PROTO-TRINITY:
The Development of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the First and Second Christian Centuries

THOMAS EDMUND GASTON
MPhil(b) History of Christianity

School of Historical Studies
UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM
2007
ω Θεός, ἰλασθήτι μοί τω γραμματεί
Abstract
The search for the ‘historical Jesus’ has resulted in the view that Jesus never was, nor claimed to be, any more than a mere man. A conservative theologian still hold that the doctrine of the Trinity, later made explicit in the creeds, is implicit within the New Testament texts and was Jesus’ most controversial claim. But what did the early Christians believe about their Lord and Master?

In this study I review the early Christian texts, their content and background, to ascertain the earliest forms of Christological thought.

My thesis is that one of the earliest understandings of Jesus’ nature is found in the infancy narratives and that this understanding is presupposed by the earliest Christian writers (including the writers of the New Testament texts). From this basis I trace the development of Christology to the end of the second century, demonstrating how Christian thought moved from its primitive understanding of Jesus to the foundations of the doctrine of the Trinity.
Contents

Contents........................................................................................................................................ 4
Acknowledgements ..................................................................................................................... 5
Dissertation .................................................................................................................................. 6
D1 - Introduction .................................................................................................................... 6
D2 - Sonship .......................................................................................................................... 10
  D2.1 - Adoptionism ............................................................................................................. 10
  D2.2 - The Virgin Conception ......................................................................................... 13
D3 - Pre-existence ................................................................................................................ 21
  D3.1 - Foreknowledge ...................................................................................................... 21
  D3.2 - Pneumatic Christology ......................................................................................... 22
  D3.3 - Wisdom ................................................................................................................ 26
  D3.4 - Logos .................................................................................................................... 32
  D3.5 - Further Development .......................................................................................... 35
D4 - Middle Platonism ........................................................................................................ 38
  D4.1 - The Second Century Milieu ................................................................................ 38
  D4.2 - Platonism .............................................................................................................. 40
  D4.3 - The Influence of Platonism on Christianity ....................................................... 47
  D4.4 - Further Development ........................................................................................ 54
D5 - Unity .................................................................................................................................. 56
  D5.1 - Judeo-Christian Monotheism and the Shema ...................................................... 56
  D5.2 - Gnosticism ............................................................................................................ 63
  D5.3 - Further Development .......................................................................................... 67
D6 - Triadic Formula ............................................................................................................ 69
  D6.1 - II Corinthians (c.56) .......................................................................................... 69
  D6.2 - Baptismal Formula ............................................................................................... 70
  D6.3 - Sub-Apostolic Triadic Formulas ......................................................................... 71
  D6.4 - Justin Martyr (c.150) .......................................................................................... 72
  D6.5 - Theophilus of Antioch (c.180) ............................................................................ 74
  D6.6 - Irenaeus ................................................................................................................ 75
  D6.7 - Further Development .......................................................................................... 77
D7 - Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 79
Appendices .................................................................................................................................. 81
A1 - Titles .................................................................................................................................... 81
  A1.1 - Tetragrammaton .................................................................................................... 81
  A1.2 - Periphrasis ............................................................................................................ 83
  A1.3 - Nomina Sacra ....................................................................................................... 84
  A1.4 - Θεός ....................................................................................................................... 84
  A1.5 - Κύριος .................................................................................................................... 93
  A1.6 - The Son of God .................................................................................................... 94
A2 - Subordinationism ......................................................................................................... 97
  A2.1 - Early Epistles (c.45-70) ...................................................................................... 97
  A2.2 - The Synoptic Tradition (c.70-90) ...................................................................... 99
  A2.3 - Sub-Apostolic Literature (c.90-110) .................................................................. 100
  A2.4 - The Gospel of John (c.100) ................................................................................. 101
  A2.5 - The Later Epistles (c.110) .................................................................................. 102
  A2.6 - Early Apologists (c.120-150) .............................................................................. 103
  A2.7 - Justin Martyr (c.150) .......................................................................................... 104
  A2.8 - Irenaeus (c.180) ................................................................................................. 104
Acknowledgements

Special thanks are due to my supervisor, Dr Philip Burton, for his invaluable support and advice throughout my research, and course convenor Professor Hugh McLeod. I would also like to thank the following academics who aided my research: Dr Charlotte Hempel (Birmingham), Professor Max Kölbel (Birmingham), Professor John Dillon (Trinity College Dublin), and Professor Simon Swain (Warwick).

Thanks are also due to my family and friends who offered non-academic support.
Dissertation

D1 - Introduction

In contemporary theology views on the origin of the doctrine of the Trinity range between two extremes: that the Trinity is explicit in the New Testament, on the one hand, and that the Trinity has no foundation in the Bible, on the other.\(^1\) A review of the tertiary literature demonstrates that the former position, though still represented by conservative theologians,\(^2\) is generally surrendered (in the face of historical considerations) for the middle position that the doctrine of the Trinity was implicit in the Scriptures and was made explicit by the developments of the Church Fathers.\(^3\) Historians have generally concluded that the doctrine of the Trinity was not original.\(^4\)

The interconnectedness between theology and history is of particular significance when considering the development of doctrine, but traditionally there has been relatively little dialogue between the two disciplines.

Many post-enlightenment scholars had long concluded that the doctrine of the Trinity did not form part of the teaching of first century Christians. It was in the nineteenth century that the history of doctrine was formally considered and theories of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity composed. The emergence of the scholarly searches for the ‘historical Jesus’ added to the historiographical development of these theories, reducing the number and nature of the claims of Jesus. This has led to a picture generally held by historians of Jesus as a mere man divinised after his death in line with precedents set by intermediary figures of Judaism and later elevated still further by Christianity’s contact with Greek philosophy.

There have been a number of attempts by conservative scholars to write historical apologetics for the doctrine of the Trinity. In God Crucified Richard Bauckham

\(^{1}\) "Views on this topic range from the conviction that Trinitarian doctrine is little more than a summary of explicit data otherwise scattered across OT and NT, to the assertion that it is an important aid in worship but without any real foundation in the Bible” p581 A New Dictionary of Christian Theology 1983


\(^{4}\) p581 A New Dictionary of Christian Theology 1983, p1142 Encyclopaedia of Early Christianity 1997,
argued that the emphasis on the intermediary figures of Jewish apocalyptic was misguided, asserting that Second Temple Judaism was strictly monotheistic. He reasons that the Jews were primarily concerned with God’s identity, rather than His nature and that Jesus, in his actions, equated himself with that identity of God. In *Who Did Jesus Think He Was?* John O’Neill tries a different line of attack, claiming that the doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation already existed in Judaism before Jesus and that these doctrines were presupposed by the early Christians in their discourse about Jesus. Meanwhile John Behr, an Orthodox theologian, in his *The Way to Nicaea* abandons the historical project altogether, arguing that Jesus is (and can only be) revealed in the “world of scripture”, rather than a historical framework.

We can see that scholars are generally polarized, positing either that Jesus was divine or understood to be so by the early Christians (i.e. Trinitarianism), on the one hand, or that Jesus was just a man and understood to be so by the very early Christians, on the other. Few scholars take a middle route. Sir Anthony Buzzard does take this ground in *The Trinity: Christianity’s Self-Inflicted Wound*, arguing that the early Christians adhered to the Jewish conception of a uni-personal God and regarded Jesus as His literal Son. Generally, this middle-ground is represented today by faith groups like the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Christadelphians.

In this dissertation I will argue that there is little reason to suppose that Jesus was ever considered to be ‘just’ a man by his early followers but neither was he considered to

---

5 p5 R. Bauckham 1999
6 p8 R. Bauckham 1999
7 p26 R. Bauckham 1999
8 p94-114 J. C. O’Neill 1995
9 p12 J. Behr 2001
10 This work has often been criticized for ignoring the importance of the intermediary figures of Second Temple Judaism, particularly Wisdom, passing over the topic with only brief reference (pp129, 173, 284 A. F. Buzzard & C. F. Hunting 1998).
12 anon. *Should You Believe in the Trinity*, London: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Britain, 1989; anon. *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2005. Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that the Son is subordinate and created, and that he pre-existed with the Father before the Creation. They assert that this was the belief of the apostles and was held by the ante-Nicene fathers. They trace the acceptance of the Trinity to the intervention of Constantine and the influence of pagan triad deities (p7-11 *Should You Believe ...* 1989).
13 P. E. White, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Analytically Examined and Refuted*, London: Dawn Book Supply, 1937. The Christadelphians teach that the Son was created at his birth to Mary and did not pre-exist. The Holy Spirit is the power of God and not a person. They assert that this was the original teaching of Jesus and the apostles, though theories of the later historical development vary.
be God. I will re-examine the picture of development generally accepted by scholars today, concentrating on the teaching of the early Christian writers rather than relying on the analysis of titles.\(^{14}\) I will show how the seeds of the doctrine of the Trinity were sown early, though unwittingly and yet even by the end of the second century the beliefs of Christian writers were not in line with Nicene orthodoxy.

**Problems**

There are two difficulties with attempting to trace the development of doctrine in the early Christian centuries which we should acknowledge from the outset. First is an issue over the dating of texts and second is regarding the sheer lack of evidence.

1) To describe the development of anything it is necessary to be able accurately to date each stage of development, in this case the date of early Christian texts. However there is great difficulty in dating any of the early Christian texts with accuracy due to simple lack of data, particularly in the cases of those texts which are anonymous or pseudonymous. Often scholars have little more to go on than their own presuppositions about the development of doctrine.

2) There are a limited number of Christian texts surviving from the first and second centuries. We are fortunate to have the New Testament, which preserves many first century texts with an abundance of manuscript support. Yet as a collection of ‘approved’ works it does not preserve the writings of dissenters or opponents. The collection of works known as the ‘Apostolic Fathers’ rests on much weaker manuscript evidence and was probably only preserved because they have the appearance of orthodoxy. Less orthodox works are generally only preserved in quotations by their critics. It is, therefore, difficult to judge whether the texts preserved are truly indicative of general consensus or were rather the outspoken minority whose theology only later became orthodoxy. As with most eras of history, because the illiterate could not write texts of their own it is hardly possible to know what the laity thought.\(^{15}\)

\(^{14}\) For consideration of titles see appendices (A1).

\(^{15}\) The probability is that the lay Christian would have been left behind by the complex theological speculations of the second century onwards. While the Church Fathers were theorising about the nature of God (that would eventually lead to the doctrine of the Trinity) it is conceivable that the laity took a ‘simpler’ view of God. Addis writes: “the bulk of Christians, had they been let alone, would have been satisfied with the old belief in one God, the Father, and would have distrusted the ‘dispensation’, as it has been called, by which the sole Deity of the Father expanded into the Deity of the Father and the
These problems cannot be solved. The best we can do is to acknowledge that they exist. With regards to the dating of texts, I am working on the basis of general consensus; below sets out the dates for the principal witnesses. During my research I have considered such dissenters as the Docetics, the Possessionists (A3) and the Gnostics (D5.2). Even so, we must keep in mind that this is not (and could never be) the whole story.

c.45 - James

c.50-60 - Letters of Paul

c.70 - Hebrews

c.70-90 - Synoptic Gospels and Acts

c.85 - The Didache

c.90 - The Epistle of Barnabas

c.95 - I Clement

c.95 - Revelation

c.100 - Gospel of John and Johanne Epistles

c.110 - The Shepherd of Hermas

c.115 - Letters of Ignatius and Polycarp

c.125 - Apology of Aristides

c.130 - The Epistle to Diognetus

c.150 - II Clement

c.150 - Justin Martyr

c.180 - Irenaeus

Son … ‘All simple people’, Tertullian wrote, ‘not to call them ignorant and uneducated … take fright at the ‘dispensation’ … They will have it that we are proclaiming two or three gods’” (W. E. Addis, quoted p145 A. F. Buzzard & C. F. Hunting 1998).
**D2 - Sonship**

**D2.1 - Adoptionism**

The term ‘Adoptionism’ is generally defined as the belief according “to which Christ, in his humanity, is not the true, but only the adoptive, Son of God” and was used of an eighth century heresy arising in Spain.\(^{16}\) The term was later applied to a (hypothesized) belief amongst the early Christians by Harnack in his *Dogmengeschichte*.\(^ {17}\) The theory that has gained general acceptance amongst scholars is that the earliest Christian view of the Sonship of Jesus was that Jesus was a man who became the Son of God by divine election at his resurrection or baptism.\(^ {18}\) This theory appeals to historians as it provides a logical development between their view of the historical Jesus (i.e. a mere man who did not claim to be Son of God) and the (so-called) Kenotic Christology, which is often seen as the Christology of Paul.\(^ {19}\) Historians find precedents for adoptionism in the pre-Christian usages of the term ‘son of god’, which apply the term to mortal men granted exalted status (A1.6).

The problem with this theory is simply lack of evidence. Traditionally scholars have identified the Ebionites as early adoptionists.\(^ {20}\) All Irenaeus tells us of the Ebionites is that “their attitude towards the Lord is like that of Cerinthus and Carpocrates”,\(^ {21}\) and neither Cerinthus or Carpocrates were adoptionist as they both held that (part of) Jesus pre-existed (as the Christ-spirit or as his soul respectively).\(^ {22}\) The first sectaries to have proclaimed adoptionism are the followers of Theodotus in the third century\(^ {23}\) and there is no reason to suppose they did this on the basis of a primitive tradition. None of the New Testament writers or Apostolic Fathers ascribes to this belief, nor do they appear to write in opposition to any adoptionist thinker. The only indications of

---


\(^ {17}\) p158 K. Rudolph 1983, p25 J. W. C. Wand 1957. Harnack actually defines Adoptionism in this way: “Jesus was … regarded as the man whom God hath chosen, in whom the Deity or the Spirit of God dwelt, and who, after being tested, was adopted by God and invested with dominion” (p190 A. Harnack 1894). The possession, or indwelling, of the Spirit seems to be a feature later Possessionism and generally not included in modern accounts of early adoptionism.

\(^ {18}\) p106 P. M. Casey 1991, p7 J. Knox 1967

\(^ {19}\) for instance: p8-9 J. Knox 1967

\(^ {20}\) p139 J. N. D. Kelly 1989, p24 J. W. C. Wand 1957

\(^ {21}\) *Against Heresies* 1.26.2

\(^ {22}\) *Against Heresies* 1.25.1, 1.26.1

adoptionism that scholars can produce are a handful verses incorporated into the New Testament texts.

O’Neill presents an interesting thesis that “all the terms that have been taken to imply God ‘adopted’ or ‘chose out’ Jesus for a new dignity refer without exception to his enthronement as King”.24 He reasons that the words used in these passages do not imply a change in the relationship between Jesus and God, but refer to “the public promulgation of his power”.25 He attempts to show that behind all the verses taken as indications of adoptionism are four Old Testament passages that are all to do with the Israelite king.26 O’Neill is not entirely successful in justifying these claims, not least because the early Christian understanding of the Sonship of Jesus was not (wholly) concerned with his becoming king. His argument does highlight the fact that one can be given a status in the eyes of a specific audience, without implying that one did not already have that status.

Another issue is that many of the ‘adoptionist’ passages actually do not refer to Sonship. For instance Acts 2:36 - the only example Knox provides of primitive adoptionism27 - does not state Jesus was “made” Son, but “made Lord and Christ”. This passage does not state when Jesus was made “Lord and Christ”; the use of the aorist ἐποίησεν is ambiguous and is not inconsistent with the belief that Jesus became Christ at his birth, or in a pre-existent state.

I will now examine two oft quoted passages which appear to imply that Jesus was adopted as Son.


---

24 p14 J. C. O’Neill 1995
25 p16 J. C. O’Neill 1995
27 p7 J. Knox 1967
28 The variant of Luke 3:22 uses this quote at Jesus baptism, instead of “you are My beloved Son; in you I am well pleased”. The word ‘today’ would seem to imply that the ‘begetting’ takes place on the day when the phrase is used. In this case it would strongly imply that Jesus became the Son of God at his baptism. However this variant is not strongly attested and is likely to be based upon the unconscious substitution of original reading with Psalm 2:7 by the copyist, once this Psalm had become
This passage quotes Psalm 2:7 and forms part of an early speech of Paul:

And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten you’.29

Here the ‘today’ does not have a clear referent; while it possible that it refers to his baptism or resurrection, it is reasonable to suppose it refers to his literal birth (as in Hebrews 1:5-6). Israel had no law of adoption and so the words of this Psalm are “unlikely … to refer metaphorically to the process of adoption”.30 It is natural to read ‘begotten’ as a reference to literal birth.

2) Romans 1:3-4

…concerning His Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord [ESV]

The phrase ‘declared [‘ορισθέντος] to be the Son of God’ implies adoptionism, i.e. that Jesus became ‘Son of God’ when God raised him from the dead. The solution used by the ESV, and many translations,31 is to translate ‘ορισθέντος as ‘declared’, implying that his resurrection only confirmed or manifested his status as the Son of God. Cranfield objects stating that “no clear example, either earlier than, or contemporary with the NT, of its [i.e. ‘ορίσω] use in the sense ‘declare’ or ‘shown to be’ has been adduced”. He favours the translation ‘appoint’ or ‘install’.32

---

29 Acts 13:32-33 [ESV]
30 p16 J. C. O’Neill 1995
31 ‘declared’ – NKJV, NIV, ‘shown to be’ - NLT
32 Cranfield, quoted p34 J. D. G. Dunn 1989. Dunn himself takes a middle ground, stating “what is clear, on either alternative, is that the resurrection of Jesus was regarded as of central significance in determining his divine status” (p35 ibid).
An early interpretation of this phrase, attested by the textual variant προοριστέντος, is ‘preordained to be the Son of God’. Another alternative is the translation “… he was designated the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit…” (cp. NLT), which allows the possibility that the ‘appointment’ was not that of the Holy Spirit but the recognition by humanity. The difficulty with both of these alternatives is that they fail to do justice to the contrast Paul is making between Jesus “according to the flesh” and Jesus “according to the Spirit”.

One solution advocated by several commentators focuses on the attribute of the Son: “with power” [ἐν δυναµεῖ]. The previous clause, ‘His Son … born of the seed of David’, implies that Paul regarded Jesus as the Son from birth but after his resurrection he was ‘appointed the Son of God with power’. Stuhlmacher concurs, suggesting that Romans 1:4 relates to passages that talk about Christ’s exaltation to the right hand of God. He paraphrases the verse as saying that Jesus “was appointed to that appropriate sovereign rule which appertains to the Son of God”. Given that it was a common belief amongst the New Testament writers that Jesus was granted (greater) power from God after his ascension (or after his resurrection), it is not unreasonable to suppose this was Paul’s meaning.

D2.2 - The Virgin Conception

If early belief in adoptionism cannot be evidenced then it is reasonable to suppose that the early Christians did not regard Jesus as the adopted Son of God. An alternative is that Jesus was regarded as the begotten Son of God. The belief that Jesus was born of a virgin by the intervention of the Holy Spirit was widely accepted amongst the Christians by the second century and the New Testament witness for belief in the virgin conception is strong. However, the absence of direct reference to the virgin conception is strong. However, the absence of direct reference to the virgin conception is

35 particularly Psalm 110:1
36 p19 P. Stuhlmacher 1994
38 δύναµα: Matthew 28:18;
39 The early association of Jesus with Psalm 2:7 would seem to favour this conclusion: Acts 13:13, Hebrews 1:5, 5:5,
conception in the early epistles has led many to the conclusion that it is not primitive. In this section I will show that the belief in the virgin conception was both early and widespread.

The Witness of Matthew and Luke

As Davies argued, it is difficult to explain the origin of virgin conception narrative if it was not a common belief amongst the early Christians, since it does not derive from either pagan or Jewish sources. Matthew’s text does not draw on Hellenistic biographical form of the semi-divine Greek heroes as one might suppose. Nor does Matthew base the virgin conception on the Hebrew Scriptures — “the Isaiah prophecies themselves, read in their own context, could hardly have given rise to an expectation of a miraculous conception” — though Matthew certainly uses the Old Testament to justify his story to a Jewish audience, this is certainly not its derivation. France goes further stating that the Old Testament passages are so far from prompting the Matthean narrative that “it is hard to see why they should ever have been introduced into a Christian account of Jesus’ origins” unless the story was already circulating that Jesus was born of a virgin. We must allow then the likelihood that the virgin conception story predates Matthew’s gospel.

Given the parallels in the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke it is easy to suppose that one must be dependent on the other. On the other hand, there are significant differences between these two stories so that one does not seem to feed

40“The absence of direct mention must be carefully interpreted. For example, the silence of the speeches of Acts points only to the conclusion that the early preaching of the Gospel concentrated on the end of Jesus’ life rather than the beginning.” (p41 G. H. P. Thompson 1972) The fact that Luke resists the temptation to write into Acts reference to the virgin conception is used by Thompson as evidence that Luke was a faithful historian. It certainly shows that we cannot presume that just because a Christian writer does not affirm their belief in the virgin conception that they did not hold such a belief (and vice versa).
41 p31 M. Davies 1993. “Suggestions that the tradition derives from pagan stories of gods having intercourse with women ignore both the quite different tone of such stories, and the impossibility of their being accepted in a Palestinian Jewish setting; yet the Gospel accounts are both intensely Jewish in their context and expression” (p76 R. T. France 1985)
42 Though parts of Matthew’s nativity story are reminiscent of Old Testament stories, such as the birth of Moses.
43 p34 M. Davies 1993
44 “the aim of the formula-quotations in chapter 2 seems to be primarily apologetic” (p71 R. T. France 1985)
45 p71 R. T. France 1985
46 For instance, Knight claims that “Luke writes with a knowledge of Matthew’s Gospel” as the source of the virginal conception, though he makes no visible attempt to show how the one account could be derived from the other (p73 J. Knight 1998).
directly into the other. Evans writes that there is no literary dependence between the two accounts, but that both are written from pre-existing tradition. Both accounts record that Mary was a virgin, that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, the angelic prescription of the name ‘Jesus’, his birth in Bethlehem, the fact that Mary was betrothed (not married) and the name of her intended (‘Joseph’). These synchronisms point to a shared infancy tradition. Even if Luke (for instance) wrote with knowledge of Matthew, the fact that he accepts this core-tradition (though using his own narrative elements) strongly recommends the idea that he believed it and this tradition had a life independent of Matthew’s account.

Absence in Mark
I do not intend to propose a solution to the Synoptic question here, but if, as is generally supposed, Mark was the first of the canonical gospels to be written then the absence of the virgin conception narrative from Mark would suggest that it was not part of the original gospel traditions (or of any tradition that Mark was aware of). It is

---

48 C. A. Evans 1990
50 Matthew 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35. There is an objection that Luke does not state that Mary remained a virgin until the conception of Jesus. Fitzmyer states that “when this account is read in and for itself – without the overtones of the Matthean annunciation to Joseph – every detail of it could be understood of a child to be born to Mary in the usual human way” (J. A. Fitzmeyer, quoted p31 G. Parrinder 1992). This is because of Mary’s question “How will this be, since I am still a virgin?” (Luke 1:34 [ESV]) which seems redundant given the promised conception is still future and there would be plenty of time for Mary and Joseph to conceive naturally.

It has been suggested that Mary was worried because she was not yet of child-bearing age and thus doubted her ability to bear children (p30 G. Parrinder 1992). But it is not clear why Mary should express this concern in terms of her lack of sexual relations rather than her age. Since Mary and Joseph were still only betrothed when Jesus was born (Luke 2:5-6) it is not unreasonable to suppose that Mary did not expect to have intercourse with Joseph in the near future and this thought is included in Mary’s question.

The angel’s response is clear that mediation of the Holy Spirit is not only necessary, but that it will fundamentally affect the status of the child: (“…therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God” - Luke 1:35 [ESV]). Even Knight, who believes that Luke’s account is “ambiguous” as to the virgin conception, (p25 J. Knight 1998) is forced to admit that in all probability Luke 1:35 would have been immediately understood as saying “that the Holy Spirit will impregnate Mary” (p73 J. Knight 1998). Even if Mary’s question does not necessarily preclude sexual relations before the conception, it seems clear that Luke’s purpose in including it was to highlight that Jesus was not conceived by a man.
51 Matthew 1:21; Luke 1:31
52 Matthew 2:1, Luke 2:4
53 Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:27, 2:5
54 Matthew 1:19; Luke 1:27, 2:4
possible, though, that Mark simply did not want to include a nativity story. Mark was not writing a biography. His gospel starts with the baptism by John and ends with the women at the tomb – he records nothing Jesus’ life prior to his baptism and nothing about the events following his resurrection (particularly the ascension). The absence in Mark of any detailed Christology suggests that the question of Jesus’ origins didn’t concern him, he is quite happy to simply recount the stories of Jesus’ ministry.

It is also possible that Mark wrote presupposing the virgin conception. He never mentions Joseph (or any other earthly father). This issue is left ambiguous, though I believe Mark would have claimed that God was Jesus’ father. Mark records that Jesus was called ‘the son of Mary’, when in most contemporary literature individuals are designated by their father’s name (e.g. the sons of Zebedee). “Apart from the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke … there would seem to be no reason to reverse the normal Semitic usage and refer to Jesus as his mother’s son instead of his father’s”. Evans goes further asserting that “among Jews a man was not denoted the son of his mother unless illegitimate”. Though Parrinder objects that there are instances of the mother being named, he cannot provide any examples earlier than Mohammed. The other explanation, that Joseph was not referred to as he was dead by this time, is nullified by the numerous examples of individuals being denoted by the name of their dead father or ancestor. It is then a reasonable explanation to suppose that Mark believed that Jesus had no (earthly) father.

---

55 Mark 1:11, 9:7
56 Mark 6:3
57 p56 G. Parrinder 1992
58 C. F. Evans, quoted p57 G. Parrinder 1992
59 p57 G. Parrinder 1992
60 p58 G. Parrinder 1992
61 e.g. I Samuel 23:6,
62 One further piece of evidence is Jesus’ use of Psalm 110 to confound his critics, recorded in Mark 12:35-37. He asks if David calls the Messiah ‘Lord’, how he can be David’s son. Now Mark believed that Jesus was the ‘Son of David’ (Mark 10:47-48) and it would be a great departure from Jewish ideas if he did not understand that genealogically. Yet the implication of Jesus’ recorded teaching is that the Messiah is more than just Son of David (see p292 M. D. Hooker 1991). This implies that Mark believed that there was something transcendent about Jesus. An appeal to the virgin conception is probably the easiest explanation.

Hurtado suggests that Jesus is only saying that the “model” of David is inadequate for the Messiah, because Jesus views (or Mark views) the work of Messiah as being far greater than that of David (pp203-4 L. W. Hurtado 1998). While this interpretation is not ruled out by the passage, but these remarks of Jesus are set in the context of the remarks of the Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes, questioning Jesus’ authority. The natural response, then, would be for Jesus to justify his authority.
Absence in Paul

The epistle of James, the Didache, and some of the other early Christian writings are too small to conclude much if they do not mention a particular topic, but we have a good sample of the writings of Paul. Thus for Paul to omit any reference to Jesus being born of a virgin is a strong indication that the virgin conception narratives did not exist in the first decades after Christ’s death. Yet if this were our only yardstick then we would find ourselves excising almost all of the gospel records. As ‘absence of evidence isn’t evidence of absence’, as the saying goes, we must find some other criteria.

Paul does not mention Joseph or Mary, but does state that Jesus was descended from David (according to the flesh) and was the ‘seed’ of Abraham. This requires that Paul believed that Jesus had (at least) one human parent, but he does not specify which. Paul also states that Jesus was the Son of God. While it is possible that Paul used ‘Son of God’ as a synonym for ‘Messiah’, Paul is quite clear in calling God Jesus’ Father, not in the same way that He has become the ‘Father’ of the believers, but as a rigid designator.

from the Scriptures, rather than proposing a new model for the understanding of the concept of Messiah.

63 “Whether Paul knew little or much of Jesus of Nazareth, he was not concerned with particulars of his life on earth before the Crucifixion” (p69 G. Parrinder 1992).
64 Romans 1:3 (also II Timothy 2:8)
65 Galatians 3:16
66 It has been suggested that the Jews understood human conception according to the ‘flower-pot theory’ i.e. that the man implants the seed in the woman, who herself provides nothing but the means of growth, so that Jesus could not be of the ‘seed’ of Abraham and David through Mary (see p102 M. Goulder 1994). This has no basis in Jewish literature. The Old Testament speaks quite clearly of the ‘seed’ of women (Genesis 3:15, 4:25, 16:10, 21:12, 24:60, Leviticus 12:2, also see Hebrews 11:11, Revelation 12:17), and descent from a prominent woman was recognized and recorded (e.g. ‘sons of Leah’ – Genesis 35:23; ‘sons of Zeruiah’ – II Samuel 2:18; also see Matthew 1:2, 5, 6).
67 Romans 1:4, II Corinthians 1:19, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 4:13
68 Romans 15:6, II Corinthians 1:3, II Corinthians 11:31, Ephesians 1:3, 3:14, Colossians 1:3
Paul states that Jesus was ‘made [γίνοµαι] of a woman’.\textsuperscript{69} If Paul had used the phrase ‘born [γεννω] of a woman’ then from precedent in the Jewish Scriptures it could be argued that he simple meant ‘a man’,\textsuperscript{70} or could have been referring to natural procreation. The use of the verb γίνοµαι is significant because it does not imply procreation and Paul omits any reference to a man. The implication is that God ‘made’ Jesus with a woman as the catalyst.

Though we do not have enough evidence to be certain, the simplest explanation for Paul’s statements is that Paul believed that Jesus had a human mother and a heavenly Father. Certainly, no statement of Paul contradicts or excludes that belief. The fact that Luke was a close associate of Paul may indicate that he did indeed hold this belief (or, at least, had no fixed opinion on the subject).\textsuperscript{71}

**Wide Acceptance of the Virgin Conception**

One strong argument in favour of the idea that the belief in the virgin conception was primitive is the relative ease with which the virgin conception was accepted so widely. We have seen how the virginal conception narrative existed before the gospels of Matthew and Luke, and it is obvious that this belief found acceptance amongst the circles that produced these gospels. But we know that Matthew and Luke’s gospels were accepted widely throughout the first century churches and there is no evidence of them being rejected or treated as suspect (until we come to the Gnostics and the Ebionites of the second century). The community that produced the Didache accepted Matthew’s gospel, so though it does not mention the virginal conception it is likely that they accepted it. The Johannine phrase “only-begotten” also implies a belief in the virgin conception,\textsuperscript{72} especially since John connects it with the phrase “made flesh”.\textsuperscript{73} The derisive tale that Jesus was an illegitimate child that arose in amongst Jews in the latter half of the first century\textsuperscript{74} is strong evidence that the

\textsuperscript{69} Galatians 4:4
\textsuperscript{70} Job 14:1, 15:14, 25:4; also see Matthew 11:11
\textsuperscript{71} “In his second volume, the books of Acts, Luke implies that he had spent much time in the company of Paul as they travelled together. It would be quite extraordinary if Paul and Luke were divided over the issue of the origin of Jesus” (p69 A. F. Buzzard & C. F. Hunting 1998).
\textsuperscript{72} John 1:14, 1:18, 3:16, 3:18, I John 4:9; also see Hebrews 11:17
\textsuperscript{73} John 1:14
\textsuperscript{74} Rabbi Eliezer (c.70-100 AD) recounts a tale that when in Sepphoris, in Galilee, he heard someone teaching “in the name of Jesus the son of Panteri”. The name ‘Panteri’ may be “an abusive deformation of parthenos, the Greek word for ‘virgin’” (p46 M. Smith 1978). Also see John 8:41.
virgin conception was being preached by Christians at this time. The (almost credal) 
statements of Ignatius\textsuperscript{75} and Aristides\textsuperscript{76} show that by the early second century the 
belief in the virgin conception was widely accepted amongst Christians. The 
elaborations of the apocryphal infancy gospels of the second century (e.g. 
\textit{Protevangelim of James, Infancy Gospel of Thomas}) also demonstrate that this belief 
was common.\textsuperscript{77}

Given wide acceptance of this belief in the later first and early second centuries, it is 
reasonable to suppose that this belief was primitive – or, at the very least, any prior 
belief about Jesus’ origins was ambiguous, under-stated or not positively opposed to 
the virgin conception. The fact that both Mark and Paul seem to presuppose this belief 
is a strong indication of its primacy.

\textbf{The Virginal Conception as a Primitive Christology}

The accounts of the Virgin Birth perhaps record one of the earliest understandings of 
Jesus’ Sonship (and nature).\textsuperscript{78} If this is the case then the use of the phrase ‘Son of 
God’ in early Christian writing is founded upon explanation of Jesus’ origins as found 
in these narratives. Jesus is described as being the both the Son of Mary and the Son 
of God, by the intervention of the Holy Spirit. Though there is, perhaps, enough room 
in the nativity story to allow for the (Trinitarian) doctrine of the Incarnation of God 
the Son, there is no indication that this would have been the contemporary 
understanding of this text. Much more likely would be the understanding that Jesus 
was half-man, half-God, not necessarily as the Hellenes understood the concept, but 
certainly as a combination of the two natures.

We cannot be certain what Jesus of Nazareth himself taught about his origins and 
status, but we cannot rule out the possibility that he considered himself to be born of a 
 virgin through the power of God.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{75} Ignatius to the Ephesians 19:1, Ignatius to the Smyrnans 1:1
\textsuperscript{76} The Apology of Aristides chII
\textsuperscript{77} p48 J. K. Elliott 1993
\textsuperscript{78} The implication of the virgin conception narratives is that Jesus became the Son of God at his birth. 
Brown notes the contradiction with modern Trinitarian thought: “[This] is an embarrassment to many 
orthodox theologians because in traditional incarnation theology a conception by the Holy Spirit does 
not bring about the existence of God’s Son” (p291 R. Brown 1977).
\textsuperscript{79} Dunn writes, regarding the gospel records of Jesus, that “we find one who was conscious of being 
God’s son, a sense of intimate sonship, an implication that Jesus believed or experienced this sonship
to be something distinctive and unique; but the evidence does not allow us to penetrate further or to be more explicit” (p253 J. D. G. Dunn 1989).
D3 – Pre-existence

A key feature of the doctrine of the Trinity is the co-eternity of each person of the Trinity. God is understood to be eternal, therefore for Jesus to be God he must be co-eternal (and have had no beginning). If the Virgin Conception was definitive in early Christian thought with regards to the origins of Jesus then there could be no idea of him pre-existing before birth (or being eternal). By the end of second century Jesus’ role in Creation was widely accepted, a belief that necessitates that he existed before Creation. In this section, we will explore how this dramatic change in belief occurred.

There are two senses to the word ‘pre-existence’ which we should distinguish. On the one hand is existence before Creation and on the other is existence before birth. Generally we will use pre-existence in the sense of existence before birth. Further distinctions are necessary between actual and hypothetical pre-existence, and (in the case of Jesus) between pre-existence as a person and pre-existence as an emanation of God (the Logos, for instance). These distinctions are not ones made by the Christian writers themselves. Examining the texts of these writers therefore requires caution as it is not always clear in what way they thought Jesus pre-existed. As we shall see it is likely to be this lack of distinction that in part explains the development of this belief.

D3.1 - Foreknowledge

One credible precedent for ideas of the pre-existence of Jesus is the contemporary views about the foreknowledge of God. In the early speeches recorded in Acts we find the belief that the appearance of Jesus and particularly his suffering were foretold by the Old Testament prophets.\(^80\) We also find the beliefs that the appointment of Jesus as Messiah was preordained\(^81\) and that his suffering was in accord with the foreknowledge of God.\(^82\) Whether or not Luke records these views faithfully, it is clear that by the time Paul was writing (c.50) these views were assumed and being further developed. For Paul, not only was Jesus preordained, but the salvation of the elect through him\(^83\) and the gospel message were also predestined.\(^84\) Particularly significant is concept that historical events, such as the salvation of believers,

\(^{80}\) Acts 3:18, 3:54,

\(^{81}\) Acts 3:20

\(^{82}\) Acts 2:23

\(^{83}\) Romans 8:29-30, Ephesians 1:4-11, (II Timothy 1:9, Titus 1:2)

\(^{84}\) I Corinthians 2:7, Ephesians 3:11,
happened (in the foreknowledge of God) ‘before the foundation of the world’. These views are echoed in the epistles of Peter (c.60) and are even written into the Gospel of Matthew (c.80). By the end of the first century these views are still current, being employed in symbology of Revelation (c.95).

Now Knox asserts that “there is obviously only a short step from the idea of this kind of pre-existence in the mind of God to the conception of a pre-existing hypostasis, a pre-existent being more personal and objective”. Yet we may seriously question Knox’s justification for such an assertion. On paper it may seem like only ‘short step’ from phrases such as “preordained” and “preconceived” to ones such as “pre-existed”, yet it is an enormous step to take in terms of conscious acceptance. Psychologically speaking, foreknowledge cannot be easily confused with pre-existing hypostasis. A historical account of the doctrine of pre-existence should be more subtle and more gradual.

**D3.2 - Pneumatic Christology**

Harnack described two brands of early Christology. We have already examined Adoptionism; the other was Pneumatic Christology, the belief that Jesus was a pre-existent spirit \( \pi\nu\varepsilon\omicron\mu\alpha \). This thesis has become widely accepted in various forms and for a variety of reasons. In this section I shall examine some of the forms this thesis has taken, before moving on to consider the most widely accepted form: Wisdom Christology.

**Angel Christology**

Wagner describes his version of Pneumatic Christology as ‘Angel Christology’, using the concept of an angel, instead of spirit, as precedent for pre-existence. His hypothesis is that there were “Christians who doubted any human’s ability to know and do God’s will … [and] were convinced that a human could not save the cosmos”. He appeals to the Old Testament where angels act as intermediaries...
between man and God as a precedent with which this Christians could suppose that Jesus was an angel.92 Now while it is true that certain Gnostic-Christian groups ascribed angelic status to Jesus93 (or even His Father),94 it is not category appealed to by the early Christian writers who consistently regard Jesus as being both distinct from and greater than the angels.95

**Kenotic Christology**

Knox thinks in terms of a Kenotic Christology (κένωσις, meaning ‘emptying’), which he defines as the belief that Jesus was “a pre-existing divine being [who] ‘emptied’ himself and became a man”.96 This theory is clearly based upon Philippians 2:5-11. Other evidence is not forthcoming and Knox is forced to concede that “nowhere in the New Testament is this story consistently told; and proof of its ever having been extant is quite impossible”.97 Despite this admission, it is worth considering the implications of Philippians 2:5-11 as it is cornerstone of most commentators’ case for Paul’s belief in the pre-existence of Jesus.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he as in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,98 in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father [NRSV]

The term ‘something to be exploited’ [‘ἀρπαγμόν] is notoriously difficult to translate because it is used so rarely.99 The important question for our considerations is whether it implies grasping in the sense of retention or in the sense of acquisition, the first implying that Jesus already had equality with God while the second implies the contrary. Lightfoot, after extensive evaluation of its uses, concluded ‘ἀρπαγμόν implies neither necessarily: “[it] signifies nothing more than ‘to clutch greedily’”.100 In context it is difficult to see how Christ could already have equality with God when

---

92 p108 W. H. Wagner 1994
93 p109 W. H. Wagner 1994
94 e.g. Saturninus; *Against Heresies* 1.24.1-2
96 p12 J. Knox 1967
97 *ibid*
98 cp. Isaiah 45:23
99 “where it does appear it denotes ‘robbery’” (p205 G. D. Fee 1995)
100 p111 J. B. Lightfoot 1908
Paul implies in the latter clause (‘therefore God exalted him …’) that he had to be crucified for God to grant him a heavenly status.101

The temptation to ‘clutch’ at equality with God has an obvious parallel in the Eden story. In Genesis the serpent tempts Eve claiming that eating the fruit will make her “like God”.102 Jesus is being contrasted with man’s progenitors, being likewise made in the “image of God”, but instead of ‘clutching’ at equality with God he was humble to the point of death. This follows the Adam Christology which Paul uses elsewhere in his epistles.104 Both Ziesler and Dunn favour this interpretation.105 If “in the form of God” refers to being human then the humility of Jesus in this passage does not refer to a pre-incarnate decision; Adam was not thought to have existed before Creation. “The preexistence-incarnation interpretation of Philippians 2:6-11, etc., owes more to the later Gnostic redeemer myth than it does to Philippians 2:6-11”.106

However this passage is complex, and may not even be Pauline,107 and so we cannot exclude the possibility that its author had pre-existence in mind.

**Ensoulment Christology**

Several scholars have suggested that an early belief in the pre-existence of Jesus derived from the belief in the pre-existence of the soul.108 It would be a small step from the belief that Jesus’ soul was pre-existent to the belief that his soul was in some way special so his pre-existence could be spoken of in terms of his relationship to the Father. We may call this thesis Ensoulment Christology.

Ensoulment Christology is not explicit in early Christian writings.109 Now in any case the references to the pre-existence of Jesus in the New Testament are few, but the soul

---

101 An interesting idea is put forward by Buzzard who asserting that ‘equality with God’ in this passage was a “functional equality with God”, by which the Son could act with the Father’s authority while upon the earth (p102 A. F. Buzzard & C. F. Hunting 1998).

102 Genesis 3:5

103 Genesis 1:26-27. The Greek word for ‘form’ is morfh as is a “near synonym” for ‘image’ eikon (p284 J. D. G. Dunn 1998, p45 J. A. Ziesler 1990).

104 Romans 5:12-19, I Corinthians 15:45

105 p45 J. A. Ziesler 1990, p119 J. D. G. Dunn 1989

106 (p125 J. D. G. Dunn 1989).

107 Many commentators belief that Philippians 2:5-11 is a Christ-Hymn that Paul included in his letter. This would mean that this passage pre-dates the epistle to the Philippians.

108 p80 P. M. Casey 1991

109 The only explicit example of this form of belief is in the teaching of Carpocrates. Irenaeus records that he believed that Jesus was just a man, but also believed in Platonic ideas about the preexistence of
of Jesus is significant only by its total absence. It is also unlikely that the earliest Christians believed in the pre-existence of the soul. Traditionally the Jews were monists,\textsuperscript{110} the pre-Hellenistic Old Testament writings do not have a concept of soul separate from the body.\textsuperscript{111} It was only under Hellenistic influence that the Jews began to accept the concept of the soul as something that survives death.\textsuperscript{112} Plato had espoused a belief in the pre-existence of the soul under the influence of Orphism.\textsuperscript{113} The Stoics rarely accepted the immortality and pre-existence of the soul; for them the soul “was a mode or function of matter”.\textsuperscript{114} The Epicureans also held that the soul had no existence apart from the body.\textsuperscript{115}

Now while it is clear that the Platonic doctrine of the pre-existence of soul did penetrate into Judaism during the Hellenistic period, the most explicit examples come from those “who had been thoroughly influenced by Hellenistic culture”.\textsuperscript{116} The Essenes believed in the pre-existence of the souls,\textsuperscript{117} and later the Rabbis, influenced by Platonism,\textsuperscript{118} but it is not clear how common this belief was amongst Palestinian Jews at the time of Jesus and there is little evidence that this belief was held by the earliest Christian writers. The New Testament writers are clear that \textit{ψυχή} could die\textsuperscript{119} and died with the body.\textsuperscript{120} There is no indication of the belief that soul existed prior to birth.\textsuperscript{121} It seems that the early Christians were materialists with regard to the soul.\textsuperscript{122} As such, it seems unlikely that the pre-existence of the soul provided a precedent for any belief in the pre-existence of Jesus that might have emerged.

---

\textsuperscript{110} p380 N. Solomon 1998
\textsuperscript{112} p62 C. H. Moore 1931
\textsuperscript{113} p8-9, 18 C. H. Moore 1931
\textsuperscript{114} p39 C. H. Moore 1931
\textsuperscript{115} p42 C. H. Moore 1931
\textsuperscript{116} e.g. Philo (De Mundi Opificus 135) and Josephus (Antiquities 18.14-8); p8 J. N. Bremmer 2002
\textsuperscript{117} Josephus, War of the Jews 2.154f; p300 E. P. Sanders 1992
\textsuperscript{118} Chag. 12b; p83 A. Cohen 1937
\textsuperscript{119} Matthew 10:28, Mark 3:4, Luke 6:9, 9:56, Romans 11:3, Revelation 8:9
\textsuperscript{120} Matthew 20:28, 1 Thessalonians 5:23
\textsuperscript{121} Although the Gospel of Thomas does include this enigmatic phrase: “blessed is he who existed before he was created” (19).
\textsuperscript{122} p66 C. H. Moore 1931
D3.3 - Wisdom

Much that has been written regarding early Christology has focused on the intermediaries of pre-Christian Judaism as possible derivations for Christian ideas about the nature and status of Jewish.\(^{123}\) It is difficult to substantiate these various figures as precedent for Christian ideas as Christian quotations or allusions to the relevant Jewish works are not forthcoming. For instance, the gospels clearly identify Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God and the Son of Man, but not as Enoch or Moses and certainly not as a mere angel (since Jesus claims to have authority over them\(^{124}\)).\(^{125}\) Yet one intermediary does in later Christian literature become strongly associated with Jesus, that is, Wisdom.\(^{126}\)

Wisdom in Jewish Literature

The first discourse about Wisdom is to be found in Proverbs, though it may have precedents in earlier literature.\(^{127}\) In Proverbs Wisdom is personified as a woman\(^{128}\) and juxtaposed against the figure of the harlot, who represents the path of folly.\(^{129}\) Wisdom is associated with the commandments\(^{130}\) and she can lead men to riches and honour.\(^{131}\) Wisdom is possessed by kings and rulers,\(^{132}\) but more importantly “the Lord made me the beginning of his ways for his works”.\(^{133}\) She acted as “a master workman” when God created the world.\(^{134}\) Now in this account Wisdom, though personified as a woman, is not understood to be a literal person, nor an emanation from God in the Hellenistic sense. This passage is really an exhortation to be wise, rather than a philosophical discourse into the origins of the world. However, it does provide the elements for later development.

\(^{123}\) pp78-94 P. M. Casey 1991
\(^{125}\) cp. p79 P. M. Casey 1991
\(^{126}\) John 1:1-14; Justin Martyr, Dialogue 61;
\(^{127}\) e.g. Psalms 136:5 “to Him who by wisdom made the heavens for His mercy endures forever”
\(^{128}\) e.g. “say to wisdom, 'you are my sister'” (Proverbs 7:4)
\(^{129}\) Proverbs 5-27; “he went after her … as a fool to the correction of the stocks” (Proverbs 7:22)
\(^{130}\) Proverbs 7:1-4
\(^{131}\) Proverbs 8:18-21
\(^{132}\) Proverbs 8:15-16
\(^{133}\) Proverbs 8:22 [LXX]
\(^{134}\) Proverbs 8:30 [ESV], also see Proverbs 3:19-20
Around 190 BC *The Wisdom of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus*, was written\(^\text{135}\) and it contains a more developed discourse about the figure of Wisdom. In Proverbs the creation of Wisdom by God is strongly implied,\(^\text{136}\) in *Sirach* it is explicit.\(^\text{137}\) Again she is personified as a woman\(^\text{138}\) and she was active in Creation.\(^\text{139}\) According to *Sirach* Wisdom was present in the Tabernacle and dwelt in Jerusalem.\(^\text{140}\) Wisdom is also identified with the Law of Moses.\(^\text{141}\) The most significant development is that in *Sirach* is that Wisdom is described as being spoken by God.\(^\text{142}\)

In the *Wisdom of Solomon* (c. 100 BC)\(^\text{143}\) we see a further development of the concept of Wisdom. It is still personified as a woman,\(^\text{144}\) but is also called ‘Word’ \([\lambda\omicron\omicron\gamma\omicron\omicron\varsigma]\).\(^\text{145}\) The agency of Wisdom in Creation is now much more explicit\(^\text{146}\) but her generation is described in more mystical terms.\(^\text{147}\) We see in the *Wisdom of Solomon* a more developed theology. God’s transcendence is emphasized and Wisdom is seen as an intermediary,\(^\text{148}\) though not in the sense of an emanation from God. The intermediary concept is not developed along the same lines in Platonic philosophy, as Clarke explains:

Jewish theology, in accepting to modify the transcendental reality of God, did not formulate a Second God. For ‘thy Almighty Word’ one can substitute ‘God’ without altering the meaning of the verse.\(^\text{149}\)

Wisdom has no identity in and of herself – she is not a person. The actions of Wisdom are the actions of God. Wisdom is God’s agent in Creation and in enlightening men,\(^\text{150}\) but she is no way independent of God – in this sense, she is (a part of) God.\(^\text{151}\)

\(^{135}\) p1 J. G. Snaith 1974  
\(^{136}\) “the first of his acts” (Proverbs 8:22), “I was set up” (8:23), “I was brought forth” (8:25), “the Lord made [ἐκτίσε] me” (8:22 [LXX])  
\(^{137}\) “my creator” (Sirach 24:8), “before time began, He created me” (Sirach 24:9), also see Sirach 1:4  
\(^{138}\) Sirach 4:11, 6:22,  
\(^{139}\) Sirach 42:21  
\(^{140}\) Sirach 24:10-11  
\(^{141}\) Sirach 24:22-23  
\(^{142}\) Sirach 24:3  
\(^{143}\) p2 E. G. Clarke 1973  
\(^{144}\) *Wisdom of Solomon* 6:12-21  
\(^{145}\) *Wisdom of Solomon* 9:1-2; “the creative word of Gen 1 (‘and God said …’) and of Ps 33:6 (‘the LORD’s word made the heaven’) and of Wisdom” (p63 E. G. Clarke 1973)  
\(^{146}\) *Wisdom of Solomon* 9:1-2, 9  
\(^{147}\) “like a fine mist she rises from the power of God, a pure effluence from the glory of the Almighty” (Wisdom of Solomon 7:25)  
\(^{148}\) p46 E. G. Clarke 1973  
\(^{149}\) p121 E. G. Clarke 1973
Wisdom in Paul

Increasingly scholars have supposed that Paul identified Jesus with Wisdom, particularly in (so-called) Christ-hymn in Colossians 1:15-18.  

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. [ESV]

We have seen that in Jewish discourse Wisdom was the agent of Creation so the phrase ‘for in him [ἐν αὐτῷ] all things in heaven and on earth were created’ [NRSV] is one that could have been written of Wisdom. The female personification of Wisdom would be one barrier in identifying her with Jesus, but not an insurmountable one since Wisdom was never considered to be a literal person (with literal gender). As in Colossians, Wisdom is described as having been the first created thing, and it is possible that the phrase ‘the image of God’ mirrors the Jewish understanding of Wisdom.

There are several considerable objections to identifying Wisdom with Jesus. Firstly, it must be recognized that the evidence is not extensive: there are only two other references in Paul’s letters to Jesus being an instrument of Creation, one is textually suspect and the other may well only refer to Jesus being the purpose of Creation.

---

150 Wisdom of Solomon 9:10-11
151 For further discussion of the concept of Wisdom see appendices: ‘A4 – Wisdom Personified?’
152 “Indeed, few issues in recent NT theology have commanded such unanimity of agreement” – p269 J. D. G. Dunn 1998.
153 Proverbs 8:22, Sirach 24:9
155 Ephesians 3:9; ‘through Christ’ is found in “D’, E, K, L, etc, Syr., al., Chr., Thdrt., Thl., Oec.” It is omitted in “KABCDGFP 17, 73, 1778, al., It., Vulg., Syr., Ar.-erp., Copt., Eth., Arm., Dial., Bas., Cyr., Tert., Jer., Ambr., Aug., Ambrst., Vig., Pel.” (p308n W. Robertson Nicoll 1903, also see B. M. Metzger 1994).
156 I Corinthians 8:6. Generally διὰ, when followed by a genitive, is translated ‘through’ in the sense of an instrument or agent, in contrast to when it is followed by an accusative when it understood causally (e.g. ‘because of’, ‘on account of’, etc). However there are cases when διὰ with a genitive is also translated causally. Though it says it is rare in secular usage, the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament cites seven examples from the New Testament where the meaning is better rendered causally, than instrumentally (Romans 5:18, 7:7, 8:5, 10:17, II Corinthians 9:13, Hebrews 1:4, II Peter 1:4). The TDNT also lists numerous examples from both in and out the New Testament where διὰ with a genitive is used causally with regard to the ‘author’ of that cause (e.g. ‘for the sake of’). The TDNT says that “it is in the light of these that we are primarily to understand the distinctive Christian formula ‘through Christ’ in its various nuances”. If this is the case for I Corinthians 8:6 then Paul may not have
The other key passage that is associated by commentators with Wisdom is Philippians 2:5-11, yet this contains none of the iconic elements identified above and seems only to be cited because of the indications of pre-existence in that passage, which are of themselves doubtful (see above).

Secondly, the allusions in Colossians 1:15-18 are not extensive. In terms of an agent of Creation then Wisdom is the prime candidate; angels are the only other figures given that role in Judaism. But in terms of literary allusions, the evidence is once again sparse: Wisdom is described as the image of God, but significant phrases in Colossians 1:15-18 (e.g. ‘firstborn’, ‘in him all things hold together’, ‘thrones or dominions or rules or powers’) don’t have precedents in the Wisdom literature. Though a Jew might say of Wisdom that ‘all things have been created through her’, they would not add ‘for her’. And Paul does not identify Jesus by the title ‘Wisdom’.

Thirdly, Paul does not quote from the Wisdom literature, though Paul quotes extensively from the Old Testament throughout his writings. It is improbable that Paul did not know of the books of Sirach and Wisdom. The fact that he does not quote these books indicates that he did not accept them as being authoritative and so it is unlikely that Paul would have founded a principle point of doctrine upon them.

Lastly it is conceivable that Paul is not referring to the physical creation at all.

**New Creation Discourse**

It is natural for the modern reader to take Colossians 1:15-17 as referring to the (Genesis) Creation. An examination of some of the phraseology demonstrates that this passage was part of another discourse, which is now unfamiliar to modern readers. For instance, Dunn asserts that the phrase ‘all things’ [τά πάντα] always refers to “the totality of created entities”, but in fact the scope of the phrase can only ever be believed that Jesus was the agent of Creation, but rather the purpose of Creation. This option would seem more consistent with Paul’s ideas about predestination and would fit more comfortably with pre-Pauline theology.

---

157 p45 J. A. Ziesler 1990
158 *Wisdom of Solomon* 7:26
159 citing I Corinthians 15:27-28, Ephesians 3:9 and John 1:3 (p267 J. D. G. Dunn 1998)
determined by context.\textsuperscript{160} There are several passages where τά πάντα is used in the context of spiritual regeneration, or reconciliation, in Christ.\textsuperscript{161} The word ‘created’ [ἐκτισθη] is also used allegorically by Paul to refer to the concept of the believer being created anew in Christ.\textsuperscript{162} The elements listed by Paul – thrones, powers, rulers, authorities – are not the elements of the Genesis Creation, but are used elsewhere by Paul as allegories about the Church.\textsuperscript{163} The phrase “in heaven and on earth” is also used metaphorically by Paul to refer to the Church.\textsuperscript{164} Paul appends Colossians 1:15-18 with the explanation:

For it pleased the Father that in him all the fullness should dwell and by him to reconcile all things to Himself by him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of his cross [NKJV]\textsuperscript{165}

This explanation indicates that the ‘all things … in heaven and on earth’ that Paul referred to in verse 16 are those things which were reconciled to God by Christ’s crucifixion, that is, the believers. This demonstrates that this section of Colossians should be understood within Paul’s redemptive (‘new creation’) discourse, rather than as a digression into the origins of the world.\textsuperscript{166}

\textbf{Wisdom in the Followers of Paul}

\textsuperscript{160} For example, when Paul says “I have become all things [τά πάντα] to all men” (I Corinthians 9:22) he does not mean ‘I have become every created thing to all men’ but simply that adopted a different approach in each circumstance.
\textsuperscript{161} II Corinthians 5:17-18, Ephesians 1:22-23, Colossians 1:20
\textsuperscript{162} “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (II Corinthians 5:17); “a new creation” (Galatians 6:15); “for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:10); “… so as to create in himself one new man” (Ephesians 2:15); “… have put the new man which was created according to God” (Ephesians 4:24); “… have put on the new man … according to the image of him who created him” (Colossians 3:10);
\textsuperscript{163} e.g. “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12 [NKJV]). Also see Ephesians 3:10, Colossians 2:10.
\textsuperscript{164} Colossians 1:20, Ephesians 1:7-15
\textsuperscript{165} NKJV here is preferable to ESV which interpolates the phrase “the fullness of God”.
\textsuperscript{166} This is not a new interpretation. It is traditionally associated with Theodore (p110 D. E. H. Whiteley 1964), though may well predate him. Dunn does criticise the ‘New Creation’ interpretation stating “it is hard to imagine any first-century reader interpreting the first strophe except as a reference to the ‘old’ creation, particularly in view of the Wisdom and Stoic parallels already adduced” (p190 J. D. G. Dunn 1989). However, as already discussed, the Wisdom parallels are questionable and we cannot proscribe what first-century readers might have made of this passage by appeal to ‘imagination’ without a preconceived understanding of the milieu in which Paul is writing. Having shown that Paul did use some of the phrases employed in this passage in the context of his ‘new creation’ discourse, there is at least some probability that this discourse formed part of the Christian milieu of 50’s and 60’s AD and that Colossians 1:15-20 should be read in this context. Several commentators advocate this approach (see pp223-6 P. E. White 1937, pp286-298 J. H. Broughton & P. J. Southgate 2002, p107 A. F. Buzzard & C. F. Hunting 1998, pp95-111 A. Perry 2007).
The Epistle to the Hebrews (c.70) has a strong Pauline character both in style and content, and the writer probably came from Paul’s circle.\(^{167}\) The writer, like Paul, talks about the Creation being “through” \(\deltaιά\) Jesus and, once again, commentators see this as a parallel with Wisdom. This association is usually defended by reference to the phrases “radiance” and “exact imprint” of God,\(^{168}\) which commentators frequently link to Wisdom 7:26:\(^{169}\)

For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of His goodness

However, like Paul, the writer does not name ‘Wisdom’. The first chapter of Hebrews is saturated with Old Testament quotations which the writer uses to justify the claims made in the first four verses, so the fact that to justify the idea that Jesus made the world he quotes from the Psalms\(^ {170}\) and not the Wisdom literature strongly indicates that the writer did not know of this association.

One further point of interest is that when the writer to the Hebrews refers to Jesus creating the world he uses the Greek word \(\alphaι̉ωνος\), rather than \(\kοσμος\). Generally the former is used temporally, the latter spatially.\(^{171}\) Therefore here the translation ‘age’ or ‘world-order’ would be preferable. This would indicate that the writer did not have Genesis Creation in mind, but rather the creation of a world-order (perhaps Paul’s New Creation\(^ {172}\)).

*First Clement* (c.95) is another epistle that is Pauline in character, and quotes readily from the Pauline corpus. It is interesting that though Clement refers to the Creation

---

167 Hebrews 13:23 demonstrates that they have a mutual friend in Timothy. Robinson suggests that the writer is Paul’s companion Barnabas, stating that “[Harnack and Edmundson] both agree that this [Tertullian’s statement] is the only attribution ancient or modern that does not ultimately rest upon guesswork” (p217 J. A. T. Robinson 1976). However the total evidence for the case is not strong and so cannot be conclusive.

168 Hebrews 1:3 [ESV]

169 p34 B. Lindars 1991, also p66 D. Guthrie 1983, p39 R. P. Gordon 2000, p97 W. Manson 1951, Psalm 102:25-27. The use of this quotation is itself difficult to account for as it would seem to ascribe to the Son a passage originally directed towards YHWH.

170 TDNT asserts that \(\upsilonο\upsilonο\upsilon\) in Hebrews 1:2 should “be understood spatially”, but only on the evidence of the treatment of equivalent Hebrew words by the Jewish Rabbis after the first century (p204 [Vol.1] Theological Dictionary of the New Testament 1976). In contrast, Lampe’s *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* does not record a single patristic use of \(\upsilonο\upsilonο\upsilon\) in reference to physical creation. He lists translations including: ‘lifetime’, ‘eternity’ and Gnostic ‘aeon’ (pp55-6 A Patristic Greek Lexicon 1976).

171 see p76 A. F. Buzzard & C. F. Hunting 1998
several times he never hints at the involvement of Jesus, either as a pre-existent person or as Wisdom; God is the Creator – solely.\textsuperscript{173} In one passage Clement even quotes the words of Wisdom as a warning\textsuperscript{174} but does not identify Wisdom with Jesus.

The fact that the followers of Paul do not identify Jesus with Wisdom, nor quote from the Wisdom literature where it would strengthen their position if they did so, must make us question how explicit the allusions to Wisdom are in Paul. Yet the language that Paul, and his followers, use does at least parallel the Wisdom literature in terms of the creation of ‘all things’ \textbf{though} Jesus. Now Paul used these expressions to assert that Jesus was the purpose of Creation, or the agent of the New Creation, but concurrence of Paul and the Wisdom literature on this issue would give sufficient reason for a later writer to identify Jesus with Wisdom. This is what John does.

\textbf{D3.4 - Logos}

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him and without him was not any thing made that was made.\textsuperscript{175}

Traditional commentators, Barclay for instance, have viewed the gospel of John as an attempt to reconcile Christianity to Greek thought,\textsuperscript{176} thereby feeling legitimized in tracing John’s \textit{λόγος} back to Heraclitus.\textsuperscript{177} Barclay argues for this by asserting that “by AD 60 there must have been a hundred thousand Greeks in the Church for every Jew who was a Christian”\textsuperscript{178} and reasoning that Greeks simply would not have understood the Synoptic tradition because of its Jewish character.\textsuperscript{179} The former claim seems baseless\textsuperscript{180} and the latter uncharitable.\textsuperscript{181} But both these arguments fail to actually engage with John’s gospel; John was not an apologist; he was not a philosopher; he was not a Greek.

\textsuperscript{173} I Clement 20:1, 26:1, 33:2, 35:3, 59:2, 59:3, 62:2
\textsuperscript{174} I Clement 57:3-58:1, cp. Proverbs 1:23-33
\textsuperscript{175} John 1:1-3 [ESV]
\textsuperscript{176} “How could he find a way to present Christianity to these Greeks in their own thought and in their own language and in a way that they would welcome and understand?” (p3 [Vol.1] W. Barclay 1964)
\textsuperscript{177} p11 [Vol.1] W. Barclay 1964
\textsuperscript{178} p2 [Vol.1] W. Barclay 1964
\textsuperscript{179} pxxi [Vol.1] W. Barclay 1964
\textsuperscript{180} Barclay presents no evidence for this ratio of 100,000:1. Based upon my own research, I judge that Barclay presents no evidence because there is none to present.
\textsuperscript{181} For instance, Mark’s gospel was almost certainly written for a Gentile audience (possibly the church at Rome), including many parentheses explaining Jewish terminology and customs, which are not included in Matthew (e.g. Mark 7:3, 7:11)
John’s gospel is fundamentally Semitic in character and shows intimate knowledge of Jewish customs, and the Judean geography. Whereas Mark includes explanatory notes about certain Jewish practices for his Gentile audience, John makes no effort to do so, using imagery such as the sacrificial Lamb without such much as a footnote. He also quotes readily from the Old Testament, though admittedly less frequently than the Synoptic writers. Burney argues that John’s gospel was originally written in Aramaic and is a product of Aramaic thought. Some scholars, like Buchanan, go further and pinpoint the Samaritans as the specific group for which John is writing but Cullmann urges caution, seeing Samaritan question as only one factor in the origins of John’s gospel. Either way, the background to John’s gospel is more Semitic than Greek.

Neither in the prologue, nor in the rest of the gospel does John use philosophical concepts nor does his thought seem to be particularly indebted philosophical works. John’s Logos does not serve as mediator for a transcendent God; John has an immanent view of God. For John, the Logos does not come from philosophical necessity. There is little reason to suppose John derived his Logos from Philo. Rather they are independent inheritors of the Wisdom discourse. This common heritage provides an interesting basis for the evaluation of the prologue because John says nothing about the Logos before John 1:14 that Philo could not have agreed with. Philo confidently names the Logos ‘God’ and describes it as the agent of Creation, and yet the consensus of scholars is that Philo did not regard the Logos as an independent being.

John’s prologue is written intentionally to mirror Genesis 1:

---

182 cp. Mark 7:11
183 John 1:29, 1:36, 19:36
184 “The author’s language is cast throughout in the Aramaic mould. He is thoroughly familiar with rabbinic speculation. He knows his Old Testament, not through the medium of the LXX, but in the original language.” (p127 C. F. Burney 1922)
185 p51 O. Cullman 1976, based upon such evidence as the favourable inclusions in the narrative of incidents in Samaria and the unfriendly presentation of those John calls ‘the Jews’.
186 p52 O. Cullman 1976
187 Qu.in Gen. II.62, On Dreams 1.227
In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light’, and there was light. Obviously the opening phrase, “in the beginning” is a direct quotation, but other elements are also mirrored, including the concepts of creation and light. It is therefore likely that the Logos in John is primarily an allusion to the creative word of God in Genesis. The secondary reference to Wisdom is also apparent. We have already seen Wisdom equated with the creative word in the Wisdom of Solomon. Yet significantly neither of these derivations for John’s language entails the personality of the Logos. The word of God, though sometimes personified, was never regarded as being a separate being. Wisdom is frequently personified as a woman, but never regarded as a literal person. There does not seem sufficient reason to suppose that in John the situation has changed. As a masculine noun, many translations use the word ‘he’ of the Logos but the translation ‘it’ is equally allowable.

The only reason to suppose that the Logos is a person is the interpretation of many theologians that equates Jesus with the Logos, but it is by no means evident that this is John’s intention. John does not refer to Jesus by name until verse 17, nor does he refer to the Logos (either in his gospel or his epistles) after verse 14, in which the Logos becomes flesh. The fact that John never calls Jesus ‘the Word’ nor calls the Logos ‘Jesus’ demonstrates that there is a fundamental distinction between the two. Jesus is not the Logos, he is the Logos made flesh.

189 Genesis 1:1-3
190 John 1:2-3
191 John 1:4-5
192 This equation of Logos with the creative word might be mediated through Jewish understanding. Burney refers to the concept of the Mēmrā (‘Word’) which was used frequently in the Targums as a periphrasis to interpret passages of the Old Testament where the Hebrew “seemed too anthropomorphic to Jewish thought” (p38 C. F. Burney 1922).
193 p38 C. F. Burney 1922
194 Recent research has shown how ancient languages made use of literary devices such as personification and thus personification in such texts did not necessarily imply that the writer believed their subject to be a literal person. (see W. Burkert, Hesiod in Context: Abstractions and Divinities in an Aegean-Eastern Koiné, 2005 and E. Stafford, Worshipping Virtues: Personification and the Divine in Ancient Greece, 2000).
195 Both Tyndale and The Geneva Bible use ‘it’, instead of ‘he’. Even if John had explicitly personified his Logos this would not necessarily imply that he understood the Logos as a person.
However we understand the origins of the prologue, it is clear that it forms an integral part of the gospel of John.\textsuperscript{196} It is included to demonstrate John’s own understanding of Jesus’ origins and underpins the statements he makes elsewhere in the gospel. Those sayings of Jesus which state that he came down from heaven\textsuperscript{197} should be understood as a product of John’s concept of Jesus as the pre-existent Logos, rather than as demonstrating the belief that Jesus pre-existed as a person.

**D3.5 – Further Development**

The development of the doctrine of the pre-existence of Jesus seems primarily based upon the associations between Jesus and Wisdom. It is possible that Paul did not identify Jesus with Wisdom, but his ‘New Creation’ discourse could be interpreted by a new generation of converts in that light. It is probably upon this basis that Wisdom was given a prominent position in John’s prologue. However none of the New Testament writers ascribe a personal pre-existence to Jesus. The fact that the Synoptic gospels give no hint of pre-existence, rather tracing Jesus’ existence to his birth,\textsuperscript{198} is a strong argument against the hypothesis that such a doctrine was preached earlier by Paul or the writer to the Hebrews.\textsuperscript{199} John follows the precedents in the Wisdom literature, which do not ascribe any personality to Wisdom. For John, Jesus was the incarnate-Logos; a part of Jesus had existed before his birth as a creative, impersonal, emanation.

\textsuperscript{196} The Prologue is frequently as having been a poem prior to the composition of John because its Logos terminology occurs nowhere else in the book in quite the same form. The opportunity is then taken to free the Prologue of those obtrusive verses about John the Baptist, (John 1:6-8, 15) to create, what is seen as, the original Prologue (John 1:1-5, 9-14, 16-18). Yet if, in an effort to link this poem of the pre-existent Logos with the beginning of his narrative, an editor saw fit to write in verses about John Baptist into the Prologue, then is it not equally likely that a single writer would have to go through the same process if he wanted to join these two ideas together? As such, though we may think the Baptist-verses in the Prologue to be a little inconsistent with this rest of the poem, to ascribe this narrative choice to a redactor rather than a writer seems a little arbitrary. We must also consider that, while λόγος is not used of Christ again, φως plays a significant role throughout the gospel in John’s Christology (John 3:19-21, 8:12, 9:5, 11:9-10, 12:35-36, 12:46). The phrase ‘word of God’ in connection with Christ is certainly used elsewhere in Johannine literature (I John 2:14, Revelation 19:13). In fact, the absence of the λόγος in the rest of John’s gospel simply underlines part of his Christology: Jesus of Nazareth was not the Logos - when the Logos became flesh it became Jesus of Nazareth. Thus it would actually be surprising if we did find reference to the Logos beyond the Prologue.

\textsuperscript{197} “[Matthew and Luke] show no knowledge of [Jesus’] preexistence; seemingly for them the conception was the becoming (begetting) of God’s Son” (p31n R. Brown 1977).

\textsuperscript{198} “It would certainly go beyond our evidence to conclude that the author has attained to the understanding of God’s Son as having had a real personal preexistence” (p55 J. D. G. Dunn 1989).
Christian writers after John seem to be strongly dependent on John in their assertions about the pre-existence of Jesus. For instance in the epistles of Ignatius (c.115) we find several references to the divine origin of Jesus yet the only explicit reference to pre-existence is Magnesians 7:1, “…Jesus Christ, who was with the Father before the ages and has been manifest at the end”. This passage is clearly dependent on John’s Logos discourse. Ignatius elsewhere describes Jesus as “the expressed purpose of the Father”, which implies that he understood Jesus’ pre-existence in terms of foreknowledge.

The statements of John are ambiguous and so it was possible for later writers (especially of a Hellenised mindset) to interpret them as meaning that Jesus pre-existed as a person. The Epistle to Diognetus (c.130) manifests a discernible change in Christian discourse. Though he does sometimes describe the pre-existence of the Son in terms of the Logos, in other passages his language is much more personal:

And when He had a great and inexpressible thought, he communicated it to His child alone

Now while it is possible that “child” is just a description of the Logos, the concept of communication taking place between the Father and the Son before the incarnation would more naturally require the Son to be personal. The Paraleipomena Jeremiou (c.130) refers to Jesus appearing to Jeremiah and performing miracles before him. In the Epistle of the Apostles (c.160) Jesus is recorded as describing his conception in Mary in these terms: “I formed myself and entered into her body”.

200 Magnesians 7:2, 8:2; Ephesians 7:2
201 “Jesus Christ His Son, who is His Word” Magnesians 8:2
202 Ephesians 3:2
203 The early Christian writers are deeply influenced by their origins in Judaism. Now in Judaism the language of pre-existence was often used idiomatically to speak of predestination. (p160 A. F. Buzzard & C. F. Hunting 1998).
204 “the word appeared to them…” Diognetus 11:2, “for this reason he sent His word” Diognetus 11:3
205 Diognetus 8:9
206 The writer of Epistle to Diognetus may have held a belief similar to John that only a part of Jesus pre-existed. He says of the Logos: “this is the eternal one who ‘today’ is considered to be the Son” (Epistle to Diognetus 11:5).
207 Paralipomena Jeremiou 9:24-27
208 Epistle of the Apostles 14
By identifying Jesus as ‘Logos’ John had unwittingly given later writers justification to identify Jesus with the intermediary of Middle Platonism. As we shall see it is this positioning of Jesus into the Platonic world-view that required him to exist before Creation (see D4.3).

Despite these developments the early view expressed in Acts and in Paul, of Jesus pre-existing (only) in the foreknowledge of God, persisted into the second century. The pseudonymous Second Clement, written about this time (c.150), asserts:

And, as you know, the books and the apostles indicate that the church has not come into being just now, but has existed from the beginning. **For it existed spiritually, as did our Jesus;** but he became manifest here in the final days so that he might save us.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ II Clement 14:2
D4 - Middle Platonism

D4.1 - The Second Century Milieu

Why were educated Romans attracted to Christianity?

The precise demographics of early Christian churches is still debated, whether they were largely made of slaves and women or ‘middle’ and upper classes. What is clear is that by the end of the second century there was a significant proportion of educated elite within the Church. The fact that at this time Clement of Alexandria writes *Who is the rich man who can be saved?*, a justification of possessing wealth, demonstrates that there must have been wealthy people within the Church. The educated attack on Christianity made by Celsus (c.180) probably demonstrates that the number of the elite turning to Christianity was becoming worrying to the old institutions. We also have the personal testimonies of individuals like Justin and Tatian, former Platonists, who convert to Christianity. The question (which we can only answer in brief) is why were educated Romans, like these, attracted to Christianity?

By the second century in the Roman Empire the upper classes were united by “a shared literary and philosophical education”. This philosophical discourse, particularly (Middle) Platonism, was now taking the place of the traditional pagan gods. So already the upper classes were inclined towards a sort of monotheism. This was coupled with a moralistic tendency similar to that of Christianity. Examples from Greek novels from this period, such as Longus’ *Daphnis and Chloe*, highlight the importance of virginity and sexual purity, themes also emphasized in Christianity. Despite, some “conspicuous” differences between Christianity and Platonism, there were several elements that the educated classes would have found attractive.

Some of the differences were also attractive. The Greek philosophical systems offered only intellectual enlightenment, Christianity offer “the wholly new idea of man’s redemption”.

---

210 p305 R. Lane Fox 1986
211 p330 R. Lane Fox 1986
212 p123 F. Novotný 1977
213 p332 R. Lane Fox 1986
Why were Christians attracted to Middle Platonism?

Christianity is presented in the New Testament in a form that was unacceptable, even incomprehensible, to people of education, such as most aristocrats … One of the dearest concerns of the second century apologists … [was] the translation of Christianity into a language that could be understood and accepted by the upper classes.

There is a distinct shift in the type of literature being produced by Christians in the second century. The (false) Acts and Gospels written during this period can be interpreted as an effort on the part of Christians to write the sort of books that upper classes would read. These works seem to follow the basic pattern of the Greek novel yet with a distinctly Christian message. The idea that Christians ‘translated’ the New Testament into Platonic language to appeal to the upper classes is not improbable, though for many this may have been an unconscious process. The apologists seem to have genuinely believed that the Greek philosophers discovered through reason the same God that was revealed to the Hebrew prophets by revelation. Justin would have seen in John a mediating principle named ‘Logos’ and also seen Middle Platonism a mediating principle named ‘Logos’ – it would have seemed reasonable to equate them. Syncretism of Middle Platonism with religion is not only a feature of early Christianity; Philo the Jew wrote extensively, interpreting the Old Testament in a Platonic light, and Plutarch combined Platonism with Egyptian mythology. The apologists appear to have accepted that both Christianity and Middle Platonism were true. An analogy with the syncretism of Darwinism with Christianity in the nineteenth century would not be unjustified.

The increasing persecution of Christians by the Romans was a strong incentive for the Christian writers to present their religion in philosophic terms. The first century had seen two persecutions initiated by the state, one under Nero and another under Domitian, as well as sporadic persecution in individual provinces. By the end of the first century, as the Jews sought to withdraw themselves from Christians, the Christians lost any protection they might have had from being considered a sect of Judaism. And the persecutions continued. So certain Christians, following the precedent of other individuals, began to write ‘apologies’, or defences, of

---

214 p99 D. J. Kyrtatos 1987
215 p204 J. Dillon 1977
Christianity. Since the Roman elite, including the Emperor, shared a philosophical education, one of the defences that the apologists used was the claim that Christianity was the true philosophy. Some of the apologists styled themselves 'philosopher', others addressed the emperors as philosophers. The apologists sought to claim Christianity as the truth to which the Greek philosophers had been striving, even asserting that Moses had been the source for philosophers’ doctrines.

D4.2 - Platonism

It would be impossible to do justice to such a vast subject as Platonism in such a few words. It would be equally impossible to understand the background to the developments that take place in Christian doctrine in the second century without some understanding of Platonism. What follows is a brief summary of the salient points of Platonism.

Plato

Plato is not consistent in his view of the origins and nature of the world. There are two explanations in Plato’s writings that we should be aware of.

The first is his concept of the Forms, which he explains in the Republic. His idea is that the visible (material) world is a poor imitation of the true (immaterial) world (the Realm of the Forms). The Forms are true things; for instance, the form of the tree is everything that makes a tree a tree and is that which all trees imitate, just as a picture of a tree imitates a physical tree. For Plato the chief Form is the Form of the Good from which all things proceed.

A second explanation is found in the Timaeus, where Plato explains that the world was created from chaotic matter by a god that he calls the Demiurge (literally ‘the Craftsman’). The Demiurge creates the World-Soul, which relates to the world in the same way that the human soul relates to the human body. Interestingly, the Demiurge

---

216 p12 R. M. Grant 1988
217 p83 F. Young 1999
218 Apology of Aristides XVII [Syriac]
219 Justin, First Apology 1; pp83-4 F. Young 1999
220 p94 F. Young 1999
is not omnipotent; he has to use the pre-existent chaotic matter to form the world and
in this way Plato explains the imperfections in the world. There is possibly some
cross-over between the Timaeus and the Republic. The Forms seem to occur in the
Timaeus, the Demiurge may appear in the Republic, and it is even possible that
Plato linked the Demiurge and the Form of the Good (though this is nowhere
stated).

In his later years Plato became influenced by Pythagoreanism and with the idea of a
mathematical model for the universe. Thus the Forms come to be regarded by Plato as
numbers. Like the Pythagoreans, he postulates as first principles the One (Monad)
and the Indefinite Dyad.

The One is an active principle, imposing ‘limit’ (peras) on the formlessness (apeiron) of the
opposite principle. The Dyad is regarded as a duality (also termed by him ‘the great-and-
small’) as being infinitely extensible or divisible, being simultaneously infinitely large and
infinitely small.

The World-Soul becomes “the supreme mediating entity” between the Realm of the
Forms and the physical world. The One acts upon the Dyad making the
Forms/numbers. These numbers are taken in by the World-Soul and thus become
‘mathematicals’, which are projected upon Matter by the World-Soul to form the
physical world.

This latter explanation of the origins of the world left many issues unresolved, which
would be debated by Plato’s successors. The identity of the Demiurge and its relation
to the Form of the Good are just two things that are left unexplained. One further
mystery of Plato’s thought (that will be particularly influential in Middle Platonism) is
an enigmatic passage in Plato’s letters:

221 Timaeus 53d; p32 A. E. Taylor 1928
222 Republic VII 530a; p10 R. D. Mohr 1985
223 pxxii D. J. Zeyl 2000
224 for which our principle witness is Aristotle
225 pp3-4 J. Dillon 1977
226 For the Pythagoreans the Dyad is united within the One, so the One is the union of the ‘unlimited’
and the ‘limited’ (p30 A. E. Taylor 1928).
227 p3 J. Dillon 1977
228 p6 J. Dillon 1977
229 p6 J. Dillon 1977
230 “Are these letters, or any of them genuine? We have no way of knowing for sure. We have no
record of any Platonic letters existing before the end of the third century BC, some one hundred fifty
It is like this. Upon the king of all do all things turn; he is the end of all things and the cause of all good. Things of the second order turn upon the second principle, and those of the third order upon the third. Now the soul of man longs to understand what sort of things these principles are, and it look toward the things that are akin to itself, though none of them is adequate; clearly the king and the other principles mentioned are not of that sort.²³¹

**Stoicism**

The Stoics were materialists – they believed that everything was made of matter and that nothing in the universe was immaterial or incorporeal. They regarded the soul as material and even God, God being regarded as the world-soul. The Stoics were pantheists believing that God pervades the entire world. Following Heraclitus, the Stoics believed that the world was made of fire (and God was made of fire). They also believed that God was absolute reason (Logos), because they thought fire was rational. The Stoics adopted from Heraclitus this concept of the all-pervading Logos:

> Of this account [Logos] which holds forever men prove uncomprehending, both before hearing it and when first they have heard it. For although all things come about in accordance with this account [Logos], they are like *tiros* ['inexperienced recruits'] as they try the word and the deeds which I expound as I divide up each thing according to its nature and say how it is.²³²

Though Stoicism (in its materialism) is fundamentally opposed to the doctrines of Plato (particularly the concept of the Forms), later Platonists would make use of the teachings and terminology of the Stoics.

**Middle Platonism**

Middle Platonism is Platonism from the time of Plato to the time of Plotinus. This period is one that has received relatively little attention from scholars.²³³ The one exception is Philo of Alexandria, about whom many volumes have been written. The vast majority of the work done on Middle Platonism, including work on Philo, has been rather cursory and done with a view to providing background to the Christian theologians (in which situation I find myself). Dillon’s *The Middle Platonists* is one

---

²³¹ Letters II 312e-313a  
²³² Heraclitus B1  
²³³ John Dillon compares it to “those tedious tracts of the Mid-Western United States through which one passes with all possible haste, in order to reach the excitements of one coast or the other” (pxiii J. Dillon 1977).
of the few books that attempts to give the period the attention it deserves and is thus often regarded as near definitive on the subject (not least, for lack of alternative).  

We will consider two Middle Platonic thinkers specifically, Philo and Numenius, who seem to have the clearest influence upon Christian thinkers. But beforehand it will be helpful to present a brief summary of the general tendencies Middle Platonism.

Through the influence of Stoicism, Platonists adopted the term Logos for the active, creative force of God. Above this Logos, they posited the One who is identified with the Form of the Good, while the Logos itself is identified with the Demiurge. Thus Plato’s principles are worked into a hierarchy: the immaterial and utterly transcendent One, and the creative Demiurge. For some, like Moderatus, the World-Soul becomes the third principle. Interestingly, from what is recorded it seems that the concept of the Forms received little attention during this period and yet the duality between the immaterial and the material is central feature of Middle Platonism (except for thinkers like Antiochus who adopted a Stoic materialism). This duality will prove to be particularly influential in creating the necessity for intermediaries between the transcendent One and the material world.

**Philo of Alexandria**

Philo of Alexandria seems destined to remain a battleground of scholars for some time to come. This remarkable figure, poised as he is between the Greek and Jewish thought-worlds, attracts interest from a variety of sources, each of which is inclined to claim him for itself. Is he an essentially Jewish thinker, clothing his doctrines in Greek terminology? Or is he, on the contrary, essentially Hellenic in his cast of mind, Jewish only by ancestral loyalty, making of Moses the archetypal Greek philosopher?  

Philo does not attempt to escape his religion. His works are commentaries of the Jewish books. Where other Platonists posit two (or three) gods, Philo remains loyal to the monotheism of his fathers. This being said, Philo is profoundly influenced by Platonism to the extent that much of his teaching would have been foreign to other Jews of his age.

---

234 Moore provides a useful summary of Middle Platonism on Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, which is clearly based upon Dillon’s book (http://www.iep.utm.edu/m/midplato.htm).
235 p46 J. Dillon 1977
236 pxi J. Dillon 1981
Philo identifies the Platonic One, or First Principle, with Yahweh because of which Philo has “an emphatic doctrine of divine transcendence”. Philo states that God is ‘qualityless’ \([\alphaποιος]\), ‘unnameable’ \([\alphaκατό̉νομαστος]\) and ‘unutterable’ \([\alphaρρητος]\), and thus altogether incomprehensible to the human mind.

When one has established a totally transcendent God, there straightway arises in an acute form the problem of his relations with the universe.

The hierarchy extant in other Middle Platonic systems gave Philo a basis on which to answer this problem. For Platonists the Supreme One is not the Creator, but the Demiurge (Second Principle) is. Now Philo cannot deny that Yahweh is the Creator since He is frequently called such in the Old Testament, but he does adopt the same strategy of placing an intermediary in between God and the material world. Thus Philo posits two creations, which he believes Genesis attests: the first creation is the intelligible (immaterial) world and the second is the sensible (material) world. The intelligible world is the totality of the Forms and is thus also the Logos (“the divine reason-principle”). God creates the intelligible world (Logos) and the Logos is the instrument through which God creates the sensible world, after the image of the Logos (the intelligible world).

The reason Philo choose the term ‘Logos’ for this intermediary principle has been debated. For instance, Goodenough wrote that the Logos “is almost always referred to as Stoic and … seems to me essentially unlike anything in Stoicism except the term”, in opposition to writers like Wolfson who favoured the Stoic influence for Philo’s use of the term. The likely explanation is that the Stoic influence on Philo’s thought was mediated through previous Platonists, like Eudorus of Alexandria who used the term. However the appeal of the term for Philo must have stemmed from

---

237 p22 D. Winston 1981
238 p23 D. Winston 1981, citing: LA 3:36, 1:36, 51, 3:206; Deus. 55:56; Cher. 67;
239 p155 J. Dillon 1977
240 p157 J. Dillon 1977
241 p159 J. Dillon 1977, also see p23 D. Winston 1981
242 p94 E. R. Goodenough 1962
243 p253 H. A. Wolfson 1947
244 e.g. p128 J. Dillon 1977. Grant urges caution, saying “It is by no means certain, however, that Philo had ever read Eudorus, whom he never mentions, any more than other philosophers just before his time” (p85 R. M. Grant 1986).
the variety of uses it has in the Septuagint. We have seen how Wisdom was called Logos (D3.3) and creative role ascribed to Wisdom gives Philo sufficient reason to equate it the Platonic Logos/Demiurge.

Philo is not clear on the question of whether the Logos is personal or not; both options could be evidenced from the Philonic corpus. The Logos is often personified and even called “the Son of God”. Dillon supposes that Philo could not have thought of the Logos as a divine being in and of itself because of his monotheism, yet this monotheism does not prevent Philo from referring to the Logos as “the second god”. Young supposes that Philo held “a kind of binitarian view of God”, but in every circumstance the Logos is subordinated to the Supreme God. Goodenough writes that Philo seems “completely unaware” that the Logos could be inconsistent with monotheism and it is probably because Philo did not recognize the problem that he did not give a consistent answer.

Another issue upon which Philo is not clear is the origins of the Logos. In one sense the Logos is the sum total of the Forms, but the Logos is also a hypostasis that is God’s agent in physical creation. For Philo the Logos is not one of the created things and yet he is not un-create like God: “neither unbegotten as God, nor begotten as you [man], but midway between the two extremes”. Philo describes a

References:

245 p254 H. A. Wolfson 1947
246 “This vacillation in language has provoked a library of debate on the question” (p102 E. R. Goodenough 1962).
248 p367 J. Dillon 1977
249 e.g. On Providence (frag.1). This fragment is preserved in the quotation by Eusebius and so may be a victim of interpolation.
250 p114 F. Young 1977. O’Neill goes further, using Philo’s writings as his principle evidence for his assertion that: “there is no doubt that there were Jews before Christ who recognized that although God was one, he was also three” (Quaest. in Gn. IV.2; p95 J. C. O’Neill 1995). However to claim this passage as Trinitarian subverts Philo’s intentions. Philo says that “the single appearance appears as a triad, and the triad as a unity” (Quaest. in Gn. IV.2 [Loeb]). The two that appear with God are not ‘persons’, but His two chief powers: the creative power and the kingly power. The Logos is superior to these powers; “they are divided off from it, ‘as from a fountainhead’” (p162 J. Dillon 1977). Dillon identifies the two chief powers with the Platonic Dyad (p165 J. Dillon 1977). It should also be noted that O’Neill admits that Philo does not consistently present God as a triad, since there is passage where Philo puts God at the head of hierarchy of seven (Quaest. in Ex. II.68; p95n J. C. O’Neill 1995).
251 O’Neill’s view of Philo is not new; Eusebius believed that Philo taught the doctrine of the Trinity (p35 D. Winston 1981).
252 E. Moore (section 6a): http://www.iep.utm.edu/m/midplato.htm
253 Philo, Quis Her.234
254 Philo, Quis Her.205
process by which God “gives forth a Stream from himself” which is named the Logos, and as the Sun and its rays can at one time be identified and at another distinguished so are we to understand the relationship between God (Sun) and the Logos (rays). However the answer that many commentators search for, as to whether Philo regarded the Logos as having an eternal generation (as per a Trinitarian conception of Jesus) or was ‘given forth’ at one point in time, is not a question Philo deigned to answer (he did not know he would be required to).

**Numenius of Apamea**

Dillon classes Numenius as a Neopythagorean. Numenius supposes that Plato was influenced by the philosophy of Pythagoras, which we have seen is likely with regard to his later ideas. Numenius is thus influenced by both Plato and Pythagoras, and may (possibly) have been acquainted with the philosophy of Philo.

Numenius posits three gods. The First God is identified as the Form of the Good (or ‘Good-in-itself’). He is “eternal, immutable … [and] concerned only with the intellectual realm”. Like other Neopythogeans, Numenius sharply distinguishes between the Good and the Second God, who is identified as the Demiurge. This is due to the utter transcendence ascribed to the First God:

> The First God, who exists in himself, is simply; for as he absolutely deals with none but himself, he is in no way divisible

> The First God may not undertake creation

---

255 pp100-2 E. R. Goodenough 1962. A complication is Philo’s use of the concept of Sophia (or Wisdom). At times Sophia and Logos are identified (p256 H. A. Wolfson 1947). In other places, the Logos is described as proceeding from Sophia (p164 J. Dillon 1977), Philo even says that Sophia is the mother of the Logos and God has “intercourse” with her (*Ebr.* 31). On the other hand Sophia is also said to proceed from the Logos (p102 E. R. Goodenough 1962).

256 *Proverbs* 8:22 [LXX] says that God ‘created’ [*ἐκτισε*] Wisdom before He created the earth. Philo interprets this ‘obtained’ [*ἐκτησατα*], suggesting that he wished to deviate from the implications of *ἐκτισε*. However Wolfson maintains that Philo used *ἐκτησατα* when he meant ‘created’, citing *Cher.* 35 – the birth of Cain (pp256-7 H. A. Wolfson 1947). It is likely that Philo wished to maintain the distinction between the physical and the intelligible creations; the Logos is not a physical creature but is the intelligible creation (as the sum total of the Forms).

257 p144 J. Dillon 1977. The word attributed to Numenius – “What else is Plato than a Moses who reveals Greek tendencies?” [τι γαρ εστι Πλατων ή Μωσης Αττικιζων; ] (frag.13) – are certainly in keeping with Philo’s ideas. Guthrie asserted that “the definite assertion of the divinity [by Numenius] of the second principle … was unquestionably due to Philo Judaicus” (p191 K. S. Guthrie 1917), however the positing of a second god was not unique to Numenius among the Middle Platonists.

258 p26 K. S. Guthrie 1917; p368 J. Dillon 1977;

259 E. Moore (section 6c): http://www.iep.utm.edu/m/midplato.htm

260 Numenius, frag.26:3
The First God is free from all labour, inasmuch as he is King.\(^{262}\)

It is the Second God that creates the world. The relationship between the First and Second Gods is not clear. Numenius describes the Second God as being the “imitator” and “image” of the First God\(^{263}\) and elsewhere describes the First God as “the Father of the Creating Divinity”.\(^{264}\) The Third God is Creation,\(^{265}\) or rather a second creating principle which presides over Creation.\(^{266}\) The Demiurge is divided “as a result of his concern for” the world and the lower aspect becomes the Third God, taking a role analogous to that of the World-Soul.\(^{267}\) This concept of a threefold divine hierarchy derives in part from the enigmatic passage in Plato’s Letters quoted above.

Numenius identifies the Dyad with Matter and, following certain Pythagoreans, supposes that the Dyad is opposed to the Monad. Thus for Numenius matter is evil.\(^{268}\)

**D4.3 - The Influence of Platonism on Christianity**

**Early Christianity**

To demonstrate that there was a development in Christian thought it is necessary to demonstrate that the conception of God of the first Christians was significantly different to that of the Apologists.

Jesus is unlikely to have had any philosophical education or any contact with the ideas of Greek philosophy, unless it came through educated Jewish teachers with whom he came into conflict with. Paul, on the other hand, is likely to have studied some philosophy as part of his education; there are three (recorded) occasions when Paul quotes from Greek literature.\(^{269}\) It is interesting therefore that Paul strongly rejects philosophy as a means of learning about religion.\(^{270}\)

---

\(^{261}\) Numenius, frag.27a

\(^{262}\) Numenius frag.27a:8

\(^{263}\) Numenius, frag.25:3

\(^{264}\) Numenius, frag.27a

\(^{265}\) p122 K. S. Guthrie 1917

\(^{266}\) p371-2 J. Dillon 1977

\(^{267}\) p374 J. Dillon 1977

\(^{268}\) pp373-4 J. Dillon 1977. Dillon notes the similarities with Gnosticism.

\(^{269}\) Menander (I Corinthians 15:33); Epimenides (Titus 1:12-13); Aratus (Acts 17:28);

\(^{270}\) Colossians 2:8; I Corinthians 1:18-25
An examination of Paul’s doctrine of God shows that it is quite different from that of Justin and of Philo, his contemporary. For Paul, God is not only nameable, He is knowable. In Acts, it is recorded that Paul preached that all men are able to seek for God and that “He is actually not far from each one of us”. One of Paul’s recurring themes in his epistles is that God (in some sense) dwells in/amongst the believers. Though Paul does treat Jesus as an intercessor and a mediator (A3.1), this is as the intercession to a monarch or spiritual mediation of a priest. God does not require a metaphysical mediator; He is quite able to work in the world Himself. Paul does assert that God cannot be seen, in line with Old Testament teaching, but there is no suggestion that God cannot relate to the material world.

The Preaching of Peter

The Preaching of Peter is lost and now only exists in quotations from the Church Fathers, so our knowledge of it is slight. It cannot a strictly be called an apology as there is no evidence that it was addressed to an emperor or official. It does however have several elements in common with the both the Apology of Aristides and the Epistle to Diognetus and it is likely that both these apologies knew of this work.

One major focus for the Preaching is the transcendence of God, who is described in the following terms:

…the invisible who seeth all things, uncontainable, who contained all, having need of nought, of whom all things stand in need and for whose sake they exist, incomprehensible, perpetual, incorruptible, uncreated... 

Jesus is in turn described as “the word of His power” by which God made all things. Though none of the extant fragments digress into the nature of the relationship between God and Jesus it seems reasonable to suppose that Jesus is

---

271 Romans 2:24, (I Timothy 6:1), Paul argues that Creation itself manifests God’s “invisible attributes” and so all men can know God (Romans 1:18-21)
273 Acts 17:27 [ESV]
274 I Corinthians 3:16, II Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 2:2, 4:6,
275 Philippians 2:13
276 (I Timothy 6:16)
277 Exodus 33:20
278 p58 H. G. Meecham 1949
279 Preaching of Peter 1, quoted Stromata 6.5.39
280 ibid
assigned a mediating role as the agent of Creation (and therefore does not qualify for the same transcendent description).

It is also interesting to note that the *Preaching* equated the Christian God with the God of Greek philosophy, saying:

… we and the good Greeks worship the same God, though not according to perfect knowledge for they had not learned the tradition of the Son.

This seems to be the earliest occurrence of the common Christian belief that the Greek philosophers learned through the exercise of reason about the same God that the Christians learned through revelation. The *Preaching* also criticizes both the worship of idols and the religious practices of the Jews, features that will recur in other apologists.

**The Apology of Aristides (c.125)**

Aristides begins his apology by an argument for God’s existence very similar to Aristotle’s own argument for the existence of the Unmoved Mover:

When I saw that the universe and all that is therein is moved by necessity, I perceived that the mover and controller is God. For everything which causes motion is stronger than that which is moved, and that which is moved, and that which controls is stronger than that which is controlled.

Aristides, however, is not primarily concerned with proving the existence of God since his Roman audience were not atheists. Aristides employs this reasoning to argue for the transcendence of God; since the mover must be “more powerful” than the moved then God must be greater than the universe. Because God must be greater than the universe, Aristides reasons that the very nature of God must be beyond human comprehension:

---

281 Preaching of Peter 2, quoted *Stromata* 6.5.39
282 *ibid.*
283 The Apology of Aristides is preserved in the forms: an Armenian fragment, a Syriac translation and a shortened version in the Life of St Barlaam of India in Greek. As the original apology was written in Greek, it is likely that the version preserved in Barlaam is more accurate than the other two. However this version is likely to have been edited for an Indian audience, removing the frequent references to the Greek gods preserved in the Syriac version as irrelevant. As such none of the three forms can be trusted absolutely.
284 *ibid.*
285 *Apology* I [Greek]
286 *cp.* Syriac and Armenian
But that I should make search concerning this same mover of all, as to what is His nature (for it seems to me, He is indeed unsearchable in His nature), and that I should argue as to the constancy of His government, so as to grasp it fully – this is a vain effort for me; for it is not possible that a man should fully comprehend it.

Aristides then continues by describing the utter transcendence of God:

I say, then, that God is not born, not made, an ever-abiding nature without beginning and without end, immortal, perfect, and incomprehensible. Now when I say that He is ‘perfect’ this means that there is not in Him any defect, and He is not in need of anything but all things are in need of Him. And when I say that He is ‘without beginning’, this means that everything which has beginning has also an end, and that which has an end may be brought to an end. He has no name, for everything which has a name is kindred to things created. Form He has none, nor yet any union of members; for whatsoever possesses these is kindred to things fashioned. He is neither male nor female …

Having established this description of the reality of God, Aristides compares this description to the ways in which the “four classes of men in this world” worship. Like the Preaching, Aristides condemns the worship of idols and criticises the practices of the Jews. What is particularly interesting for our purposes is his critique of the Greek myths, which is very similar to Plato’s own criticisms in the Republic, reasoning that certain of the descriptions of the Greek gods are inconsistent with true divine nature. This reasoning is significant as it means Aristides, not only identifies God with Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover, he also defines the qualities of God in Platonic terms.

The Epistle to Diognetus (c.130)

This apology has several points in common with both the Preaching of Peter and the Apology of Aristides and various theories have been developed of their interdependence. It will suffice for our purposes to note that all three come from the same milieu, all three writing against the worship of idols and the practices of the

---

287 Apology I [Syriac], cp. Armenian
288 Apology I [Syriac], cp. Greek
289 Apology II [Syriac], only three classes in the Greek version
290 Apology III [Syriac]
291 Apology XIV [Syriac]
292 Republic II.377d-391d
293 “J. Armitage Robinson marshals evidence to show that the Preaching lies behind both the Apology of Aristides and our Epistle” (p58 H. G. Meecham 1949). “Douket and Kihn advocated the view that the Apology of Aristides and the Epistle to Diognetus came from the same hand” (p59 H. G. Meecham 1949).
294 Diognetus 2:1-10
Likewise the transcendence of God is emphasized – “which cannot be comprehended by humans” – and a mediator is necessary to reveal God to men. This mediator is the Word. It is significant that this is the first occasion when the Son is called Demiurge. He does not use other Platonic concepts so it is debatable to what extent the writer was influenced by Platonism.

**Justin Martyr (c.150)**

In *Dialogue with Trypho* Justin recounts the period he spent studying with various philosophical schools before he became a Christian. The last school he studies from is the Platonists, to which he was greatly appealed. He says, “the perception of immaterial things quite overpowered me, and the contemplation of ideas furnished my mind with wings.” Though Justin eventually adopted Christianity, it is clear from his writings that he did not abandon all his philosophical teaching. One clear example of this is recorded by Irenaeus:

> Justin well said in his book *Against Marcion*, ‘I should not have believed the Lord himself had he proclaimed a God other than the Creator’

This exclamation may be just rhetorical, but it implies that Justin came to Christianity with preconceived ideas, particularly relating to the nature of God.

Price, in his article ‘*Hellenization*’ and Logos Doctrine in Justin Martyr, warns against an overemphasis of the Hellenistic influence upon Justin and the other apologists.

> Our modern handbooks often assure us that Justin and the Apologists took over the Logos doctrine of contemporary Middle Platonism. This claim is widely accepted because it is intrinsically plausible, in view of the Apologists’ concern to make Christianity philosophically respectable. But the unwary need to be warned that the similarity between the Logos doctrine of the Apologists and contemporary Platonic theology is less close that this claim implies.

We have already seen that the early apologists were affected by some elements of Greek philosophy, but the doctrine of the Logos is one of the key elements of the

---

295 *Diogonetis* 3:1-4:4
296 *Diogonetis* 7:2
297 “he sent the Craftsman [δηµιουργόν] and maker of all things” (*Diogonetis* 7:2)
298 *Dialogue* ch2
299 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV.6.2
300 pp19-20 R. M. Price 1988
development of the doctrine of the Trinity so it is worth spending sometime analyzing its source.

Price argues that the term ‘Logos’ was rare amongst Middle Platonists, being a Stoic term. Since the use of ‘Logos’ in the Gospel of John is not due to Greek influence, Price argues, then why should we suppose that Justin’s use of the term is influenced in this way.\(^{301}\) However, we know Philo used the term ‘Logos’.\(^ {302}\) Dillon identifies Plutarch as a Middle Platonist who makes use of the concept of the Logos and adds that the absence of others examples of Middle Platonists using this concept “may be a function of the inadequate evidence we possess for the period”.\(^ {303}\)

Justin’s use of the concept of the Logos is significantly different from that employed by John. For Justin the Logos is a “power”,\(^ {304}\) he is the revealer of all knowledge (not just knowledge of God),\(^ {305}\) and, most significantly, the Logos is now necessary to mediate between the transcendent, incorporeal, God and the material world.\(^ {306}\)

As we have seen, the early apologists deviate from the theology of earlier Christian writers and adopt a transcendent view of God, in line with the doctrines of Middle Platonism. Justin follows these writers. He describes God as “unbegotten”,\(^ {307}\) “ineffable”,\(^ {308}\) unchanging,\(^ {309}\) and unnameable.\(^ {310}\) These are features of Middle Platonic view of God and particularly the view of Philo, who seems to have been the
first to describe God as unnameable and ineffable. For this reason Justin says that it is impossible that God should have “left the super-celestial realm to make Himself visible in a little spot on earth” and so concludes that all the occasions in the Old Testament where God appears to, or converses with, men it was in fact the Son (Logos). Interestingly he puts less emphasis on Jesus’ role in Creation and he does not call Jesus ‘Demiurge’ as in the Epistle to Diognetus. In fact, Justin uses the term ‘Demiurge’ of the Father and identifies Him with the Demiurge when quoting Plato’s Timaeus. Justin emphasizes the role of the Logos in bringing the light of knowledge to men. Justin has no use of the Platonic doctrine of Forms.

Justin’s ideas on the origin of the Logos owe much to Middle Platonism, particularly Philo and Numenius. He describes the Logos as an emanation, though he does not use the term. He uses three analogies to explain the origins of the Logos, each of which has precedent in Philo or Numenius. The first is that Logos is as light from the Sun, so that the Logos is inseparable from the Father as light is inseparable from the Sun and yet the two are “distinct in real number”. Justin is cautious that the Father should not be diminished by the issue of the Logos, which is apparent in his second analogy of fire kindling fire, “though it ignites many other fires, [it] still remains the same undiminished fire”. His third analogy is that of human speech: “when we utter a word, it can be said that we beget the word, but not by cutting it off”. These analogies are designed to show how Jesus can be God without being the Father. They

311 p155 J. Dillon 1977. “Goodenough has pointed out that Justin consistently uses αγεννητος rather than αγενητος, which is the philosophical term expressing the fact that the Deity has no beginning” (p80 L. W. Barnard 1967).

312 Dialogue 60

313 “Thus neither Abraham, nor Isaac, nor Jacob, nor any other man saw the Father and Ineffable Lord of all creatures and of Christ himself, but [they saw] him who, according to God’s will is the God the Son, and His Angel because He served the Father’s will” (Dialogue 127).

314 First Apology 13, 58, 63; also see p48 R. A. Norris 1966

315 cp. Second Apology 60, Timaeus 36b-c; also see p97n T. B. Fall 1948. Justin seems to identify the Son with the World-Soul.


318 This is an analogy used by Philo of the relationship between God and the Logos (p101 E. R. Goodenough 1962).

319 Dialogue 128

320 Dialogue 61; 128; cp. Numenius, frag.29.16 (“this can be seen when one candle receives light from another by mere touch; the fire was not taken away from the other, but its component Matter was kindled by the fire of the other”).

321 Dialogue 61. Irenaeus will later reject this analogy as it implies that the Son had a beginning (Against Heresies II.13.8). He will also reject any idea of emanations as “it is impossible to conceive of anything as proceeding out from the Infinite and Omnipresent” (p152 E. R. Goodenough 1968).
all imply that the Logos had a beginning in time and that there was a time when the Logos was not.322 “He knows nothing, at least says nothing, of the Logos being eternal”.323 Like Philo, Justin does not provide an answer as to whether the Logos had a temporal beginning (perhaps because of his dependence on Philo); suffice to say that the Logos was with God before Creation.

Commentators struggle with Justin’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit as he does not seem to have a consistent line.324 The Holy Spirit mainly features as the Prophetic Spirit, which inspired the prophets.325 Bizarrely sometimes the Spirit is identified with the Logos326 and at other times they are sharply distinguished. One possible explanation is that this is due to Justin’s dependence on Numenius. Numenius’ Second God was divided into two and it was the lower aspect, which dealt directly with the world, that he calls the Third God. It may be that for Justin the Spirit is the lower aspect of the Logos.

Justin’s motivation for positing a third principle almost undoubtedly comes from Plato’s Letter, which he quotes,327 though his acquaintance with this passage may well have come through the works of Numenius.328 For this reason Justin, like Numenius, posits a hierarchy of principles,329 rather than three co-equal persons.

D4.4 - Further Development

Justin is significant as the first Christian (on record) to have openly adopted both the words of Scripture and the words of the Platonists. The influence of Justin upon later writers is hard to judge. His pupil Tatian retains many of the Platonic elements

---

322 In one place Justin says “God has begotten of Himself a certain rational power as a beginning before all other creatures” (Dialogue 61). The phrase ‘all other creatures’ implies that the Logos is a creature.
323 p153 E. R. Goodenough 1968
324 “There is no doctrine of Justin more baffling than his doctrine of the Holy Spirit” (p176 E. R. Goodenough 1968); “Justin’s ideas are fluid, as with much second-century thought” (p103 L. W. Barnard 1967);
325 pp62-63 R. M. Grant 1988
326 First Apology 36; “sometimes the Spirit which inspired is called the Holy Spirit, sometimes Prophetic Spirit, sometimes the Logos and sometimes God” (p180 E. R. Goodenough 1968).
327 First Apology 60; Plato, Letters II.312c;
328 p60 R. M. Grant 1988
329 “we have learned that he is the Son of the Living God Himself, and believe him to be in the second place, and the Prophetic Spirit in the third” (First Apology 13)
adopted by Justin, perhaps even making greater use of Platonism. Athenagoras, who knew of Justin’s Apology, develops Justin’s arguments further along philosophical lines. He demonstrates (at least to his own satisfaction) that logically there can only be one God and then explains the position of the Son and the Spirit without disrupting that monotheism. His explanations are taken from Middle Platonism; “the Son of God is the Mind [νους] and Reason [λόγος] of the Father”. Athenagoras, Embassy for the Christians 10.2 He identifies the Logos with the sum of the Forms, and describes the Holy Spirit as “an effluence of God”. While later thinkers might not have wholly adopted Justin’s arguments, the syncretism of Christianity with Platonism was going to stay.

Middle Platonism was extremely influential in the development of Christian doctrine, particularly the threefold conception of God, but it did not provide the doctrine of the Trinity. Middle Platonism posited a hierarchy of principles not a consubstantial unity. This meant that Christian writers for many centuries to come tended towards subordinationism. For instance Bell complains of Origen’s “grossly exaggerated subordinationism”, which was due to Platonic influence. It is not until the Neo-Platonist Porphyry that we find a triad that is coordinate and not hierarchical. Dillon notes how influential Porphyry was on Christian thinkers, particularly Gregory of Nazianzus. It appears that this Neo-Platonic influence was instrumental in the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity in the fourth century.

---

330 For instance Tatian uses the analogy of one flame lit from another to explain the way the Logos proceeds from God (Address to the Greeks 5). Tatian’s understanding of the Spirit is also interesting as he not only sees the Spirit as “inferior” to the higher principles, in line with Justin’s hierarchy, but also ascribes to the Spirit the role of interaction with matter, which God will not (or cannot) do, reflecting a Platonic immaterialism (Address to the Greeks 4). This probably stems from an equation between the Spirit and the World-Soul (p144 R. M. Grant 1986).
331 Athenagoras, Embassy for the Christians 10.2
332 p157 R. M. Grant 1986
333 Christian writers continued to use Plato’s Letter to demonstrate that there must be three principles. “It appears in both Athenagoras and Clement” (p62 R. M. Grant 1988).
334 p44 D. N. Bell 1989
335 “Now it was Porphyry, despite his notoriety as an enemy of Christianity, not Plotinus, nor yet Iamblichus, who exercised the greatest influence over Christian thinkers both East and West in the fourth and fifth centuries” (p10 J. Dillon 1989).
D5 - Unity

D5.1 - Judeo-Christian Monotheism and the Shema

One significant argument used by theologians and evangelicals alike to prove the doctrine of the Trinity is based upon the *Shema*:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

The reasoning is that because there can be only one God, if Jesus made any claim to divinity he must also be the one God. Bauckham makes a similar, if subtler, argument in *God Crucified* reasoning that Judaism of the Second Temple period was "characterized by a 'strict' monotheism that made it impossible to attribute real divinity to any figure other than the one God". He says that this 'strict' monotheism was based on the *Shema*. If this was the case then even the claims by the earliest Christians that Jesus was the Son of God should be interpreted as claims that Jesus was God. But, as we shall see, this is not an adequate picture of Second Temple Judaism. The ‘strict’ interpretation of the *Shema* arose in Judaism as a response to Christianity and was not used as a justification for the Trinity by Christian writers until much later.

*Shema*

The *Shema* was, presumably, originally intended to exclude from the Israelites the polytheistic practices of the surrounding nations. It stated that the God of Israel was YHWH ("the LORD our God") and that He was to be their only God ("the LORD is one"). It does not, of itself, state that there were no other gods, though it is implied and is indicated elsewhere in the Old Testament. Jewish monotheism of the Old Testament and inter-testament periods was characterized by the refusal to worship the

---

336 Deuteronomy 6:4 [ESV]
337 p37 J. McDowell & B. Larson 1991
338 p2 R. Bauckham 1999
339 p6 *ibid.*
340 *cp.* Exodus 20:2-3 (First Commandment): “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me” [ESV]
341 ESV footnote: “Or ‘The LORD our God is one LORD’; or ‘The LORD is our God, the LORD is one’; or ‘The LORD is our God, the LORD alone’.”
342 e.g. I Kings 18:21-29, Isaiah 45:5-6, Daniel 3:29
gods of other nations, or indeed worship human rulers. In the first century AD it led both Jews to reject any form of syncretism with the pagan religions of the Hellenistic world.

Early Christians readily accepted Jewish monotheism as a tenet of their religion, being mostly Jews themselves. James, alluding to the Shema, states that the belief in one God is fundamental to the Christian faith, something which even the “demons” believe. The gospel of Mark quotes the Shema confidently, stating that it forms part of the greatest commandment. Paul not only alludes to the Shema, but even adds a second clause stating that Jesus also fulfils a unique role. Yet none of these writers seems to recognize this as a compelling reason to suppose that Jesus must be ‘one’ with the Father; none of these writers identifies Jesus with the God of Israel.

**Judaism in the Second Temple Period**

Historians of Judaism hypothesize that during and after the exile the Jewish conception of YHWH changed from that of a territorial-god to the belief in a universal God. What is clear from Jewish literature is that during the Second Temple period the transcendence of God was being emphasized far more than in the Old Testament, influenced (a certain extent) by the contact with Greek philosophy. Yet this created problems of its own, for “the more God is conceived as transcendent, the wider becomes the gulf that seemingly separates Him from humanity”. To bridge this gap between God and man, Jewish thinkers of this period emphasized the roles of intermediary figures.

Angels for the first time are named and are ascribed the “day-to-day operation of His handiwork”. “The majority of texts from Qumran no longer speak of God as

---

343 e.g. Daniel 3:12, 6:10-17, I Maccabees 1:41:53
344 James 2:19
345 Mark 12:29
346 “one Lord” – I Corinthians 8:6, Ephesians 4:5-6; “one mediator” – I Timothy 2:5;
348 “The grandiose conceptions of the Apocalyptic seers, and the influence of Greek philosophy, made Him more august and majestic, but less gentle and kindly” (p95 C. G. Montefiore 1914). “God is regarded by the covenancers of Qumran as the one majestic almighty ruler, all His creation being infinitely below Him” (p317 [Vol.1] *Encyclopaedia of Dead Sea Scrolls* 2000).
349 p240 D. J. Goldberg & J. D. Rayner 1989
350 p241 D. J. Goldberg & J. D. Rayner 1989, p95 C. G. Montefiore 1914
351 p37 M. Avi-Yonah & Z. Barab 1977
acting directly. His effectiveness can only be imagined as mediated by other celestial beings".\textsuperscript{353} As we have seen, during the Hellenistic period the oft-personified Wisdom was used as an important intermediary between God and the world.\textsuperscript{354} Philo’s Logos, not only functions as an intermediary, but can also be called ‘god’.\textsuperscript{355} At Qumran “divine beings” (presumably angels) are also called “gods” (\textit{elohim}).\textsuperscript{356} Casey lists a number of intermediary figures who “seem to be of almost divine status”.\textsuperscript{357} Sanders cites the example of Paul, a former Pharisee, as a clear proof “that for few Jews did the confession of ‘one God’ mean the complete denial of the existence of other supernatural beings”.\textsuperscript{358} Now the early Christians did not identify Jesus with any of these intermediaries (with the exception of Wisdom/Logos) but the fact that they could exist in Judaism shows that Jewish monotheism of the Second Temple period did not preclude the existence of other metaphysical beings.

One objection to this picture comes from those scholars who doubt whether the literature of the apocalypticists and of the Qumran community is truly indicative of ‘mainstream’ Judaism at the time of Jesus.\textsuperscript{359} The truth is that ‘mainstream Judaism’ is probably a misnomer as it appears that at this period there was no orthodoxy. Judaism at the time of Jesus was extremely heterodox. While, as shown above, the Essenes and other apocalypticists believed in many mediating figures, other groups took different views of God and His relation to the world. The Sadducees emphasized the transcendence and foreknowledge of God (following a Platonic outlook), removing any association between God and evil (and, therefore, the world),\textsuperscript{360} but

\textsuperscript{352} p255 J. Vanderkam & P. Flint 2002
\textsuperscript{353} p317 (Vol.1) \textit{Encyclopaedia of Dead Sea Scrolls} 2000
\textsuperscript{354} also see Baruch 3:37
\textsuperscript{355} “The Logos effectively functions as the aspect of God by which people know him. He can therefore be called ‘god’, without a definite article, at Genesis 31:13 (\textit{On Dreams} 1.227ff)” (p84 P. M. Casey 1991).
\textsuperscript{356} “Praise [the God of …] the ‘gods’ of supreme holiness” (4Q400 1.i). “… wonderfully to extol Thy glory among the divine beings of knowledge, and the praises of Thy kingship among the most ho[ly]. More wonderfully than ‘gods’ and men they are glorified amid all the camps of the ‘gods’ and feared by companies of men” (4Q400 2).
\textsuperscript{357} Moses (Philo, \textit{Life of Moses} 1.158), Logos (Philo, \textit{Qu in Gen} II.62), Wisdom (\textit{Wisdom of Solomon} 7:21ff), Melchizedek (IIQMelchizedek), angels (4QShirShabb), Metatron (III Enoch 12.3-5) (p79 P. M. Casey 1991).
\textsuperscript{358} Sanders believes that Paul talked literally about ‘heavenly beings’ that he was unwilling to call ‘gods’, but rather named ‘demons’. (cp. Philippians 3:2-6, Galatians 4:8, I Corinthians 8:5, 10:20, E. P. Sanders 1992).
\textsuperscript{359} p11 S. Sandmel 1969, p5 R. Bauckham 1999
\textsuperscript{360} \textit{War of the Jews} 2.162-65, \textit{Antiquities} 10.278 (p68-70 G. Stemberger 1995).
they did not believe in angels (or other spirit-beings).\textsuperscript{361} The Pharisees, on the other hand, believed both in angels and God’s involvement in the world.\textsuperscript{362} The influence of Hellenism was felt more strongly amongst the Diaspora leading to speculations about emanations and demiurges proceeding from God, as demonstrated by the writings of Philo. Yet all these disparate views could exist within Second Temple Judaism, because at that time to be Jewish was more a matter of practice, rather than creeds.\textsuperscript{363} It was because of this environment that Christianity originally existed as a sect of Judaism.

\textbf{Judo-Christian Relations in the First Century}

The first Christians did not attempt to isolate themselves from the rest of Judaism and generally other Jews did not persecute or withdraw themselves from the Christians. Though there were hostilities – the persecution initiated by Saul being the prime example\textsuperscript{364} - Christians were allowed to preach both within the Temple precinct\textsuperscript{365} and in the synagogues of the Diaspora.\textsuperscript{366} The attitudes of the Sanhedrin were divided over the Christian question: the Sadducees were antagonistic\textsuperscript{367} whereas the Pharisees were (generally) more tolerant\textsuperscript{368} (and were even appealed by Christian ideas).\textsuperscript{369} Jewish Christians seem have generally been tolerated by the rest of Judaism.\textsuperscript{370} This situation could hardly have existed if Christians were seen as contradicting a strict Jewish monotheism. This situation, however, was not to last.

The Jewish War (66-70 AD) had a significant effect upon the character of Judaism. The destruction of the Temple meant both end of sacrificial practices and the priesthood. The Sanhedrin was dissolved and the Sadducees lost their importance and disappeared from history.\textsuperscript{371} With the focal point of Judaism removed it could have fractured into various sects or, perhaps, ceased to exist altogether. But Roman

\begin{footnotesize}
361 Acts 23:8
362 p290 A. J. Saldarini 1988
363 p83 G. B. Caird 1975
364 Acts 8:1+
365 Acts 3:1-3
367 e.g. Acts 5:17-18
368 Acts 5:33-42. The Pharisees had more in common with the Christians as both groups believed in the resurrection, whereas the Sadducees did not – a fact that Paul used to great advantage when he stood trial before the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1-10).
369 e.g. Paul, Joseph of Arimethea, Nicodemus
371 p34 G. B. Caird 1975
\end{footnotesize}
recognition “fell upon the group of Pharisee Rabbis who were settled at Jamnia [Yavneh]” headed by Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai. While this group was not representative of the disparate Jewish communities, the concession of Yavneh by the Romans to these Rabbis meant that they could operate with (at least apparent) Roman sanction and therefore were extremely influential. This group composed the Mishnah, and many of the other traditions which helped to formalize Judaism and establish an orthodoxy. However the Rabbis of Yavneh were strongly anti-Christian. This antagonism is shown by the composition of the eighteenth blessing of the ‘Amidah, which took place at Yavneh around this time:

For the Apostates let there be no hope; and may the arrogant kingdom be swiftly uprooted, in our days. May the Nazarenes and the heretics perish quickly; may they be erased from the Book of Life; and not be inscribed with the righteous. Blessed are you, O Lord, who humble the arrogant.

Justin Martyr (c.150) refers to the “cursing in your synagogues [of] those who believe in Christ”. This antagonism is also shown in the Gospel of John (c.100), which now refers only to “the Jews”, rather than the Sadducees, Pharisees and Herodians as in the Synoptics, and in which Jesus ‘predicts’ persecution from the Jews.

One reason for this antagonism may have been the increasing threats of Roman persecution against the Christians. Previously, the Jews had received special license from the Emperor to practice their religion. However the Romans did not immediately recognize any distinction between Jews and Christians, generally showing small interest in the internal doctrinal disputes of Judaism. As the Romans began to persecute the Christians, (Nero, c.66, and Domitian, c.95), the Jews found it necessary to distinguish themselves from the Christians. Around 95 AD Gamaliel II, the

---

372 p241 P. Carrington 1957
373 p593 L. L. Grabbe 1994
374 During this period the Masoretic text reached its final form (p35 G. B. Caird 1975)
375 p593-4 L. L. Grabbe 1994
376 p38 T. Callam 1986
377 berikot 28b-29a
378 Dialogue with Trypho the Jew ch16
379 “They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service” (John 16:2)
380 Suetonius, Life of Claudius xxv.4; Dio Cassius, Epitome lxvii.14;
381 For example, when a group of Jews brought Paul before Gallio, Roman proconsul of Achaia, he dismissed the case, taking no interest in disagreements over Jewish religious laws (Acts 18:12-17).
Patriarch at Yavneh, went to Rome for the express purpose of demonstrating to the Emperor that Christians were not Jews.382

Another reason for Jewish antagonism may have been the conversion of the Gentiles, since the Christians did not demand that its Gentile converts keep the Law.383

**Rabbinical Judaism**

Unlike the heterogeneous Judaism of the early first century, Rabbinical Judaism was particularly antagonistic towards Christians (who were termed ‘minim’384) and this manifested itself in Jewish teaching.385 The Jewish view of the unity of God became much stricter than it had been previously. This is seen in the contrast in the teachings about Creation. Whereas during the Hellenistic period angels, and principally Wisdom, were recognized as intermediaries in the creative process, in Rabbinical Judaism God is the lone Creator. Rabbi Simlai says, regarding Genesis 1, “it is not written here ‘created’ as a verb in the plural, but in the singular, denoting therefore a singular subject”386. These stricter monotheistic views can be seen as a reaction to Christianity. Jewish theology of this period precluded any lesser divine beings and particularly any ‘Son’:

The Holy One, blessed be He, said, ‘I am the First’ for I have no father; ‘and I am the last’ for I have no brother; ‘and beside me there is no God’ **for I have no son**387

382 According to Lerner Jews were being persecuted alongside the Christians. He cites the examples of Flavius Clemens and Domitilia (mentioned by Roman historians – Suetonius, *Lives* XII.15; Dio, *Roman History* LXVII.14), whom Eusebius claims were Christians (HE 3.18). Lerner claims to have identified a reference to Flavius Clemens in the Talmud and asserts that they were Jews (p79 M. B. Lerner 1984). In either case it is clear from the Talmud that the Rabbis believed that Domitian was persecuting Jews c.95, the period in which the Christian Fathers claim he was persecuting Christians (Deut. Rabbah 2.24, HE 3.17-20). Several commentators have concluded that certain Jews were caught up in Domitian’s persecution of the Christians and that Gamaliel, who was acknowledged in the court of the Emperor, endeavoured, though the theological discussions recorded in the Talmud, to distinguish between Jews and Christians with the aim of relieving the Jews who were suffering (see p248 S. Sandmel 1978)
383 p106 T. Callam 1986
384 “the word denotes ‘sectaries’” (p5 A. Cohen 1937).
385 “Certain doctrines in connection with the Deity were forced into general prominence and received special emphasis at the hands of the Rabbis because of contemporaneous circumstances. The attribute of Unity had to be underlined when a Trinitarian dogma began to be preached by the new sect of Christians” (p27 A. Cohen 1937).
386 p5 A. Cohen 1937
It is clear from this passage that a ‘son of God’ would now be regarded as a second God, and therefore a contradiction of the unity of God. This is also evidenced in Christian literature from this period. In the gospel of John, the writer puts these accusations in the minds of “the Jews”:

This is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.\(^{388}\)

John did not believe that Jesus was equal with the God, even Jesus’ response to these accusations show that John believed in the subordination of Jesus. It is likely that John puts this reasoning into the minds of Jesus’ accusers because contemporary Christians were facing similar arguments from Jewish apologists. The Jews were unwilling to contemplate the possibility of there being a ‘Son of God’ because, according to their (new) views about the unity of God, such a being would also be another God.

**Christian Monotheism**

As might be expected, given the antagonism between Rabbinical Judaism and Christianity, the Christian thinkers were not influenced by this new ‘strict’ monotheism. An examination of the quotations from *Shema* in the Church Fathers\(^{389}\) demonstrates that Christian thinkers of the second and third century did not view Old Testament as precluding other divinities. Justin Martyr does not quote the *Shema* but does refer to “another god” who is “distinct in number” from the Creator.\(^{390}\) Of Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian, who each (to varying extents) posit the oneness of Jesus with the Father, not one uses the *Shema* to justify that position. Tertullian does not quote the *Shema* at all. Irenaeus quotes the *Shema* twice: once to show that Christ did not recognize the two gods of Marcion but only the God of the

\(^{388}\) John 5:18 [ESV]

\(^{389}\) An investigation was carried using a text-search tool (*Examine32 TextSearch* v4.41, Aquila Software [www.examine32.com]) into the use of the *Shema* by the Church Fathers. Each text was searched for key phrases from the *Shema* such as “Hear, O Israel” and “God is one”. The following texts were examined: **Justin Martyr:** First Apology, Second Apology, Dialogue with Trypho; **Clement of Alexandria:** Exhortation to the Heathen, Paedagogus, Stromata; **Irenaeus:** Against Heresies, Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching; **Tertullian:** Against Marcion, An Answer to the Jew, Apology, De Corona, De Spectaculis, On Idolatry.

The investigation produced the following results: **Justin Martyr:** no instances of the *Shema* found; **Clement of Alexandria:** *Shema* quoted twice (*Exhortation* ch4, *Stromata* V.14); **Irenaeus:** *Shema* quoted twice (*Against Heresies* IV.2.2, V.22.1); **Tertullian:** no instances of the *Shema* found.

\(^{390}\) *Dialogue* ch56
Jews, since he quotes the *Shema*, and once to show that the Law is not ignorance, since Christ quotes it. Clement of Alexandria also quotes the *Shema* twice: once to show that the Scriptures condemn the worship of idols and once to show that the beliefs of Greek philosophers came from Moses.

These references are indicative of a wider trend in Christianity of the second century. Christian writers were not influenced by Rabbinical Judaism but by Greek philosophy and by Gnosticism. It is due to these influences that the Christian view of the unity of God developed. Later Christians rule out the possibility that the Son of God could be a being between God and man.

**D5.2 - Gnosticism**

It would be impossible in such a brief section to do justice to the full complexity of the number of varied belief-structures that fall under the category of Gnosticism. Nor could it be possible give the final answer in the debate as to the origin(s) of Gnosticism. Resting upon the foundations of Kurt Rudolph’s near-definitive work *Gnosis* (1983), as well as other research, we can at least give some account of the formative influence that Gnosticism had upon the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, particularly with regard to emphasize placed upon the unity of God by ‘orthodox’ Christian writers in the latter half of the second century.

Gnosticism was not born out of Christianity and its origins pre-date Christ. Gnosticism developed independently of Christianity; efforts to read Gnosticism into the early Christian writings, for instance in the New Testament, are generally unconvincing. It now seems likely that several of the similar features, such as the Gnostic redeemer myth, arose and developed independently of Christianity, but it

---

391 *Against Heresies* IV.2.2
392 *Against Heresies* V.22.1
393 *Exhortation to the Heathens* ch4
394 *Stromata* V.14
395 “The discovery [at Nag Hammadi] contains both strongly Christian and also less Christian and non-Christian documents; it therefore shows on the one hand the inter-relationship of Gnosis and Christianity, but on the other hand also their independence from one another. Since analyses so far undertaken on some specific Christian-Gnostic texts were able that they have been secondarily Christianized, this provided confirmation for the theory of the non-Christian origins of Gnosis” (p51 K. Rudolph 1983).
396 One such effort can be found pp151-161 R. M. Grant 1959
397 p148 K. Rudolph 1983
was features such as these that gave the basis for syncretism between Christian and Gnostic beliefs and mythology. There is a great variety of different sets of beliefs that are called Gnosticism, but they are united by some key features particularly an anti-material dualism. Gnostics held “an unequivocally negative evaluation of the visible world together with its Creator”.\(^{398}\) This could have had great appeal to some early Christians, due to the moral rhetoric about the evils of “the flesh” and the influence from certain sections of Judaism\(^{399}\) and Middle Platonism. It was this anti-material dualism that led Christian-Gnostics to posit more than one god.

**Marcion**

The Gnostic who probably had the greatest influence on ‘mainstream’ (or non-Gnostic) Christianity was Marcion. He grew up in a Christian environment and in a Christian family. Around 140 AD he became allied to the congregation in Rome, which donated money to his cause. However at a synod in Rome (July 144) Marcion failed to gain support and recognition for his views and was branded a heretic.\(^ {400}\) Yet he appears to have still had a powerful influence, which Justin Martyr complains about in his writings. Marcion’s system was based upon the idea that the God of the Old Testament, the God who created the world, was distinct from the God of the New Testament, the Father of Jesus, which he justified with a series of antitheses showing the apparent contradictions between the Gospel and the Law.\(^ {401}\) Some scholars, particularly Harnack, have denied the Gnostic origin of Marcion’s thought.\(^ {402}\) Yet, though Marcion clear rejects the “mythological speculation” that is a common feature of most Gnostics, he does retain the anti-material view of the world.\(^ {403}\)

**Gnostic Influence**

The influence of the Gnostics upon Christianity was clearly a worry for non-Gnostic Christian thinkers. Nearly every major writer of the latter second century wrote

---

[^398]: p60 K. Rudolph 1983
[^400]: p314 K. Rudolph 1983
[^401]: Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 1.19
[^402]: p44 R. M. Grant 1961; p313 K. Rudolph 1983
[^403]: “In his valuation of the world and of matter, Marcion also stands on Gnostic ground, and the ethic (ascetic) consequences which he draws arise from the anti-cosmic attitude that pervades his whole theology” (p316 K. Rudolph 1983).
against Gnosticism, particularly against Marcion. The imaginative speculation of
many of the Gnostics was rejected (and often ridiculed) by the more conservative and
Biblically minded non-Gnostic thinkers. They strongly rejected the Doceticism which
was a consequence of many of the Gnostic systems. But also these thinkers could
not allow the strong dichotomy between the Old and New Testaments that many
Gnostic systems posited (particularly Marcion’s) since it was Christianity’s roots in
the Old Testament that had allowed the Apologists to argue for the great antiquity of
the Christian religion. We should also not under-estimate the deterrence of Gnostic
moral teaching had upon non-Gnostic writers. At a time when Christianity was
attracting well-off Greco-Romans, appealed by the strong moral system, both moral
extremes of Gnosticism, asceticism and licentiousness, would have been condemned
(and feared).

The challenge made by Gnosticism profoundly influenced the development of the
doctrine of God. “Irenaeus’ preoccupation with the doctrine that God is one was
occasioned and shaped … by opposition to the view of his Christian opponents
concerning the Creator of the world”, i.e. Marcion.

Irenaeus

Irenaeus employs many tactics against the Gnostics. He attempts to show that their
systems are self-contradictory and that their propositions are illogical. But his
principle argument is that Old Testament, Jesus and the Apostles only recognize one
God, who they identify as the Creator. There cannot be two gods as Marcion proposes
nor any god above the Creator as Basilides and Valentinus speculated. Irenaeus
emphasizes that there is only one God, however in doing so he seems to argue himself
into a corner since the Apostles, though only naming one ‘God’, did give special
significance to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gnostics speculated about many lesser
divinities, angels and aeons, and some analogous to the Logos-Christologies of the
sub-apostolic writers and the Apologists. Irenaeus would never have back-tracked on
the teaching of his predecessors and yet his rebuttal of Gnosticism depended on the
proposition that there was no other divinity than the Creator. Nor could Irenaeus fall

404 Justin Martyr, Against Marcion (lost); Irenaeus, Against Heresies; Tertullian, Against Marcion;
Hippolytus, The Refutation of All Heresies;
405 p142 J. N. D. Kelly 1989; Tertullian, Against Marcion III.8; Irenaeus, Against Heresies I.19.2;
406 p24 D. Minns 1994
back on the concept that the Logos was an emanation from God as Justin had asserted, as this was also a feature of many of the Gnostic systems.

The solution Irenaeus settles on is to reject the idea that the Logos had a beginning and assert that the generation of the Logos is mysterious. Rebutting the followers of Basilides he writes:

> From Mind, they say, Logos and Life were emitted … Everyone knows that this may rightly be said about men, but in the case of the God who is above all [this cannot be said] … [one should] use more suitable terms than those who transfer the generation of the expressed word of men to the eternal Logos of God and give the expressions ‘a beginning’ and ‘a genesis’ as they would give it to their own word.\(^{407}\)

Irenaeus justifies this solution by quoting Isaiah: “who shall declare his generation?”\(^{408}\)

In *Demonstration* Irenaeus takes this argument one step further, writing, “the Son is God, since he who is born of God is God, and in this way, according to His being and power and essence, one God is demonstrated”, \(^{409}\) and so with that semantic flourish Irenaeus is able to subsume Jesus under the phrase “one God”. Despite this Irenaeus still asserts that there is a fundamental difference between the natures of the Father and of the Son. He asserts that the Father is “uncontainable”, \(^{410}\) “uncreated”, \(^{411}\) “invisible”, \(^{412}\) and incorruptible, \(^{413}\) while teaching that the Son is “born”, \(^{414}\) begotten and mortal, \(^{415}\) and accessible and visible. \(^{416}\) So though Irenaeus is able to content himself that the Father and Son are “one God”, he is far from equating their natures or even giving a consistent explanation of their relationship.

---

\(^{407}\) *Against Heresies* III.13:8

\(^{408}\) *Against Heresies* III.19.2; cp. Isaiah 53:8

\(^{409}\) *Demonstration* 47

\(^{410}\) *Demonstration* 4; 6;

\(^{411}\) *Demonstration* 6;

\(^{412}\) *Demonstration* 6; 47;

\(^{413}\) *Demonstration* 31

\(^{414}\) *Demonstration* 30

\(^{415}\) by implication: “we cannot speak of the resurrection of one who is unbegotten, since one who is unbegotten is also immortal, and one who has not undergone birth will neither undergo death” (*Demonstration* 38).

\(^{416}\) by implication: “since the Father of all is invisible and inaccessible to creatures, it is necessary for those who are going to approach God to have access to the Father through the Son” (*Demonstration* 47).
D5.3 – Further Development

The flaw with Bauckham’s thesis is a category mistake. While it is true that Judaism only recognised one God (in a category of one), this did not mean that Jews could not acknowledge the existence of other lesser divinities. Jews of Jesus’ day did not operate under a two-category system (God and created beings), but a multi-categorical system with God at its head. Nothing preached by Jesus or the early apostles implied that Jesus belonged in the God-category; early Christians seem comfortable with the idea that Jesus was neither God nor man. Objections to this multi-categorical system only begin to arise in response to Gnosticism, which speculated about many lesser divinities even to the extent of shifting the God of the Old Testament into a lower category.

Though the majority of Christians were not appealed by Gnostic polytheism, the evidence of Irenaeus demonstrates that one could proclaim that the Father and Son were ‘one God’ while believing them to be quite separate beings. Irenaeus’ ‘solution’ is effectively to dissolve the category of lesser divinities and move Jesus into the God-category. This begs the question of how to define the God-category; what is it about Jesus that makes him ‘God’? Even in the writings of Irenaeus Jesus is clearly a distinct person from the Father and subordinate in nature.

Praxeas is just one example of a Christian who felt uncomfortable with having Jesus in the God-category. He asserts that there was only one God who rules as monarch and Jesus is not part of this Monarch, but serves Him. Tertullian’s response to Praxeas reaffirms Jesus’ place in the God-category, stating that God is *una substantia* in *tribus personis*. What he meant by this is controversial: some suggest that *substantia* means substance (equivalent to the Greek ὀ̉σία); others say that...

---

417 Another objection to Bauckham’s thesis is that the God of the Jews was uni-personal (pp13-32 A. F. Buzzard & C. F. Hunting 1998). The identity of God and the nature of God were linked exclusively to the person of God. This uni-personal conception of God could not admit a second or third person. Therefore if Jesus had made claims which equated himself with the unique identity of God then he would also be equating himself with the person of God (and not proclaiming the Trinity).
418 The term ‘category’ is, of course, anachronistic but is a reasonable description of the situation (also see p110 W. H. Wagner 1994).
419 “a government is one, and does not prevent the monarch from having a son or from managing his monarchy as he pleases” (p178 J. L. González 1987)
420 p40 E. Evans 1948
*substantia* is used in its legal sense of property.\(^{421}\) Whatever Tertullian means by *substantia*, he does not mean that Jesus is God (in the sense of later creeds). He proclaims that “the Father is the entire substance, but the Son is a derivation and portion of the whole”.\(^{422}\)

The idea that Jesus subsists within the God-category (and can be called ‘God’) seems to have been accepted by the majority of Christians by the fourth century. The Arian controversy addressed at Nicaea (325) did not centre on this category question; Arius seems quite comfortable to call Jesus ‘God’. But the consequence of Nicaea was acceptance of the term *homoousios* (‘same substance’)\(^{423}\) as a description of the unity of Father and Son, to exclude the view of Arius that Jesus was created.

---

\(^{421}\) p179 J. L. González 1987. This theory comes from the work of Harnack and is based upon hypothesis that Tertullian had had a legal education. This would mean that Tertullian used the word *substantia* in its legal and not in its philosophical sense. Evans disagrees, arguing that Tertullian uses *substantia* as a translation of ὑποστασις and so, dependent on context, it could mean whatever ὑποστασις can mean (including οὐσία) (p39 E. Evans 1948). Osborn takes a middle view, asserting that “to claim that it must be one or the other or even both is an oversimplification”, unfortunately he doesn’t provide an alternative solution (p55 E. Osborn 1981).

\(^{422}\) *Against Praxeas* 9

\(^{423}\) A term rejected at the Council of Antioch (268).
**D6 - Triadic Formula**

The doctrine of the Trinity expresses the concept of three persons in substantial unity. The onus is always upon Trinitarians to find expressions of the essential three-ness of God, as well as the oneness, to justify the belief in the primacy of the doctrine of the Trinity. One such expression is triadic formulas which conjoin the names of Father, Son and Spirit in a single passage. These passages cannot immediately be taken as evidence of the belief in the co-substantial unity of God; names may be conjoined for any number of reasons (e.g. unity in greeting, unity of purpose, etc) so even the use of a threefold formula cannot be conclusive. However given the significance that will later be ascribed to the juxtaposition of Father, Son and Spirit it is necessary to explore early types of such formula to determine what was intended by their usage.

**D6.1 - II Corinthians (c.56)**

The earliest Christian use of a triadic formula that we have recorded is II Corinthians 13:14. It is an interesting departure for Paul, who generally closes his letters “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you”\(^424\) or simply “grace be with you”.\(^425\) Now this variance need not lead us to suppose that II Corinthians 13:14 is textually suspect, but it does establish the fact that Paul did not use a triadic formula out of custom or as common practice. Also the comparison demonstrates that the clauses “the love of God” and “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” are additions (though not afterthoughts). The use of ‘God’, rather than ‘Father’, distinguishes it from later triadic formulas and implies that Paul did not conceive of the Son and the Spirit as also being God. Given these points it is probable that Paul is not intending to make some profound theological point about the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit, but is rather expanding his usual blessing with additional clauses.

---


\(^{425}\) Colossians 4:18, (I Timothy 6:21, II Timothy 4:22, Titus 3:15). (The one other exception is Ephesians 6:23: “Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”).
D6.2 - Baptismal Formula

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.426

The closing passage of Matthew’s gospel (c.80) is the first time the three names ‘Father’, ‘Son’ and ‘Spirit’ used together. More significant is the fact that “name” in this passage is singular, implying that Father, Son and Spirit share the same name. That the earliest Christian baptisms, recorded in Acts, only record baptism “in the name of Jesus Christ”427 does not give us sufficient justification to suppose this verse in Matthew is a later interpolation,428 since it is reasonable to suppose that the historian, Luke, was intent on distinguishing Christian baptism from the practice of other sects, rather than giving a full account of early baptismal practice. The Didache, which does give an account of baptismal procedure, includes this triadic formula, almost certainly quoted from Matthew’s gospel.429

The use of ‘name’ (singular) might imply that Father, Son and Holy Spirit were viewed as the same being, but this conclusion is by no means necessary. For instance, Davies and Allison make the point that “some early texts speak of the Father giving His name to Jesus”.430 We must also bear in mind that in Greek understanding ὄνομα [‘name’] did more than simply function as a designator.431 The word ὄνομα could also be used of one’s reputation or even of one’s legal title. “The expression ἐις (τό) ὄνομα creates difficulties … ἐις (τό) ὄνομα means ‘with respect or regard to’, ‘because … is’”.432 As an idiom ἐις (τό) ὄνομα appears to carry the idea of causality, which might make allowable the translation: “baptizing them for the sake of the Father and of the Son and of the Spirit”.

426 Matthew 28:19 [ESV]
427 Acts 2:38, 8:12, 8:16, 10:48, 19:5; cp. I Corinthians 1:13
428 As Plummer puts the case: “the verse is found in every extant Greek MS; whether uncial or cursive, and in every extant Version, which contains this portion of Mt […] the evidence for its genuineness is overwhelming” (p431-432 A. Plummer 1928). Also see p296 R. J. Swanson 1995a
429 Didache 7
430 p547 W. D. Davies & D. C. Allison 2004 (my emphasis); John 17:11, Philippians 2:9
431 “There was and is a world-wide belief that the name of an object, man, or higher being is more than a mere label only incidently (sic) associated with the one who bears it. The name is an indispensable part of the personality” (p243 [Vol.5] TDNT 1978)
In both Matthew and the Didache the triadic formula is only used with reference to baptism. Given the link between Matthew 28:19 and the Apostles’ Creed\(^{433}\) (which itself arose from “questions that were asked of the catechumens at baptism’’),\(^{434}\) it may be reasonable to understand the triadic formula as a form of baptismal confession – this is Luz’s conclusion.\(^{435}\) This conclusion is supported by the facts that εἷς (τό) ὄνομα and ἕκατον are essentially equivalent\(^{436}\) and the phrase ‘in Christ’ is used of the confession of Christ.\(^{437}\)

### D6.3 - Sub-Apostolic Triadic Formulas

If we take the “seven spirits” to represent the Holy Spirit then the introduction of Revelation (c.95) may be one of the few places where we see the use of a triadic formula, i.e. Father: “from Him who is and who was and who is to come”, Spirit: “from the seven spirits”, Son: “from Jesus Christ”.\(^{438}\) Yet the “seven spirits” are only mentioned three other times in the book and two of those instances state that Jesus possesses (“has”) the “seven spirits”.\(^{439}\) Unlike the Lamb, the “seven spirits” do not sit on the throne but are “before” it.\(^{440}\) They are never ascribed with name, or authority, or even personality. If anything the seven spirits are referenced here to give a sense of hierarchy rather than unity. It is also possible that the seven spirits do not represent the Holy Spirit at all but are the seven archangels.

*I Clement* (c.95) does include one possible use of the ‘Trinitarian’ formula, saying, “for as God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit all live …”\(^{441}\) He does not say that they these three share name, nature or the Godhead. He does specify that the “faith and hope of those who are chosen” likewise lives.\(^{442}\) Though this passage does not imply the unity of the three, by stating that the Spirit ‘lives’, it might imply that

---

\(^{433}\) “the Apostles’ Creed is in fact an expansion of Matthew 28:19” (p11 W. Barclay 1990). Also see C. H. Moehlman 1933


\(^{435}\) p632 U. Luz 2005

\(^{436}\) p275 [Vol.5] *TDNT* 1978

\(^{437}\) e.g. Acts 24:24, Romans 12:5, I Corinthians 16:24, Galatians 1:22,

\(^{438}\) Revelation 1:4-5

\(^{439}\) Revelation 3:1, 5:6.

\(^{440}\) Revelation 1:4, 4:5

\(^{441}\) I Clement 58:2

\(^{442}\) I Clement 58:2
the Spirit was regarded as a person (though this indicated in no other way in the epistle).

The one use of a triadic formula in the letters of Ignatius (c.115) is not particularly significant. He says “… in whatever you do you may prosper in flesh and spirit, in faith and love, in the Son and the Father, and in the Spirit …”\textsuperscript{443} This is a triadic formula in the sense that Father, Son and Spirit are conjoined, and yet these are only three of many clauses. Ignatius is not indicating that the Son and Spirit are one substance anymore than he is saying flesh and spirit are one substance. The fact that the Spirit is separated from Father and Son by another “and in …” shows that far from being unified with the Father and Son, the Spirit is distinguished from them. This example is significant because it demonstrates that a writer may juxtapose Father, Son and Spirit without wishing to imply their unity; here, for instance, they are juxtaposed because a believer can work in the Father and can also work in the Spirit.

The indications from the apostolic and sub-apostolic writers are that triadic formulas are rare and, more importantly, do not carry the same significance as post-Nicene triadic formulas. The early apologies (the Apology of Aristides and the Epistle to Diognetus) do not even mention the Holy Spirit.

**D6.4 - Justin Martyr (c.150)**

Justin’s use of the triadic formulae is relatively rare and this may be readily explained by his concentration on the relationship between God and the Word, the Spirit being generally neglected. Though Justin does assert that the Word “is also God” (in some sense),\textsuperscript{444} he never makes similar claims about the Spirit.\textsuperscript{445} For this reason commentators have sometimes labelled Justin ‘binitarian’!\textsuperscript{446} I have identified three triadic formulas in Justin’s writings. One is the baptismal formula paraphrased from

\textsuperscript{443} Magnesians 13:1
\textsuperscript{444} First Apology 62
\textsuperscript{445} In fact, Justin does not seem to have a fixed doctrine of the Spirit. There is no reason to suppose that Justin ascribed personality to the Spirit and he never elaborates about how the Spirit relates to the Father and the Son, except that it is “the third” (p62 R. M. Grant 1988).
\textsuperscript{446} p52 S. G. Hall 1995
Matthew’s gospel\(^{447}\) and so is not particularly enlightening. Another is notoriously difficult to translate\(^{448}\) and so cannot be used as a reliable indicator of Justin’s opinions.

The third triadic formula is particularly interesting. It does not include the Father in a separate clause, but does enumerate the Son and the Spirit so we know that Justin has three things in mind.

> We have learned that he is the Son of the Living God Himself, and believe Him to be in the second place, and the Prophetic Spirit in the third\(^{449}\)

It is interesting that in this passage Justin does not explain what he means by the ‘second place’ and ‘the third’. Presumably he views this as the hierarchy of heaven, but he does not elaborate as to what the relationship between the three is. What this

\(^{447}\) “… in the name of God, the Father and Lord of all, and our Savior, Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Ghost” (\textit{First Apology} 61)

\(^{448}\) “We do proclaim ourselves atheists as regards those whom you call gods, but not with respect to \textbf{the Most True God} … we revere and worship Him and \textbf{the Son} who came forth from Him and taught us these things, and also the legion of good angels … and \textbf{the Prophetic Spirit}” (\textit{First Apology} 6)

In this passage Justin would seem to be listing divine beings that Christians “revere and worship”, as opposed to the worship of pagan gods which they reject. Since this list consists of ‘God’, ‘Son’ and ‘Spirit’ then it may imply that Justin believed that he, and other Christians, should worship these three as divine beings.

This passage is notoriously difficult to translate and so, despite appearances, it is possible that this is not strictly a triadic formula at all. The problem derives from the phrase “and also the legion of good angels”, which, taken at face value, would imply that Justin taught the worship of angels, a doctrine which elsewhere he strenuously denies (\textit{First Apology} 13; 16; 61). Given that the ‘good angels’ cannot be the recipients of worship, Schaff purposes that we should instead regard ‘good angels’ as the common object of the verb ‘taught’ (P. Schaff: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.viii.ii.vi.html). Schaff admits that this translation is “somewhat harsh”, but asserts that we are “driven” to accept it. This would give us the translation: “the Son who … taught us about these things and also \textbf{about} the legion of good angels”. Now if it is acceptable to suppose that ‘good angels’ is an object of the verb taught then it is equally acceptable to suppose that ‘the Prophetic Spirit’ is also an object of the verb taught since these two phrases are in the same case.

(Another problem of the translation is that the Greek phrase translated “also [\underline{ά̉λλος} the legion of good angels” could be rendered “the host of other good angels”, which would entail that Jesus was one of the ‘good angels’. This difficulty is more easily overcome as “‘other’ [\underline{ά̉λλος}] is in Greek often used pleonastically for the second of two separate subjects” (p39n T. B. Fall 1948).) It is easy in a post-Nicene milieu to suppose that Justin must have intended the Spirit to one the worshipped beings along with God and the Son. Yet Justin does not refer to the worship of the Spirit in any other place. He does not even appear to have consistent idea of who or what the Spirit is, stating in one place: “it is wrong, therefore, to understand the Spirit and the power of God as anything else than the Word, who is also the first-born of God” (\textit{First Apology} 33). Given these difficulties, we cannot use this passage as a reliable indicator of Justin’s opinion.

\(^{449}\) \textit{First Apology} 13
passage does tell us is that Justin did not believe that the Father, Son and Spirit were
co-equal but rather believed they existed in a hierarchy. His concept of the Spirit as
the third being may derive from Justin’s reading of one of the triadic formulas of
earlier writers (perhaps the baptismal formula which we know he quotes). Another
source for this concept is Middle Platonists like Numenius, who held a three-fold
hierarchy of God (see above). It is this Platonic idea that seems to have been more
influential than the writings of the Apostolic Fathers in securing a third position in the
divine hierarchy.450

D6.5 - Theophilus of Antioch (c.180)

When writing of analogies to be taken from the Genesis account of Creation
Theophilus says:

Also the three days which were before the luminaries, are types of the trinity, of God, and His
Word, and His Wisdom451

This is the first time that the word ‘trinity’ (τρίας) is used in Christian literature with
reference to God. Theophilus does not use τρίας to mean ‘three-in-one’, but rather
simply uses it to indicate that there were three things before man, God and His Word
and His Wisdom. Theophilus continues his series with man (the fourth thing). If
anything this sequence would imply hierarchy rather than co-equality.452

450 One triad occurs in the Martyrdom of Polycarp from around this time(c.150), when Polycarp, about
to be burned, prays to God and says:

I praise you, I bless you, I glorify you through the eternal and heavenly high priest Jesus
Christ, your beloved child [παιδός], through whom be glory to you, with him and the Holy
Spirit, both now and for the ages to come. Amen (Martyrdom of Polycarp 14:3)

The triad of worship implied is significant, particularly as it includes the Holy Spirit. Despite this, the
subordination implied by the phrase “through whom” means that it is unlikely that Polycarp
worshipped these three as equals.

451 Theophilus to Autolycus II.xv

452 Theophilus is not clear upon the identities of the Son and Spirit. In one place “the Word” is called
“the Spirit of God” –Theophilus to Autolycus II.x
D6.6 - Irenaeus

Although it is likely that Irenaeus knew the work of Theophilus, the word ‘trinity’ is not contained in either Against Heresies or his later work The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching. There are few examples in Against Heresies of the names of Father, Son and Spirit being used in conjunction in the same passage. Yet what makes this fact intriguing is that he regularly refers to the Father and Son together without mentioning the Spirit. Since Irenaeus is keen to stress the unity of God in opposition to the plethora of gods of the Gnostics, one might imagine that he would omit reference to Son and Spirit so as to emphasize that unity. His regular juxtaposing of the Father with the Son without reference to the Spirit implies that Irenaeus believed that the Father and the Son shared a unified relationship of which the Spirit was not a part. The following are but a few examples:

As I have already stated, no other is named as God, or is called Lord, except Him who is God and Lord of all … and His Son Jesus Christ our Lord

The prophets and the apostles confess the Father and the Son; but naming no other as God

… to the Greeks they preached one God, who made all things, and Jesus Christ His Son

And the others of them, with great craftiness, adapted such parts of Scripture to their own figments, lead away captive from the truth those who do not retain a steadfast faith in one God, the Father Almighty, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God

The last two of these quotations are interesting statements for Irenaeus to make since they imply that the one God is the Father and that the Son is something separate. This is in contrast to the first two quotations which proclaim that Jesus is called ‘God’. The apparent inconsistency may be due to the fact that the latter two passages appear to contain paraphrases from the New Testament. In any case, the key point is that the Spirit is neglected.

---

453 p63 S. G. Hall 1995
454 John Behr does include at the end of his translation of Demonstration the benediction: “Glory to the All-Holy Trinity and one Divinity: Father and Son and all-provident Holy Spirit, forever, Amen” (p101 J. Behr 1997). These words are not found in other English translations of Demonstration as they are probably not words of Irenaeus but part of the postscript by the Armenian copyist, which continues: "The God-accepted and thrice-blessed Archbishop, Ter Johannes, the owner of this book, the brother of the holy king, remember in the Lord; and the miserable scribe”. The ‘holy king’ is identified by Behr as Haitoum I (p27 J. Behr 1997) and so this postscript probably dates from the thirteenth century.
455 Against Heresies III.6.2
456 Against Heresies III.9.1
457 Against Heresies III.12.13
458 Against Heresies I.3.6; cp. I Corinthians 8:6
Even when the Spirit is referred to the distinction is maintained between the Spirit and the other two. For instance:

Since, therefore, the Father is truly Lord, and the Son truly Lord, the Holy Spirit has fitly designated them by the title of Lord\footnote{Against Heresies III.6.1}

If the Spirit was regarded as a full person within the Trinity then it would be odd that he should not also be called ‘Lord’. Instead the Spirit is included because of its function (i.e. revelation), rather than as a separate person. The other occasions on which Father, Son and Spirit are used together are with regard to the cooperation of their functions:

For the God is powerful in all things, having been at that time indeed, \textit{prophetically through the Spirit,} and seen too, \textit{adoptively, through the Son;} and He shall also be seen \textit{paternally in the Kingdom} of Heaven, the Spirit truly preparing man in the Son of God, and the Son leading his to the Father\footnote{Against Heresies IV.20.5}

Thus, therefore, was God revealed; for God the Father is shown forth through all these \textit{operations, the Spirit indeed working} and the \textit{Son ministering} while \textit{the Father was approving} and man’s salvation being accomplished\footnote{Against Heresies IV.20.6}

So while on the one hand Irenaeus thinks of the Spirit, along with the Son, as one of the ‘two hands of God’,\footnote{Against Heresies IV.20.1; p4 G. Wingren 1959; }462 through which God created the world, on the other he does not appear to motivated by a belief in the essential three-ness of God.

The approach is different in \textit{Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching}. This may be due to the fact that this is a later work, or may simply be due to a change of audience. In \textit{Demonstration} Irenaeus includes triadic phrases with respect to baptism.

\textit{We have received baptism for the remission of sins, in the name of God the Father, and the in the name of Jesus Christ,} the Son of God, incarnate, and died, and was raised, and \textit{in the Holy Spirit of God}\footnote{Demonstration 3}

This concept of baptism “in the name of …” is based in Matthew 28:19 (see above). Notice that Irenaeus does not make Father, Son and Spirit all subjects of a single “in
the name of” clause, but rather says “in the name of God the Father, and in the name of Jesus Christ …” Also note that the third clause is “in the Holy Spirit” and not “in the name of the Holy Spirit”, which implies Irenaeus perceived there to be a distinction between the Spirit and the other two (perhaps he did not regard the Spirit as a person in its own right). This provides an interesting example of how early Christians interpreted Matthew 28:19.

Irenaeus links the three subjects of the baptismal formula with the three articles of faith that he sees as being the epitome of Christian belief. The rest of demonstration is an exposition of these three articles. That Irenaeus should employ the baptismal formula in this way supports the interpretation of Matthew 28:19 that we presented above. Irenaeus’ description of the three articles of faith is composed from the language of the New Testament. The Father is “one God, the Creator of all”, the Son is “the Word of God … by whom all things were made”, and the Spirit is that “through whom the prophets prophesied”. The description gives no reason to suppose that the three are considered one; it appears to demonstrate a hierarchy.

D6.7 - Further Development

Irenaeus did not give a detailed account of the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit (and seems to have somewhat neglected the Spirit). Later Tertullian would coin the Latin term trinitas to describe the relationship (see D5.3), and this terminology was going to endure. Nonetheless it would take many more centuries for a precise understanding of the relationship of the three parts of the Trinity to be defined, let alone accepted throughout the Church.

The position of the Holy Spirit was long-neglected. The Creed of Nicaea had supplied no doctrine of the place of Holy Spirit within a Trinity: “there were theologians who affirmed with the Nicene creed … but held that the Holy Spirit was not within the supreme Godhead but at the summit of the created, angelic order”. Gregory of

---

464 “For this reason the baptism of our regeneration takes place through these three articles, granting us regeneration unto God the Father through His Son by the Holy Spirit” (Demonstration 7).
465 Demonstration 6
466 p72 S. G. Hall 1995.
467 p146 H. Chadwick 1993
Nazianzus writes of the variance of opinions in his own day, saying, “some of our theologians regard the Spirit simply as a mode of divine operation; others, as a creature of God; others as God Himself; others, again, say that they know not which of these opinions to accept, from their reverence of the Holy Writ, which says nothing upon it”.\textsuperscript{468} It was not until the Council of Constantinople (381) that “those who denied that the Holy Spirit is a distinct individual within the Trinitarian mystery of God” were condemned.\textsuperscript{469}

Given the relationship between the Apostles’ and later creeds, it is interesting to speculate to what extent the ‘three-ness’ of God, and particularly the position of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity, was borne out of the three-fold baptismal confession. The Holy Spirit was significant for early Christians as the source of miracles, but the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19 secured for the Spirit significance alongside the Father and the Son. On the other hand we cannot ignore the influence that Greek philosophy had upon Christian thought. It is not coincidence that the Middle Platonists also believed in the ‘three-ness’ of God.

\textsuperscript{468} Gregory of Nazianus, quoted p369 J. H. Broughton & P. J. Southgate 2002
\textsuperscript{469} p125 M. Eliade (ed.) [Vol. 14] 1981
D7 - Conclusion

That the doctrine of the Trinity did not form part of earliest Christian teaching is not a new conclusion, nor is it a difficult conclusion to justify. The apostles and early church fathers make far too many assertions that would be judged heretical in post-Nicene eyes for us to maintain the idea that they held an un-stated adherence to the doctrine (see A2). The problem is trying to create an accurate picture of what was the earliest Christian teaching regarding the nature and status of Jesus and explaining how that teaching developed over the centuries until Christians would accept a doctrine so far removed from the apostolic teaching.

Judging what Jesus taught (let alone thought) about his nature and status is fraught with difficulty. There are questions about the historical value of the gospels as sources and the figure presented therein seems particularly canny when it comes to making controversial claims about him. The title he does use of himself, ‘Son of Man’, carries with it a cluster of ideas that present Jesus as a figure who will pass into heaven and before the very throne of God. It is this discourse of the heavenly-redeemer figure that probably formed the earliest teaching regarding the nature of Jesus. Yet by itself this discourse would leave undefined many aspects of the question, particularly the relationship between Jesus’ heavenly and human aspects. Undoubtedly one of the earliest explanations was that given by the infancy narratives, which presented Jesus as a composite being created by the union of divine and human natures (D2.2). It is this understanding that is behind many of the early uses of the title ‘Son of God’ (A1.6).

How this picture of Jesus as a created, composite, being developed into the doctrine of the co-equal, co-eternal, co-substantial, second person of a triune God is long and wandering road. In this dissertation we have only covered its beginnings. It is likely that this doctrine had its beginnings (unwittingly) in the writings of the apostles. The language of the Wisdom/Logos Christology of Pauline-Johannine Christianity gave precedent for the idea that some part of Jesus pre-existed, even if they only thought of this ‘part’ as an abstract concept (D3). This pre-existent part soon became a pre-existent person, though the first (recorded) group to do so (“Possessionists”) would later be condemned as heretical as they taught that the Son was the Spirit and that
Jesus was just the vessel (A3). It was the Apologists, under influence from contemporary Platonism, who identified Jesus as a pre-existent divine intermediary, the link between an immaterial God and the material world (D4). But this concept would itself lead to a subordinationist tendency that would endure for several centuries (A2.9).

The Spirit has largely been neglected in this study for the simple reason that the Spirit was largely neglected by the early Christian fathers. Though, as the inspirer of the prophets and apostles, the Spirit was always something special, it was not until Christianity was overtly influenced by Platonism that Christians began to speculate about a personal role for the Spirit within the Godhead and even so it would take several more centuries for anything like an orthodoxy on the subject to be established (D6.7).

The significance of this study is not the discovery that the doctrine of the Trinity developed but the examination of gradual degrees of that development, particularly the varying theologies of the (so-called) apostolic fathers (an aspect that is all too readily skimmed over by many commentators). Yet the relevance of this study goes far beyond the historical study. Often when dating a text the textual critics have little more to go on than the theology it expresses, isn’t this task made the easier the greater our understanding of gradual development of doctrine is? In the study of philosophy the lecturers leap between Aristotle and Descartes with minimal reference to what came in between yet how can we fully understand the Enlightenment philosophers if we do not understand the Catholic philosophers and how can we understand the development of Western philosophy without consideration of the Middle and Christian Platonists? Theologians and religious groups today still discuss and debate the nature of the Christian God often appealing to arguments of the great theologians like Augustine and Aquinas but would it not be more relevant to examine what those closest to Jesus taught?
Appendices

A1 - Titles

A1.1 - Tetragrammaton

It is well-known that Jews today will not write or speak the name of God (YHWH), a fact that has meant that the true pronunciation of this name remains unknown. Rabbinic tradition records that after the sudden death of Simon the Just, the high priest, the priests no longer pronounced the name of God for fear of a similar fate.\(^{470}\) It is also records that by the second century BC the name of God was being read as Adonai.\(^{471}\) It seems that during the Greek translation of the Old Testament (c.3rd century BC) the command “whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death”\(^{472}\) was ‘updated’ to read “he that names the name of the Lord, let him die the death”\(^{473}\). The presence of the Tetragrammaton in the Hebrew Scriptures remained but the scribes were governed by strict prescriptions when copying the divine name. In non-Biblical literature, for instance the biblical commentaries found at Qumran,\(^{474}\) the name of God was not and is not used. This trend seems to have been followed in the Septuagint, the copies extant using κύριος to translate YHWH, and also in the New Testament.

There is difficulty in stating definitely when the Tetragrammaton ceased to be used in non-Biblical texts and there are indications that the first versions of the Septuagint contained the divine name. Montgomery records the case of a translation of Daniel 9:2 of the “Septuagintal tradition” found in the Syro-Hexaplar which translates the YHWH as τη γη, instead of κυριος as most Greek versions. This, he reasons, is based upon a transliteration in Greek letters of the Hebrew Tetragrammaton. He asserts that this represents a “more archaic” version of the Septuagint.\(^{475}\) In fact, Jewish translators were still using a transliterated form of the Tetragrammaton in their Greek translation articles and commentaries.

\(^{470}\) p600 L. H. Schiftman and J. C. Vanderkan 2000
\(^{471}\) p277 R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and G. Wigoder 1997
\(^{472}\) Leviticus 24:16 [NKJV]
\(^{473}\) Leviticus 24:16 [LXX]
\(^{474}\) p66 G. Howard 1977
\(^{475}\) p86 J. A. Montgomery 1921
translations well into the second century AD.\textsuperscript{476} There have also been many discoveries of fragments of the Septuagint bearing the divine name. A fragment of the Septuagint found at Qumran dating from 1\textsuperscript{st} century BC bears the divine name, though many of the Qumran LXX fragments do not.\textsuperscript{477} For instance a fragment of the Septuagint found amongst the ‘Nahal Hever Minor Prophets’, dating from 50 BC – 50 AD, contains a use of the Tetragrammaton in Paleo-Hebrew script in the midst the Greek text. Schiftman and Vanderkan refer to other uses of the Tetragrammaton in texts found at Qumran.\textsuperscript{478} Though it is almost certain that the Tetragrammaton was still being used in certain quarters at the time the New Testament texts were being written, it is not at all clear whether this was the practice in mainstream Judaism or only in heterodox fringe groups.

The Tetragrammaton is not found in the New Testament, not even quotations from Old Testament Scriptures where the MSS reads YHWH. Howard presents an interesting hypothesis that the earliest versions of the Septuagint did contain the Tetragrammaton and that New Testament, following the pattern of the Jewish scribes,\textsuperscript{479} preserved the divine name when quoting directly, but not when commenting on the quotation. He theorizes that “when it [the Tetragrammaton] was removed from the Greek OT, it was also removed from the quotations of the OT in the NT. Thus somewhere around the beginning of the second century the use of surrogates must have crowded out the Tetragram (sic) in both Testaments”. He continues that this removal would have had a theological effect: “in many passages where the persons of God and Christ were clearly distinguishable, the removal of the Tetragram (sic) must have created considerable ambiguity” since κύριος was now used both as a title for Christ and as the name of God.\textsuperscript{480} This is certainly an attractive theory as it explains the curious double usage of κύριος throughout the New Testament. Howard backs up his thesis by showing how many of the textual variants involving the words θεός, κύριος, Ἰησοῦς, Χριστός, and υἱός, can be explained

\textsuperscript{476} p10-11 N. Walker 1953, p 73 G. Howard 1977
\textsuperscript{477} 4QLXXLev\textsuperscript{b}, vs. 4QLXXNum, 4QLXXLev\textsuperscript{b}, Exod 28:4-7 and the Letter of Jeremiah 43-44; p65 G. Howard 1977
\textsuperscript{478} p601 L. H. Schiftman and J. C. Vanderkan 2000; 4Q380, 381, I1QPsalms, 4Q411, 4QJubilees, 4QLXXLev\textsuperscript{b}
\textsuperscript{479} (based on discoveries made at Qumran) p66 G. Howard 1977
\textsuperscript{480} p77 G. Howard 1977
supposing that confusion arose when the Tetragrammaton was replaced by κύριος. For instance in Romans 10:16-17 [NIV] reads:

But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

There is a well attested textual variant for ‘Christ’ as ‘God’ [θεός]. Howard reasons that originally the Isaiah quotation would have used the Tetragrammaton, but when it was later replaced by κύριος the quotation could equally be read in reference to Christ, “thus the shift from θεοῦ to Χριστοῦ, scribally speaking, would have been quite insignificant”. 481

A1.2 - Periphrasis

During the pre-Christian period Judaism began to become uncomfortable with references to God acting directly on the earth. Any reference to human-like activity and activity on the earth was carefully reinterpreted. The Targums are a good example of this process. For instance shekina began to be used in the paraphrases of the Scriptures for God’s presence. For instance “I will walk among you”482 became “I will cause my shekina to dwell among you”. Burney points to further examples of how the Targums would use yekara when mentioning God’s appearance to men – e.g. “they saw the God of Israel”483 became “they saw the yekara of the God of Israel” – and memra is used when the description of God “seemed too anthropomorphic” – e.g. “they heard the voice of the Lord God walking”484 became “they heard the voice of the memra of the Lord God walking”. 485

This form of circumlocution regarding the name of God is also evident in the New Testament, though it does not seem common; Jesus’ titles for God are, if anything, more personal. Luke frequently uses the title ‘Most High’ for God; 486 likewise ‘Lord

---

481 p79 G. Howard 1977
482 Leviticus 26:12
483 Exodus 24:10
484 Genesis 3:8
485 p35-38 C. F. Burney 1922
God Almighty’ is used in Revelation.\textsuperscript{487} These titles have their precedent in the Old Testament. They are never once just used in reference to Jesus.

### A1.3 - Nomina Sacra

In the New Testament manuscripts words like \textit{θεός} and \textit{κύριος} are abbreviated using just their first and last letters with a line over the top to draw the reader’s attention to the abbreviation. “The purpose of the system was demonstrably not to save either space or the scribe’s time; a free space is often left round the abbreviation and the time saved by writing a four-letter word in two letters would be occupied in drawing the line”.\textsuperscript{488} Originally it was thought that this practice arose in Hellenistic Judaism, following the Hebrew practice of using no vowels in the Tetragrammaton. In 1959 Paap reviewed the question, in light of recent papyrological discoveries, and concluded that instead the practice arose amongst Jewish converts around AD 100 who considered \textit{θεός} to be as sacred as the divine name.\textsuperscript{489} However the practice arose, it is significant that certain Greek words were being treated as sacred. Since ‘Jesus’ and ‘Christ’ are also nomina sacra, it has been argued that this practice “reflected a theological position”,\textsuperscript{490} i.e. indicating the scribes believed Jesus to be God. We must be careful of concluding too much from this practice. For instance there are examples of the name ‘Moses’ being abbreviated in the same way.\textsuperscript{491} Amongst the other nomina sacra frequently written in this way is ‘cross’ and others include: ‘heaven’, ‘David’ and ‘Jerusalem’. This demonstrates that the nomina sacra were just that, sacred names, not necessarily implying anything about the \textit{homoousios} of their referents.

### A1.4 - \textit{Θεός}

One of the few titles of the Father applied to the Son in the New Testament is that of ‘God’ [\textit{θεός}], and modern Trinitarian writers are quick to highlight these instances. Raymond Brown lists three definite instances (John 1:1; 20:28; Hebrews 1:8-9) and

\textsuperscript{487} Revelation 1:8, 4:8, 11:17, 15:3, 16:7, 19:6, 21:22  
\textsuperscript{488} p26-7 C. H. Roberts 1979  
\textsuperscript{489} p75 G. Howard 1977. Roberts refers to a possible precedent in the Epistle of Barnabas (9:8-9), which is often regarded as the work of a Jewish-Christian (p36 C. H. Roberts 1979).  
\textsuperscript{490} p125 C. P. Thiede and M. D’Ancona 1996  
\textsuperscript{491} p39 C. H. Roberts 1979
Wright lists seven instances of which we may dismiss John 8:58 and Colossians 2:9 from our discussion here since they do not use the word θεός. (The other instances are John 1:1; 1:18; 20:28; Hebrews 1:8-9; Titus 2:13).

1) John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [ESV]

We have considered the Prologue of John’s gospel elsewhere (D3.4). Here it will suffice to say that, contra Brown; this is not an instance of Jesus being called ‘God’ but the Word being called ‘God’. This distinction, though readily blurred by evangelical Christians, is fundamental to a proper understanding of this passage.

2) John 1:18

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known. [ESV]

No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. [NKJV]

The former reading, μονογενές θεός (‘only begotten God’), though seemly contradictory, does convey the paradox of the incarnation. The latter reading, ‘ο μονογενές υιός (‘the only begotten Son’) fits more readily with the phrase ‘no one has ever seen God’. It is perhaps due to this tension that the different variants of this verse arose. Μονογενές θεός is generally accepted to be the better attested variant, featuring in the Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus, as well as many other Greek MSS, the Papyri and the Fathers (including Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Origen). ‘ο μονογενές υιός is attested by the

---

492 p1048 The New Dictionary of Theology 1987
493 p1142 Encyclopedia of Early Christianity 1997
495 p8 R. J. Swanson 1995
majority of the Greek MSS, particularly the Byzantine witnesses, as well as the
majority of the Fathers (the earliest being Tertullian). 496 However, few
commentators seem content to follow the better attested variant. Both Bultmann
and Barrett point out that ‘υιός fits better in the context and conforms better to
variant is “suspect as being too highly developed theologically”. 498 Sanders puts
forward the theory that both variants can be explained by supposing that the verse
originally read just ‘ο μονογενὲς, a variant supported by “two MSS of the Latin
Vulgate, and by Ephrem, Aphraat, Cyril of Jerusalem and Nestorius”. 499 Burney,
based upon his theory that John's gospel was originally written in Aramaic,
suggests that originally the verse read ‘the only begotten of God’ and was
misunderstood as ‘the only begotten God’, the difference in Aramaic being one of
pointing. 500

3) John 20:28

Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” [ESV]

One explanation often put forward with regards to this verse is that Thomas is not
attributing ‘Lord’ and ‘God’ to Jesus but is simply using a common form of
exclamation, perhaps akin to our ‘gosh!’ This explanation is not entirely
convincing since it doesn’t seem consistent with the reverence with which Jews
usually treated divine titles, though without further digression by Thomas it is
impossible to discount this explanation.

Assuming that Thomas is referring to Jesus, we should not immediately assume
that Thomas is making any claim about Jesus’ nature or substance. After all,
previously in this chapter Jesus has also used the expression ‘my God’ in
reference to the Father. 501 This implies that Jesus is subordinate to the Father and
regarded Him as an object of worship; it certainly shows that ‘my God’ cannot

496 p8 R. J. Swanson 1995
497 p81n R. Bultmann 1971; p141 C. K. Barrett 1955;
498 p17 R. E. Brown 1982
499 p85n J. N. Sanders 1968
500 p40 C. F. Burney 1922
501 John 20:17
instantly be taken as a claim about divine nature, though this might be the natural reading. We also have, at the end of this chapter, the comment by the gospel writer that:

> These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.⁵⁰²

This statement shows that, whatever he intended by Thomas’ exclamation, that his primary purpose was to prove that Jesus is Messiah, not necessarily that Jesus is God.

4) Romans 9:5

> Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. [NIV]

> And from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. [NRSV]

These two versions show two of common translations of this verse. A third alternative is to put a full stop after ‘Christ’, rendering the final clause as ‘God, who is over all, be blessed forever’. The problem here is the phrase ‘ο ον ἐπί πάντων θεός εὐλογητός’, literally ‘the one over all God blessed’. Without any punctuation then it is not clear to what θεός applies, either with πάντων, i.e. ‘God over all’, or with εὐλογητός, i.e. ‘God-blessed’. There are grammatical objections to the translation ‘God over all’ (cp. NIV) as this “would naturally be expressed by ‘ο ἐπί πάντων without ον’. Since ‘ο ον naturally applies to what precedes”, the translation ‘Christ, who is over all’ is preferable.⁵⁰³ The NRSV margin lists a third possible variant as ‘may he who is God over all be blessed forever’, which would detach the whole phrase from the preceding ‘Christ’.

5) Titus 2:13

---

⁵⁰² John 20:30 [ESV]
⁵⁰³ p658 (Vol. II) The Expositor’s Greek Testament 1900
…waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ

[ESV]

Here again, the problem is one of punctuation. ‘God’ \(\text{θεόςου}\) could be a predicate of ‘Jesus Christ’ \(\text{Χριστοῦ}\) giving the translation (as per most modern translations):

(1) of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ

Whereas, ‘God’ could be a separate object in the sentence, giving the translation (seen in NRSV margin):

(2) of our great God and of our Saviour Jesus Christ

Many commentators decide in favour of the first option because of the absence of the article before \(\text{σωτήρος}\) (‘saviour’), which we would naturally expect if this clause referred to two persons.\(^504\) Though, as *The Expositor’s Greek Testament* notes, this argument “is too slender to bear much weight” since there are several examples in the New Testament where the article is omitted before \(\text{σωτήρ}\).\(^505\) Alford adds that \(\text{σωτήρ}\) “is joined with \(\text{ημῶν}\), which is an additional reason why it may spare the article”, citing several New Testament examples.\(^506\) This suggestion recommends the following translation:

(3) of the great God and of Jesus Christ our Saviour

One further objection raised is that if ‘God’ and ‘Saviour’ refer to separate individuals then this verse would speak of the appearing of both God and Christ, which Easton says, “would be without parallel and almost unthinkable.”\(^507\) Alford

\(^504\) p138 C. K. Barrett 1963

“Now there is no doubt that *soter* was one of those words which gradually dropped the article and became a quasi proper name” (p394 [Vol. III] H. Alford 1856).


\(^507\) p95 B. S. Easton 1948
responds to such objections stating that “no such appearing is even hinted at in this passage”, it is the appearance of the ‘glory’ that is predicted.  

6) Hebrews 1:8-9

But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of our kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wicked; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions. [ESV]

It possible that \( \theta \varepsilon \omega \zeta \) isn’t applied to Jesus in these verses; Westcott writes:

The LXX admits of two renderings: \( ho \ theos \) can be taken as a vocative in both cases (‘Thy throne, God, … therefore, O God, Thy God …’) or it can be taken as the subject (or the predicate) in the first case (‘God is thy throne’, or ‘Thy throne is God…’) and in apposition to \( ho \ theos \ sou \) in the second case (‘Therefore God, even Thy God…’)

He concludes that since it is “scarcely possible” that the Psalmist would have addressed a human king as \( elohim \) in the original psalm, it is unlikely that \( \theta \varepsilon \omega \zeta \) is a vocative in the LXX.  

Against this Guthrie states “that the king could be addressed as God” as he was God’s representative. Gordon refers to Isaiah 9:6 as evidence that the Israelite king could be called God. The writer of Hebrews must have had some reason to choose this psalm in trying to justify his claim that Jesus is of greater worth than angels. The idea of God addressing Jesus as ‘God’ would be a strong proof-text for the writer, though he may have simply been capitalizing on the phrases ‘your throne is forever’ and ‘beyond your companions’.

In either case, equality with God is out of the question. The words ‘therefore’ and ‘anointed’ imply that Christ’s position came as a result of his own actions and God’s favour, rather than any innate right. The phrase ‘your God’ requires subordination.

---

508 p394 (Vol. III) H. Alford 1856. “We may add that, according to several New Testament writers, Jesus is the splendor of the Father”; cp. II Corinthians 4:6, James 2:1 (p116 A. T. Hanson 1966).
509 p25 B. F. Westcott 1889
510 p76 D. Guthrie 1983
511 p44 R. P. Gordon 2000
512 see p26 B. F. Westcott 1889
7) II Peter 1:1

Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ [ESV]

This case is equivalent to that of Titus 2:13, once again the NRSV margin supplying the variant ‘of our God and the Savior Jesus Christ’. 513 However, in this case early textual variants read κυρίου, instead of θεοῦ. 514 It seems reasonable to suppose that later copyists replaced κυρίου with θεοῦ, rather than the other way round. Mayor points to the fact that in the next verse Jesus and God are distinguished and argues “it is natural to let that interpret this, as there seems no reason for identity here and distinction there”. 515

8) I John 5:20

We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. [NIV]

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. [NKJV]

We need not even refer to the Greek to demonstrate the possible confusion involved in this verse. The phrase ‘the true God’ could refer to the preceding clause ‘His Son Jesus Christ’ or the earlier phrase ‘Him who is true’, i.e. the Father. But, in fact, this verse may not originally have had the word ‘God’. The Nestle-Aland text omits θεοῦ,516 following many early manuscripts.517 Metzger reasons that this omission this is the best explanation the origin of the other

---

513 “Undoubtedly, as in Titus 2:13, in strict grammatical propriety, both theou and sotepos would be predicates of Iesou Christou”. Alford directs his reader to his comments on Titus 2:13 as to why he favours ‘of our God and the saviour Jesus Christ’, as the reasoning is similar (p390 [Vol. IV Part I] H. Alford 1864).

514 א, Ψ, pg, vg, ms, syph, sa,

515 p82 J. B. Mayor 1902, also see p390 (Vol. IV Part I) H. Alford 1864.

516 Novum Testamentum Graecae (1994)

517 B, syr, cop, arm, Speculum
variants, saying that “in order to clarify the reference of the adjective, copyists added θεοû, either before τόν αληθινόν (629) or after (A Ψ 33 614 1739 vg cop boms eth).”

As we can see, only John 20:28 definitely uses θεός with reference to Jesus, though it is possible in some of the other passages. But what is not clear is whether on any of these occasions θεός is used substantially (i.e. that Father and Son have the same nature), as opposed to a title of a lesser being. What we have also shown is how possible confusions could have arisen later as to whether the apostles really did use θεός in reference to Jesus. This confusion could certainly be one explanation for the way Ignatius uses θεός in some of his letters.

Ignatius refers to Jesus as θεός eight times, though one of these is textually suspect and should be discounted. All these occasions are markedly different from when θεός is applied to the Father. On six occasions Jesus is referred to as “our god”, which suggests its usage should be understood relationally rather than substantially. In all these occurrences “god” is juxta posed with “Jesus Christ”; never does Ignatius refer to Jesus by “god” alone, while he is quite comfortable to referring to the Father simply as “God” even when juxta posed with “Jesus Christ”. Ignatius does not call Jesus ‘god’ in the two letters “concerned with the Judaizing heresy” (Magnesians, Philadelphians), presumably so as not to offend Jewish-Christians. Now Ignatius’ use of θεός is a departure from New Testament precedent but it is still far from attributing full divinity to Jesus, as Schoedel requires.

Other texts from the (sub-)apostolic period are far more conservative. Jesus is never called θεός in any of the following texts: The Didache, The Epistle of Barnabus, First Clement, The Shepherd of Hermas, Polycarp to the Philippians, The Apology of

---

518 pp650-1 B. M. Metzger 1994
519 Ephesians salutation, 18:2, Trallians 7:1, Romans salutation (x2), 3:3, Smyrneans 1:1, Polycarp 8:3
520 Trallians 7:1, p39 W. R. Schoedel 1985
521 e.g. Ephesians 17:2, Magnesians 8:2, Trallians 1:1
522 p7 R. M. Grant 1966
523 Perhaps demonstrating “something of the liberal use of the word γεον (god) to be found in Hellenistic circles” (p77 C. C. Richardson 1953).
524 p20 W. R. Schoedel 1985. Schoedel evidences the phrase “the blood of God” (Ephesians 1:1) as an instance of Ignatius speaking of Jesus “simply” as God. Yet this is no different from phrases in the New Testament that treat the blood of Christ as being a possession of God (Acts 20:28)
Aristides or The Epistle to Diognetus. Ignatius’ use of θεός is the exception, not the rule. It is not until Justin Martyr that we find a writer unreservedly call Jesus θεός and he is quite precise that by the use of this title he does not mean Jesus is God (in a Trinitarian sense).

One further point worthy of notice is that θεός is does not uniquely apply to God (capital ‘G’). As the Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament lists, θεός can also be applied to an idol (Acts 14:11), the ruling spirit of this age (II Corinthians 4:4), “as an adjective, ‘divine’, (probably John 1:1)”, of human judges (John 10:34) and, figuratively, even of the belly (Philippians 3:19). As such even a definite instance of θεός being applied to Jesus would not of itself be sufficient evidence of the writer’s belief that Jesus was the God, or one substance with the Father.

Before moving on to consider κύριος one last point about the use of θεός should be stressed. The one definite use of θεός with reference to Jesus, and the seven further possible uses, should be juxtaposed against over a thousand uses of θεός with sole reference to the Father. This should not be confined to a purely statistical argument (which in itself is quite significant). Throughout the New Testament θεός is not only used especially of the Father but also exclusively of the Father. Often θεός and πατήρ are used synonymously. An overview of those verses which refer to both God and Jesus show that ‘God’ [θεός] is used to distinguish a person other than Jesus, i.e. the Father. A good example of these occasions is the epistles which consistently open with a greeting such as:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

---

525 The Armenian fragment does include the phrase “God-bear” with reference to Mary. However this term appears to have been an interpolation by the Armenian translators. It is in neither the Syriac nor the Greek versions.
526 This apology does include the phrase “he sent him as a god” (Diognetus 7:4), but it is clear that this is not used as a title but a metaphor.
527 “[He was] termed God … in order that by these expressions you may recognize him as the minister of the Father of all things” (Dialogue 58)
528 Also, the difference in the Greek between ‘god’ [yeov] and the usual word for ‘divine’ [yeiov] is only one letter, which is easily overlooked by copyists.
529 E.g. John 6:46, 8:41; Acts 2:33; Romans 15:6; I Corinthians 8:6, 15:24; II Corinthians 1:3; Ephesians 4:6; Colossians 3:17;
530 Romans 1:7 [NKJV]
In these phrases of the two persons mentioned one is named ‘God’ [θεός], as distinguished from Jesus, who is not named ‘God’.  

All these considerations regarding θεός must temper our considerations of κύριος. If the New Testament writers were not really to assert Jesus’ deity directly by naming him θεός then is it likely they would have done so, in a veiled fashion, through the term κύριος?

A1.5 - Κύριος

As we have seen, κύριος is the word used in the Septuagint instead of the Tetragrammaton. It also translates the Hebrew word adonai, which was used by the Jews instead of YHWH. In the New Testament Jesus is frequently designated κύριος, a fact that has been seized by many modern evangelicals as a proof of Jesus’ deity. But a review of the lexicons, that can give exhaustive overview of Greek literature which is not possible in this work, show how simply unsustainable this conclusion is. Liddell and Scott’s Greek lexicon list the uses of κύριος, not only “of persons” but “of things”. It was used of heads of family, guardians and also of rulers, sometimes deified (e.g. Ptolemy XIV, Cleopatra) and sometimes not (e.g. Herod). The lexicon of the Septuagint by Lust, Eynikel and Hauspie shows that classical uses would have been familiar to the New Testament writers. κύριος is not only used of God, but of masters (as opposed to slaves), husbands, fathers, owners, and as a formal address (i.e. ‘sir’). Lampe’s Patristic Greek Lexicon compliments this summary of pre-Christian usage. He shows how κύριος was used by the Fathers of angels, apostles, bishops and relatives, as well as of God and of Jesus. When we turn to the New Testament we find that likewise κύριος is not just

---

531 It is irrelevant that God is called ‘God our Father’ or ‘God the Father’ as the Trinitarian designator ‘God the Father’ is far later than the New Testament period. The only significance in the predicate ‘the Father’ would be to make a distinction from any other individual named ‘God’. As no other person is named ‘God’ in the context it is clear that ‘the Father’ is an attributive, and not a distinguishing, predicate.

532 e.g. p33-37 J. McDowell & B. Larson 1991
533 p1013 (Vol.1) H. G. Liddell & R. Scott 1940
534 Judges 19:11 LXX
535 Genesis 18:12 LXX
536 Genesis 31:35 LXX
537 Exodus 21:29 LXX
539 p787 G. W. H. Lampe (ed.) 1976
used of God but also of property owners,\textsuperscript{540} of masters (as opposed to slaves),\textsuperscript{541} and as a formal address.\textsuperscript{542} Hence the \textit{Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament} gives the meaning of κύριος as ‘one having legal power’\textsuperscript{543} and Strong’s \textit{Concordance} gives ‘supreme in authority’ and ‘controller’.\textsuperscript{544} As Bauer’s lexicon points out, the New Testament usage of κύριος with reference to Jesus goes beyond simply calling him ‘sir’. It raises Jesus “above the human level”. But, as the usages Bauer records illustrate, the ‘supernatural’ usage of κύριος did not imply equality with God, the prophet Mani being called κύριος\textsuperscript{545} and even in the New Testament κύριος is used of angels\textsuperscript{546} and false gods.\textsuperscript{547}

Perhaps the simplest way of refuting the argument that the use of κύριος of Jesus demonstrates the belief in his deity is the following thought experiment. Imagine you are a Jew in 1\textsuperscript{st} century Palestine and you come across a man. Suppose you believe him to be a righteous leader, how do you address him? Suppose you believe him to be an angel or a minor deity, what do you call him? Suppose you believe that he was born of a virgin by the intervention of the Holy Spirit, what title could you give use of him? One answer to all these questions is definitely κύριος A less likely alternative is θεός (certainly nothing stronger). Now suppose you believe him to be the one true God – the God of the Old Testament – how do you address him? Certainly κύριος, but also many stronger expressions worthy of his greatness like ‘God’, ‘Lord God’, ‘God Almighty’, ‘Holy God’, ‘Lord of Hosts’, etc. When viewed from this perspective it is difficult to maintain that κύριος alone would be used by someone wishing to indicate that Jesus was God. Its use certainly demonstrates that the belief that Jesus was special, but it is far too general a term to point to equality with the Father.

\textbf{A1.6 - The Son of God}

There are two discernable trends in the way commentators explain the use of the title ‘the Son of God’ when used by Christian writers in reference to Jesus. On the one

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{540} Mark 12:9
\item \textsuperscript{541} Luke 12:43
\item \textsuperscript{542} John 4:11
\item \textsuperscript{543} p240 T. Friberg, B. Friberg & N. F. Miller 2000
\item \textsuperscript{544} The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible 1990
\item \textsuperscript{545} Kephal I.183, II.13, 16
\item \textsuperscript{546} Acts 10:4
\item \textsuperscript{547} 1 Corinthians 8:5; p459 W. Bauer 1979
\end{itemize}
hand, conservative commentators see it has an expression of Jesus’ divinity. For instance, Hooker worries about those rebuttals which followed *The Myth of God Incarnate* that “appealed to the occurrence of the phrase ‘Son of God’ in the New Testament – as though it were used there with all the significance which it has in the later creeds”, i.e. that ‘Son of God’ = ‘God the Son’.

On the other hand, many scholars explain the title ‘Son of God’ by referring to precedents in Jewish and Hellenistic literature. It is questionable as to how helpful this method is. Though there are many examples from the pagan world of human rulers being called ‘god manifest’ or ‘son of a god’, it is doubtful that these uses are equivalent to the title of Jesus. It is likely that these titles were not taken literally as there is little evidence of religious reverence being applied to these rulers before the emperor cult of rulers in the latter 1st century. More importantly, it is unlikely that such a concept would have been accepted in a Jewish context.

Turning to Jewish literature, we also have difficulty finding equivalent phrases. In the Old Testament angels are called ‘sons of God’ and the nation of Israel referred to as a child, but the phrase ‘the Son of God’ is never used. Nothing in the New Testament suggests that Jesus was every considered to be an angel (let alone a nation) so these usages are irrelevant. In the Jewish Wisdom literature righteous men are said to be “numbered among the children of God” and even called “a son of God”, but again these verses do not refer to the Son, only a son. Though the passages II Samuel 7:14 and Psalm 2:7 provide ample opportunity for Christian writers to justify the title ‘Son of God’ from the Old Testament, they do not function so well as sources of that title. As Hooker noted, “we do not have a title here; rather we have a description of a relationship”. Though probably not primarily understood by the

---

548 p55 M. D. Hooker 1979  
549 For further rebuttal of this idea see p42ff A. F. Buzzard & C. F. Hunting 1998  
550 e.g. Julius Caesar (p98 F. Young 1977)  
551 e.g. Romulus, Augustus (pp96, 98 F. Young 1977)  
552 p99 F. Young 1977, p42 J. A. Ziesler 1990  
553 Genesis 6:2-4, Deuteronomy 32:8, Job 38:7  
554 Exodus 4:22, Isaiah 43:6, Hosea 11:1  
555 In one verse in Daniel the phrase ‘a son of a god’ is used (Daniel 3:25), either as a designator for ‘angel’ or as a description of the angel’s appearance by the pagan king.  
556 Wisdom 5:5  
557 Wisdom 2:18, also Sirach 4:10  
558 p57 M. D. Hooker 1979
Israelites as Son in a substantial sense, these passages describe an intimate relationship with God rather than simply ascribing to the king of Israel the designator ‘Son of God’. There is scant evidence for ‘Son of God’ becoming an equivalent for ‘Messiah’. For instance, the pre-Christian Psalms of Solomon (c.40 BC) do not use ‘Son of God’ when talking about the Messiah, but do refer to the faithful as “sons of their God”.

The, so-called, ‘Son of God fragment’ (4Q246) from Qumran uses the phrases ‘the Son of God’ and ‘the Son of the Most High’, but it is not clear to whom the fragment refers, whether the Messiah or the Antichrist or some human king. Similar phrases are used in Luke’s nativity narrative. It is possible that Luke and 4Q246 are “independent meditations” on Old Testament passages, though “it seems preferable to consider seriously that Luke 1 was dependent on some such tradition as is found in 4Q246”. Yet assuming that Luke knew of the tradition that inspired 4Q246 it is not clear what implications we can draw. Did Luke quote this tradition because he believed it was fulfilled in Jesus, as Matthew quotes Isaiah? Or was Luke’s conception of Jesus’ identity shaped by his knowledge of this tradition? Either way, the earliest uses of ‘Son of God’ in the New Testament, in the Pauline Epistles, do not show any discernible dependence on this tradition.

The way that the title ‘Son of God’ is used in the New Testament is quite different from pre-Christian parallels (except, perhaps 4Q246). In the New Testament it almost always has the article before both ‘Son’ and ‘God’. This is not a title that many can aspire to, as in the Wisdom literature – Jesus is the only Son of God. The use of this title in a Jewish context precludes the Hellenistic and Roman precedents: Jesus was not seen as the Son of a god, but the Son of the God of Israel. As such, to call Jesus ‘the Son of God’ is making a unique and revolutionary claim. As we have seen (D2.2), the use of the title ‘Son of God’ probably originated from the belief that Jesus was literally born of God.

559 Psalms of Solomon 17:21
560 Psalms of Solomon 17:27
561 pp617-8 G. Vermes 2004
562 Luke 1:32, 35
563 p26 G. J. Brooke 2000
A2 - Subordinationism

The strongest argument against the primacy of a proto-Nicene doctrine of the Trinity is the saturation and endurance of subordinationist belief in the Christian texts of early centuries. The description of the relationship between God and Jesus as Father-Son which is found which is found in even the earliest Christian documents already implies that Jesus subordinate to God. The primacy of the belief in the virgin conception would also explain this tradition, as belief in the subordinate nature of Jesus is antecedent to belief in the subordinate status of Jesus. Though the role of Jesus undergoes further exploration and development, the primitive belief in his subordination is dominant at least till the end of the second century and endures long past the Council of Nicaea.

A2.1 - Early Epistles (c.45-70)

The epistle of James is meagre in its Christology so there is little exposition of the relationship between Jesus and God. In this letter Jesus is significant by his absence, being only mentioned by name twice. A believer is a servant of Jesus and his faith is in Jesus, but it is God that calls the believers and provides for their needs.

In Paul’s epistles the subordination of Jesus is far more explicit. For Paul, Jesus is ‘the Son of God’, and God is his Father. Jesus is the mediator and intercessor. God works through (διὰ) and in (ἐν) Jesus to bring redemption, victory, love, peace, and grace, to make us heirs, to make us a ‘new creation’.

---

564 James 1:27, 3:9; I Thessalonians 1:10;
565 James 1:1, 2:1
566 James 2:5-7
567 James 1:5
568 Romans 1:4, II Corinthians 1:19, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 4:13
569 Romans 15:6, II Corinthians 1:3, 11:31, Ephesians 1:3, 3:14, Colossians 1:3
570 (I Timothy 2:5) – Here the one mediator, ‘the man, Jesus’, is clearly distinguished from the one God.
571 Romans 8:34
572 Romans 3:24, I Thessalonians 5:9, (II Timothy 2:10)
573 I Corinthians 15:57
574 Romans 8:39, (I Timothy 1:14)
575 Philippians 4:7
576 Ephesians 2:7, (II Timothy 1:9, 2:1)
577 Galatians 4:7
accomplish His “eternal purpose”, to supply all our needs, and to reconcile Himself to the world. Jesus has been exalted by God to a heavenly status, having been “given … the name which is above every name”, but he is still subordinate to his Father since he is reverenced “to the glory of God the Father”, rather than his own glory. Paul prophesies that Jesus must reign over the nations of the earth to subdue them but when he has fulfilled that purpose he too will be subject to God, “that God may be all in all”.

The writer to the Hebrews develops the concept of the intercession of Jesus, using the terminology of the Temple service to describe Jesus as the heavenly High Priest. This highlights the belief in the subordination of Jesus, particularly since the writer says “Christ did not exalt himself … but was appointed”. The writer requires that the High Priest “must be fully identified with those whom he represents”, as well as standing “in a special relation to God, so as to come confidently in His presence”. While the writer expresses the special status given to Jesus (particularly in the first chapter), he is also keen to emphasize the humanity of Jesus. Jesus was made lower than the angels, he was made of “flesh and blood”, he suffered and was tempted, and this subordinate nature needed ‘perfecting’ (τελειωθείς) by the intervention of God before he could be made (εγενετο) High Priest. Not even Jesus’ status as High Priest was inherent but was granted, after his ascension. One further indication of the subordination of Jesus is the frequent references to Jesus sitting at the “right hand” of God.

578 Ephesians 2:10
579 Ephesians 3:11
580 Philippians 4:19
581 II Corinthians 5:9
582 Philippians 2:9
583 Philippians 2:11
584 I Corinthians 15:28. Héring presents the interesting suggestion that Paul’s intention in this passage was “to counter any suspicion that Christ might have been a ‘revolutionary god’ like Saturn, who dethroned Uranus” (Héring, quoted p122 D. E. H. Whiteley 1964). Though this may be correct, Paul’s primary purpose is the exegesis of Old Testament prophecy.
585 Hebrews 2:17, 4:14-15, 5:5, 8:1, 9:11,
586 Hebrews 5:5, also see 7:28
587 p147 E. F. Scott 1922, cp. Hebrews 4:15
588 Hebrews 2:9
589 Hebrews 2:14
590 Hebrews 2:18, 4:15, 5:8
591 Hebrews 5:9, 7:28
592 Hebrews 1:3, 8:1, 10:12, 12:2
A2.2- The Synoptic Tradition (c.70-90)

Generally, scholars have dated the Synoptic Gospels later than the Pauline epistles (though they are based upon an earlier tradition). Assuming this is the case then the gospel writers stick closely to their remit, not digressing into discussion of the Pauline concepts of the intercession and mediation of Jesus. However, the familiar subordinationist traits are present; Jesus is the Son and God is the Father.593

Throughout the gospels it is demonstrated that Jesus is subordinated to God in several aspects. He is morally subordinate, refusing to be called “good” since “no one is good except God alone”.595 He is subordinate in knowledge, since God knows the hour of the Second Coming but the Son does not.596

In Luke, a belief in the subordination of Jesus is further demonstrated by a statement that is frequently passed over by commentators:

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man.597

For Jesus to increase in favour with God not only implies that he is not inherently worthy of praise (like God) but that he became more worthy. This would suggest that Luke believed Jesus to be subordinate also in terms of reverence.

In Acts the subordination of Jesus is also demonstrated, but now in terms of his heavenly status since Acts begins with the ascension of Jesus into heaven. As in Hebrews, it is claimed that God has exalted Jesus to His right hand.598 The fact that Jesus to not exalted himself implies that he was subordinate in power, and that he is now at the ‘right hand’ of God implies that he is subordinate in authority.

Though in the Didache theological indications are sparse, since it is primarily concerned with practical issues, the subordination of Jesus is still strongly implied.

595 Mark 13:32, cp. Matthew 24:36
596 Mark 13:32, cp. Matthew 24:36
597 Luke 2:52 [ESV]
598 Acts 2:33, 5:31, 7:55. It is unlikely that Luke bases this claim upon the Epistle to the Hebrews, rather they appear to be separate witnesses of the same tradition (cp. Psalm 110:1).
Though both Jesus and the Father are called ‘Lord’ (κύριος), there is no confusion or conflation of the two persons, the Father being given several special titles that are not used of Jesus.599 Prayer is directed solely to the Father.600 Jesus is referred to as “thy servant”.601 As in Paul, Jesus’ role is one intercession, being the instrument “through” [διά] whom the Father brings life, knowledge and faith to his disciples.602

A2.3 - Sub-Apostolic Literature (c.90-110)

First Clement follows closely in the tradition of Paul and Hebrews and though its Christological statements are quite reserved, its subordinationism is still clear.
Clement represents Jesus as a mediator: God works “through” him and “in” him.603 Clement is particularly fond of the phrase “through whom be the glory” which he uses to emphasize that God is glorified through His Son.604 Jesus is called “High Priest”, as in Hebrews, and also “benefactor”, or ‘guardian’, “of our souls”;605 Jesus is the agent of salvation. Clement describes God’s relationship to Jesus as of a parent to his child. Jesus is called “Son” [huios], quoting from Psalm 2:7-8,606 but he is also called “his beloved child” [tou egapemenou paidos autou],607 indicating that Clement did not understand ‘Son’ just as a title but also as a relationship.

In the Revelation of John, as in the Pauline epistles, Jesus is a mediator: God gives him the vision to deliver to the angel.608 He also has no authority of his own: he “received authority” from his Father.609 It is because he was slain that he is declared “worthy … to receive power and wealth and wisdom …”.610 Though the Lamb is worshipped, this does not indicate that Jesus is considered to be (equal with) God, as Bauckham asserts,611 since that worship is conditional.612 Other suggestions of

---

599 “Lord thy Creator” (ch1), “holy Father”, “Almighty Lord” [despota pantokrator] (ch10)
600 ch8, 9
601 five times in ch10
602 ch10
603 I Clement 20:11, 38:1, 50:7, 58:2, 59:3, 61:3, 64:1, 65:2, and salutation
604 I Clement 58:2, 61:3, 64:1, 65:2
605 I Clement 36:1, 61:3, 64:1
606 I Clement 36:4, cp. Hebrews 1:5
607 I Clement 59:2, cp. 59:3-4
608 Revelation 1:1
609 Revelation 2:28
610 Revelation 5:9-12
611 p59 R. Bauckham 1994
612 “you are worthy … for you were slaughtered” (Revelation 5:9)
divinity are likewise conditional. Jesus may have the “name” of God, but it is a “new name”, \(^{613}\) i.e. he did not always have it. Though the Lamb now sits with God on His throne, \(^{614}\) he did not always occupy that position. He had to “conquer” before he could sit on that throne, and he promises the same blessing to his disciples if they likewise “conquer”. \(^{615}\) Jesus is shown to be subordinate, not only in name and authority but also in nature. While God’s nature is described in terms of eternity, “who is and who was and who is to come”, \(^{616}\) Jesus’ nature is described in terms of mortality, “I am he who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevemore”. \(^{617}\)

Though in Revelation Jesus is clearly subordinate to God, we do have a certain degree of blurring of the distinctions between God and Jesus that seem to be more apparent in the earlier writings.

**A2.4 - The Gospel of John (c.100)**

Despite the obvious emphasis on Jesus’ divine origin it contains, the Gospel of John contains some of the most explicit subordinationist statements of the whole New Testament:

- The Son can do nothing on his own \(^{618}\)
- I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me \(^{619}\)
- I do not seek my own glory \(^{620}\)
- The Father is greater than I \(^{621}\)

Even when Jesus claims to be one with the Father it is clear that he is talking in terms of unity of mind, rather than equality of status (or substance), since Jesus prays that his disciples be likewise one with them. \(^{622}\)

\(^{613}\) Revelation 3:12
\(^{614}\) Revelation 7:17, 22:1-3
\(^{615}\) Revelation 3:21
\(^{616}\) Revelation 1:8
\(^{617}\) Revelation 1:18
\(^{618}\) John 5:19 [NRSV]
\(^{619}\) John 8:28 [NRSV]
\(^{620}\) John 8:50 [NRSV]
\(^{621}\) John 14:28 [NRSV]
Ignatius follows in the tradition of Paul and John, and is clearly a subordinationist. He is clear that Jesus and God exist in a Father-Son relationship. He uses διά and ἐν as Paul did, indicating that Jesus is a mediator. Ignatius also expresses his ideas of subordination more explicitly:

And so, just as the Lord did nothing apart from the Father …

Be submissive to the bishop and to one another – as Jesus Christ was to the Father, [according to the flesh] Be imitators of Jesus Christ as he is of his Father

All of you should follow the bishop as Jesus Christ follows the Father

Ignatius’s analogy to the building of a temple is particularly telling. The followers of Jesus are being built into a temple. While the temple is for God the Father, Jesus is part of the building process (“the crane of Jesus Christ, which is the cross”) and Holy Spirit is merely “the cable”.

Polycarp also follows in this tradition, seeing Jesus as a mediator “through” whom God works (like Paul) and as the “eternal priest” (like the writer to the Hebrews).

---

622 John 10:30, 10:38, 17:5, 17:21-23; see appendix 6 for further consideration of these passages.
623 “his Son” Ephesians 4:2, Magnesians 8:2, “Son of God” Ephesians 20:2, Smyreans 1:1, “the Son” Magnesians 13:1, “his only Son” Romans salutation, “Son of the Father” Romans salutation
624 Ephesians 4:2, Magnesians salutation, 5:2, 8:2, Trallians 9:2, 13:3, Romans 2:2
625 Magnesians 7:1
626 The words “according to the flesh” are absent in the Armenian and Arabic versions. Schoedel says “the phrase ‘according to the flesh’ looks suspiciously like an addition made by an interpolator bent on eliminating any suggestion of subordinationism in the text” (p131 W. R. Schoedel 1985).
627 Magnesians 13:2
628 Philadelphians 7:2
629 Smyrneans 8:1
630 Ephesians 9:1
631 Polycarp, Philippians 1:3
632 Polycarp, Philippians 12:2
A2.6 - Early Apologists (c.120-150)

Of the early Apologists, Aristides is particularly interesting. He disparages other religions, critiquing the Greek myths in a very similar way as Plato did.\(^{633}\) He reasons that certain of the descriptions of the Greek gods are inconsistent with true divine nature. It is significant that many of these ‘un-divine’ descriptions are similar to descriptions applied to Jesus in the New Testament:

The Greeks … have gone further astray than the Barbarians; inasmuch as they have introduced many fictitious gods, and have set up some of them as males … and some even died … and some were made servants even to men … and some, indeed, were lamented and deplored by men. And some, they say, went down to Sheol, and some were grievously wounded.\(^ {634}\)

Is it possible, then, that a god should be manacled and mutilated? What absurdity! Who with any wit would ever say so?\(^ {635}\)

But it is impossible that a divine nature should be afraid, and flee for safety, or should weep and wail; or else it is very miserable\(^ {636}\)

For though they see their gods … slain as victims … they have not perceived that they are not gods\(^ {637}\)

Now Aristides asserts that he was studied the Christian “writings”\(^ {638}\) and if he had then he would have known these descriptions could also be applied to Jesus. In the Apology Aristides himself refers to the death of Jesus.\(^ {639}\) So the most reasonable explanation is that Aristides believed that Jesus was in a different category than God; that he was subordinate to God; that he was not God.\(^ {640}\)

\(^{633}\) Republic II.377d-391d

\(^{634}\) Apology VIII [Syriac]

\(^{635}\) Apology IX [Greek], cp. “It is impossible that a god should be bound or mutilated; and if it be otherwise, he is indeed miserable” (Apology IX [Syriac])

\(^{636}\) Apology XII [Syriac], cp. “Did you ever see, O King, greater folly than this, to bring forward as a goddess one who is … given to weeping and wailing?” (Apology XI [Greek])

\(^{637}\) Apology XII [Greek]

\(^{638}\) Apology XV [Syriac], Apology XVI [Greek]

\(^{639}\) Apology II [Syriac], Apology XV [Greek]

\(^{640}\) The Syriac version does use the phrase “God came down from heaven” (Apology II). However this phrase is not included in the Greek or Armenian versions and is probably a later addition, or a misunderstanding of the phrase “the son of the most high God, who came down from heaven” (Apology XV [Greek]) supposing ‘God’, and not ‘son’, to be the subject of the clause.
A2.7 - Justin Martyr (c.150)

Justin went further than any these previous writers in ascribing divine attributes to Jesus, even stating “he is called God, he is God, and shall always be God”. Justin does not believe in the co-equality of Father and Son, either in substance or status. “The Son is numerically distinct from the Father” and mediates for God, who Himself does not (cannot) leave the “super-celestial realm”. The Father cannot be given a proper name because he is the Creator, whereas the Son is “properly called” ‘Word’, ‘Christ’ and ‘Jesus’. Jesus is “another God and Lord under the Creator”, the only (true) God. The Father “bestowed” power on the Son and “gives” him glory. The Son has “the second place” in the hierarchy of heaven, and the Holy Spirit the third.

A2.8 - Irenaeus (c.180)

Irenaeus is well-aware of the work of Justin and like him he describes the necessity of the mediation of Jesus:

Since the Father of all is invisible and inaccessible to creatures, it is necessary for those who are going to approach God to have access to the Father through the Son.

This meditation by the Son implies subordinationism, especially since the necessity of meditation (i.e. the Father’s inaccessibility) would entail the Son having a lesser status (i.e. accessibility). However Irenaeus is adamant that there is only one God. Irenaeus is also not consistent as to whether the Son is co-eternal or was born before Creation. In fact, in one place Irenaeus is resolute that Jesus is neither “unbegotten” nor “immortal” (like the Father) as otherwise it would be impossible for
Jesus to have died. It is likely that Irenaeus would not have recognized himself as a subordinationist and yet much of his theology seems to require it. Minns explains the situation as follows: “although he describes the operation of this Trinity in subordinationist terms, he would not allow that the Son is in any sense a lesser god than the Father”. It may be that Irenaeus uses the mediatory terminology of the Apologists without himself being convinced of the Platonic concept of mediatory emanations from God.

A2.9 - Further Development

Bell asserts that Justin’s subordinationism was born out of his adoption of a Platonic scheme (rather than tradition) and writes:

Platonism, then, imposed upon Christian trinitarianism a subordinationist tendency which proved extremely tenacious

Bell is correct to say that “the Platonic scheme was also a subordinationist scheme”, but he is wrong to suppose that Christian thought was not already subordinationist. The synthesis of Platonism into Christian thought did not “impose” subordinationism, rather the prevalent subordinationism amongst Christians was probably one reason why Platonism could be accepted. The influence of Platonism did lead to the belief subordinationism being “tenacious”, as Bell suggests, since Christian Platonists could not easily deny their intellectual ancestry.

In the fourth century this ‘tenacious’ Platonic subordinationist tendency would reveal itself in the dispute between Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, and Arius, one of his presbyters. Arius was like most fourth century theologians: Arius believed Jesus to be “unchangeable” like God and he used the word “Trinity” when talking of the relation between Father and Son. Arius’ difficulty was conceiving how the Son

---

655 Demonstration 38
656 p53 D. Minns 1994
657 pp132-4 J. Lawson 1948
658 p36 D. N. Bell 1989
659 p35 D. N. Bell 1989
660 “the views of Arius and his opponents were all partly shaped by continuing debates among philosophers, whose writings were known to some of the Christian theologians, about the eternity of the world and the relation between form and matter” (p124 S. G. Hall 1991).
661 Opitz U.6 – p326-327 J. Stevenson 1987
could have no temporal beginning and yet remain a distinct person from the Supreme Being (Father).\textsuperscript{663} It significant that, though Arianism was rejected at the Council of Nicaea (325 AD) and Arius was exiled, Arius was later accepted by Constantine without any repudiation of his beliefs\textsuperscript{664} and Arianism achieved “great popularity” under Constantine’s son, Constantius,\textsuperscript{665} creating a controversy that by 341, Chadwick judges, “clearly threatened a schism of the first magnitude”.\textsuperscript{666} This shows that even as late as the fourth century subordinationism, and a belief in the creation of the Son, were widespread.\textsuperscript{667} The belief in the full co-equality of Father and Son was very late and even those Christian writers like Irenaeus who proclaimed the equality of persons have the subordinationist terminology of both the New Testament and Platonism infused throughout their works.

\begin{itemize}
  \item p84 R. P. C. Hanson 1988
  \item His confession of faith (327 AD), while containing the phrase “begotten of Him before all ages”, does not contain \textit{homoousios} or any indication that Arius had actually accepted the Creed of Nicaea (\textit{Opitz} U.30 – p353 J. Stevenson 1987), “the Creed of Nicaea was clearly not being used as a fixed doctrinal test” (p138 S. G. Hall 1993)
  \item p67 \textit{The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church} 1974; Williams concludes that there was a “very wide spectrum of non-Nicene believers [who] thought of themselves as mainstream Christians” (p82 R. Williams 1987).
  \item p139 H. Chadwick 1993
  \item \textquotedblleft the defence of well-established and well-known orthodoxy could not possibly account for such widespread and long-lasting disturbances\textquotedblright{} (pxix R. P. C. Hanson 1988)
\end{itemize}
A3 - Possessionism

Goulder, in his book *A Tale of Two Missions*, describes what he believes to be the Christology of Petrine (that is, Jewish-Christian) church, as opposed to that of the Pauline church. He expresses the opinion that the Petrines believed that Jesus was a normal man possessed by the Holy Spirit at his baptism. Goulder coins the term ‘Possessionism’ for this belief. 668 Though perhaps Goulder’s evidence for back-dating Possessionist Christology to the early first century is weak, there is strong evidence that by the end of the first-century this belief was held by certain groups of Jewish Christians.

A3.1 - Ebionites

The primary example of Possessionists is the Ebionites.669 The Ebionites were extreme Judaizers; Irenaeus records that practiced circumcision and other customs of the Law.670 They also, like the Jewish-Christian Didache, show dependence on the gospel of Matthew.671 Irenaeus records that “their attitude towards the Lord is like that of Cerinthus and Carpocrates”.672 Carpocrates (according Irenaeus) believed that Jesus was a man, the son of Joseph, who was imbued with power from God.673 Cerinthus (according to Irenaeus) also believed that Jesus was the son of Joseph. He writes:

> After his baptism, from the Absolute Sovereignty above all the Christ descended upon him in the form of a dove; then he proclaimed the unknown Father and worked miracles. At the end, the Christ withdrew from Jesus; Jesus suffered and was raised, but the Christ remained impassable, since he was spiritual674

It is the concept that the man Jesus was possessed by a heavenly power/spirit that Goulder identifies as the common belief of the Ebionites. This is substantiated by examining the fragments of the Gospel of the Ebionites. The section about the baptism of Jesus contains these words:

668 pp107-134 M. Goulder 1994
670 *Against Heresies* 1.26.2
671 *Against Heresies* 1.25.1
672 *Against Heresies* 1.26.2
673 *Against Heresies* 1.26.2
674 *Against Heresies* 1.26.1
And as he came out of the water, the heavens opened, and he saw the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove and entering into him.\textsuperscript{675}

In difference to the Synoptics, this passage records that the Holy Spirit actually entered into Jesus. This passage is followed by the words: “this day have I begotten you”, implying that the Ebionites believed that Jesus became the Son of God when he was possessed by the Holy Spirit.

**A3.2 - The Epistle of Barnabas (c.90+)\textsuperscript{676}**

The pseudonymous Epistle of Barnabas is a product of the Jewish-Christian tradition. Though the epistle itself is written against the Judaizers, allegorizing away the Law, it shows clear dependence on the same Two Paths material found in the Didache\textsuperscript{677} and quotes from the gospel of Matthew.\textsuperscript{678} The absence of reference to the Pauline corpus or any effort to mirror the style of his epistles demonstrates that this epistle comes from a different tradition. With issues of practice the writer is reactionary, but this very fact suggests that the writer himself originally came from the Jewish-Christian tradition. His Christology is then a product of the Jewish-Christian Christological discourse.

If we look closely at the Epistle of Barnabas we see clear evidence of Possessionism. Concerning the law on fasting, he writes:

For the Lord gave the written commandment that ‘Whoever does not keep the fast must surely die’, because he himself was about to offer the vessel of the Spirit as a sacrifice for our own sins.\textsuperscript{679}

\textsuperscript{675} p15 J. K. Elliot 1993
\textsuperscript{676} “it mentions the destruction of the Jerusalem (Herodian) Temple (16.3-4), and so must have been written after 70 CE; and it assumes that the Temple was still in ruins, so that it must have been written before Hadrian constructed a new, Roman temple on the site, around 135” (p6-7 [Vol.2] B. D. Ehrman 2005). Robinson dates it to c.75 (p352 J. A. T. Robinson 1993). As we shall see, the Epistle of Barnabas demonstrates a quite developed Christology which may suggest a later date, e.g. c.120-130.
\textsuperscript{677} Barnabas 19-20
\textsuperscript{678} Barnabas 4:14
\textsuperscript{679} Barnabas 7:3
The ‘Lord’ in this verse is, presumably, God (the Father), but the ‘sacrifice’ is obviously a reference to Jesus. The translation “the Spirit” is preferable to “his spirit”\(^{680}\) given the absence of αὑρατοῦ, and this reinforces the point that it is the Holy Spirit, and not the spirit of Jesus that is being referred to. As God is offering “the vessel of the Spirit” as the sacrifice, then Jesus must be identified that “vessel”.\(^{681}\) Though the writer does not explain his understanding of Jesus’ nature, the affinities with a Possessionist Christology implies that his understanding was not vastly different from that of the Ebionites.

If the writer viewed the Son of God as the Holy Spirit dwelling in the flesh of Jesus then this would explain why he thinks that the Son was with God at the beginning and participated in Creation,\(^ {682}\) since Genesis records that the Holy Spirit was present and active at Creation.\(^ {683}\) The writer is simply taking Possessionism to its logical conclusion with reference to the Old Testament references to the Spirit.

**A3.3 - The Shepherd of Hermas (c.100+)**

Though the Shepherd of Hermas does not quote or allude to the Epistle of Barnabas,\(^ {684}\) it does make use of the Two Paths material found in both Barnabas and the Didache\(^ {685}\) and therefore is likely to be from the same tradition. In fact, many commentators are quite emphatic that Hermas is a product of Jewish-Christianity, and not Pauline Christianity.\(^ {686}\)

Hermas never uses the name ‘Jesus’\(^ {687}\) and the only three uses of the title ‘Christ’\(^ {688}\) each occur in, what Osiek calls, “very dubious manuscript variants”; “there is no

\(^{680}\) cp. p47 J. A. Kleist (trans.) 1948

\(^{681}\) cp. Barnabas 6:14, 11:9, also see “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me” (14:9, cp. Isaiah 61:1-2).

\(^{682}\) “he was the Lord of the entire world, the one to whom God said at the foundation of the world, ‘Let us make a human according to our image and likeness’” (Barnabas 5:5), also see Barnabas 5:10

\(^{683}\) cp. Genesis 1:2


\(^{685}\) p164 B. D. Ehrman 2005

\(^{686}\) e.g. p16 G. F. Snyder 1968

\(^{687}\) I will use the name ‘Jesus’ in this section to distinguish him from the Holy Spirit since both are called ‘Son’.

\(^{688}\) Visions 2.2.8, 3.6.6, Similitudes 9.18.1
reference to the historical Jesus”. Unlike other writers of this period, like John and Ignatius, Hermas regards the life of Jesus as being of little importance.

The Christological material in Hermas is largely confined to Similitude 5. In this section the angel tells Hermas a parable about a field. The owner of the field plants a vineyard and then chooses a slave to build a fence around the vineyard while he is on a journey. The slave does more than his master requires, also weeding the vineyard. When the master returns he is pleased and calls his “beloved son”, and other advisors, and they congratulate the slave. So the owner makes the slave fellow heir with his son, and his son approves.

Now this parable has many familiar elements from the Gospel parables. Yet the comparison is significant because it would lead us to expect that the owner would represent God, the son would represent Jesus and the slave would represent God’s servants. But when the parable is explained Hermas is told “the son is the Holy Spirit and the slave is the Son of God”. Now while the phrase “the son is the Holy Spirit” is only included in the Vulgate, there is every reason to suppose it was in the original as no alternative identity for the son is given by any witness and all still identify the slave as “the Son of God”. Either way, it is clear from the angel’s proceeding explanation what is intended:

God made the Holy Spirit dwell in flesh that he desired, even though it preexisted and created all things. This flesh, then, in which the Holy Spirit dwelled, served well as the Spirit’s slave, for it conducted itself in reverence and purity, not defiling the Spirit at all. Since it lived in a good and pure way, cooperating with the Spirit and working with it in everything it did, behaving in a strong and manly way, God chose it to be a partner with the Holy Spirit. For the conduct of this flesh was pleasing, because it was not defiled on earth while bearing the Holy Spirit. Thus he took his Son and the glorious angels as counsellors, so that this flesh, which

---

689 p107 G. F. Snyder 1968. Osiek suggests that the absence of the name of Jesus is due to “reverential avoidance” (p34 C. Osiek 1999).
690 Similitude 5.2.1-11
691 E.g. Matthew 21:33-45
692 Similitude 5.6.2
693 It is omitted from the Codex Athous (15th century), the two Palatine MSS (15th century), and the Ethiopic version (6th century).
694 Snyder reasons that because in the original there appeared to be two sons the phrase was deleted by later copyists (p106 G. F. Snyder 1968).
served blamelessly as the Spirit’s slave, might have a place of residence and not appear to have lost the reward for serving as a slave. 695

The last clause, about taking the son and angels as counsellors, confirms that the “flesh” in which the Spirit dwelt is the “slave” of the parable and therefore is “the Son of God”, that is, Jesus. This section asserts that the Holy Spirit dwelt in Jesus and that because Jesus served the Holy Spirit well he was exalted to become a son as well.

Osiek asserts that both the Holy Spirit and Jesus are preexistent agents of Creation, 696 yet this is by no means clear. In Hermas the use of the term ‘Son’ is, at least, confused and there is no reason to suppose that when the writer describes the Son participating in Creation he is referring to Jesus, rather than the Holy Spirit. In fact, the statements quoted above demonstrate the belief that it was the Holy Spirit that “preexisted and created all things”, while Jesus was merely a human being which the Holy Spirit inhabited.

It is not clear when the writer believed that the Holy Spirit ‘possessed’ Jesus, whether at his birth or his baptism or at some other time.

A3.4 - The Possessionist Phenomena

The origins of the Possessionist Christology are not clear. All the writings of the Ebionites have been lost and are now only preserved in quotations by their critics. We may hypothesize that it arose from a different understanding of the accounts of Jesus’ baptism and of his ‘giving up the spirit’ at his death, coupled with a Docetic desire to deny the humanity of the Son. The Holy Spirit was certainly an ideal concept for the Possessionists given its frequent occurrences in the Old Testament, 697 particularly with reference to its ‘coming upon’ mortal men. 698 The heavenly status of the Holy Spirit is obvious and would have appealed to any wishing to credit the Son with heavenly status. The references in Genesis to the work of the Spirit in Creation are probably the source of the statements in Barnabas and Hermas that the Son created all

695 Similitude 5.6.5-7
696 p36 C. Osiek 1999, quoting Similitude 9.12.2 (“the Son of God is older than all his creation, and so he became the Father’s counselor for his creation”).
697 e.g. Psalm 51:11, Isaiah 63:10-11
698 e.g. Judges 3:10, 15:14, 1 Samuel 16:13-14
things, though the ‘cross-pollination’ of ideas from the Pauline community cannot be ruled out.699 Interestingly in Possessionist Christology is the first time that the Spirit is referred to as a person and it is interesting to speculate to what degree this effected the acceptance of the Holy Spirit as a person by the later Church Fathers.

Assessing the impact of Possessionism upon the early Church is difficult. The Muratorian Canon, for instance, states that the Shepherd of Hermas “ought indeed to be read” but is not to be included amongst the Scriptures.700 But Eusebius states that both the Shepherd of Hermas and the Epistle of Barnabas are amongst the “spurious books”, as well as the Didache and the Gospel of the Hebrews,701 demonstrating that by the fourth century the Jewish-Christian writings were treated as suspect though “familiar to most churchmen”.702 It is clear that Possessionism did not dominate, and by the time of Irenaeus and Hippolytus it was regarded as heretical.

699 In the Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom is identified with the Holy Spirit (p52 L. Urban 1995). This may have provided a basis for the Possessionists to interpret any Wisdom-allusions in Paul and John as references to the Holy Spirit. Later Irenaeus would name the Holy Spirit ‘Wisdom’, perhaps due the influence of the Possessionists or perhaps due to a mutually held tradition (Against Heresies IV.20.1; Demonstration 5).
700 p124 J. Stevenson (ed.) 1987
701 HE 25.2
702 *ibid*
References

Translations

Old Testament and Apocrypha
Primary Translation:  New Revised Standard Version (Masoretic text)

Heraclitus

Plato

Philo

Dead Sea Scrolls

New Testament

Primary Translation:  [ESV] English Standard Version (Nestle-Aland text)
Others consulted:  [NKJV] New King James Version (Textus Receptus)
[NRSV] New Revised Standard Version
[NLT] New Living Translation
[NIV] New International Version

‘Q’

The Apostolic Fathers
The Preaching of Peter

The Apology of Aristides

Justin Martyr
Others consulted: [Schaff] P. Schaff, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, Internet:

Irenaeus – On the Apostolic Preaching

Irenaeus – Against Heresies

Bibliography


• T. B. Falls (trans.), *Writings of Saint Justin Martyr*, Catholic University of America Press, 1943.


• M. Hadas (trans.), *Aristeas to Philocrates*, Harper & Brothers, 1951.


• C. G. Montefiore, *Judaism and St Paul*, Max Goschen, 1914.
• A. S. Peake, *The Epistle to the Colossians*, 1903 (from W. Robertson Nicoll 1903).
• W. Robertson Nicoll (ed.), *The Expositor’s Greek Testament* (Vol.3), Hodder and Stoughton, 1903.
• W. Wrede, *Paul*, Philip Green, 1907.