

PROTO-TRINITY:

The Development of the Doctrine of
the Trinity in the First and Second
Christian Centuries

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ὦ Θεός, ἱλασθήτι μοί τω
γραμματεῖ

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.

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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

² p1641 *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* 1997, p1048 *The New Dictionary of Theology* 1987, p1336 *Eerdman's Dictionary of the Bible* 2000, p1209 *New Bible Dictionary* 2000

³ p345 *A Dictionary of Christian Theology* 1969, p379 *A Dictionary of the Bible* 1996, p299 *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* 1967

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,⁵ asserting that Second Temple Judaism was strictly monotheistic. He reasons that the Jews were primarily concerned with God's identity,⁶ rather than His nature and that Jesus, in his actions, equated himself with that identity of God.⁷ 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.⁸ 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.⁹

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*,¹⁰ arguing that the early Christians adhered to the Jewish conception of a uni-personal God and regarded Jesus as His literal Son.¹¹ Generally, this middle-ground is represented today by faith groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses¹² and the Christadelphians.¹³

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).

¹¹ pp33-113 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 Johannine 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 century²³ 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

¹⁶ p19 *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* 1997, p8 *New Dictionary of Theology* 1987

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

²³ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.26; Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 7.35-6; p142 [Vol.1] J. Behr 2001

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.

1) Acts 13:33 (and variant Luke 3:22)²⁸

²⁴ p14 J. C. O'Neill 1995

²⁵ p16 J. C. O'Neill 1995

²⁶ II Samuel 7:14 (Romans 1:3-4), Psalm 2 (Luke 3:22, Acts 4:25-26, 13:13, Hebrews 1:5, 5:5, Revelation 19:14), Psalm 8 (Matthew 21:6, I Corinthians 15:27, Ephesians 1:22, Hebrews 2:6-8), Psalm 110 (Matthew 22:44, Mark 12:36, Luke 20:42-43, Acts 2:34-36, I Corinthians 15:25, Hebrews 1:13, 5:6, 7:17-21); p14 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’ [ὀρισθέντος] 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 ὀρισθέντος 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. ὀρίσσω] use in the sense ‘declare’ or ‘shown to be’ has been adduced”. He favours the translation ‘appoint’ or ‘install’.³²

strongly associated with Jesus (as instanced by Clement of Alexandria’s conflation of the two clauses). According to Swanson only the *Bezae Cantabrigiensis* (D) substitutes ‘*huios mou ei su, ego semeron gegenneka se*’ for ‘*su ei ho huios mou ho agapetos en soi eudokesa*’, as in all other manuscripts. Clement of Alexandria has ‘*huios mou ei su agapetos ego semeron gegenneka se*’ (p54 R. J. Swanson 1995c).

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’.³³ 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 δυνάμει*]. 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**’.³⁴ Stuhlmacher concurs, suggesting that Romans 1:4 relates to passages that talk about Christ’s exaltation to the right hand of God.³⁵ He paraphrases the verse as saying that Jesus “was appointed to that appropriate sovereign rule which appertains to the Son of God”.³⁶ Given that it was a common belief amongst the New Testament writers that Jesus was granted (greater) power from God after his ascension³⁷ (or after his resurrection),³⁸ 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.³⁹ 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

³³ p453 [Vol.5] *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 1978

³⁴ p19 J. C. O’Neill 1995, p453n [Vol.5] *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 1978

³⁵ particularly Psalm 110:1

³⁶ p19 P. Stuhlmacher 1994

³⁷ *δύναμις*: Matthew 24:30, Mark 13:26, Luke 21:27, II Thessalonians 1:7, Revelation 5:12-13;

πνεύμα: Acts 2:33; also see Ephesians 1:20-22, I Peter 3:22;

³⁸ *δύναμις*: 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.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ Nor does Matthew base the virgin conception on the Hebrew Scriptures⁴² – “the Isaiah prophecies themselves, read in their own context, could hardly have given rise to an expectation of a miraculous conception”⁴³ – though Matthew certainly uses the Old Testament to justify his story to a Jewish audience,⁴⁴ 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”⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷ Evans writes that there is no literary dependence between the two accounts, but that both are written from pre-existing tradition.⁴⁸ Both accounts record that Mary was a virgin,⁴⁹ that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit,⁵⁰ the angelic prescription of the name ‘Jesus’,⁵¹ his birth in Bethlehem⁵², the fact that Mary was betrothed (not married)⁵³ and the name of her intended (‘Joseph’).⁵⁴ 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

⁴⁷ “Luke writes blithely in ignorance or disregard of Matthew” (p27 G. Parrinder 1992). One interesting theory is that Luke wrote with knowledge of Matthew’s account, but opposing many of its details. For instance, Luke’s visit of the shepherds replaces Matthew’s visit of the magi.

⁴⁸ p22 C. A. Evans 1990

⁴⁹ Matthew 1:23-25; Luke 1:27, 34.

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.⁵⁵ Mark records that Jesus was called ‘the son of Mary’,⁵⁶ 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”.⁵⁷ Evans goes further asserting that “among Jews a man was not denoted the son of his mother unless illegitimate”.⁵⁸ Though Parrinder objects that there are instances of the mother being named, he cannot provide any examples earlier than Mohammed.⁵⁹ The other explanation, that Joseph was not referred to as he was dead by this time,⁶⁰ is nullified by the numerous examples of individuals being denoted by the name of their dead father or ancestor.⁶¹ It is then a reasonable explanation to suppose that Mark believed that Jesus had no (earthly) father.⁶²

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.⁶³ 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)⁶⁴ and was the 'seed' of Abraham.⁶⁵ This requires that Paul believed that Jesus had (at least) one human parent, but he does not specify which.⁶⁶ Paul also states that Jesus was the Son of God.⁶⁷ 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.⁶⁸

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 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).

In the Greco-Roman world views differed. Hippocrates believed that the human foetus was formed by the intermingling of male and female 'semen' in the womb (*On Diseases of Women* 1.17). Even those writers, like Aristotle, who accredited women with no part in conception other than incubation believed that women produced 'seed', though we have no indication as to what function they thought female 'seed' fulfilled (pp186-195 E. Fantham et al. 1995).

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 [γίνωμα] of a woman’.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 simply meant ‘a man’,⁷⁰ or could have been referring to natural procreation. The use of the verb γίνωμα 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).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,⁷² especially since John connects it with the phrase “made flesh”.⁷³ The derisive tale that Jesus was an illegitimate child that arose in amongst Jews in the latter half of the first century⁷⁴ is strong evidence that the

⁶⁹ Galatians 4:4

⁷⁰ Job 14:1, 15:14, 25:4; also see Matthew 11:11

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).

⁷² John 1:14, 1:18, 3:16, 3:18, 1 John 4:9; also see Hebrews 11:17

⁷³ John 1:14

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 Ignatius⁷⁵ and Aristides⁷⁶ 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. *Protevangelium of James, Infancy Gospel of Thomas*) also demonstrate that this belief was common.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.

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).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.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ *Ignatius to the Ephesians* 19:1, *Ignatius to the Smyrnans* 1:1

⁷⁶ *The Apology of Aristides* chII

⁷⁷ p48 J. K. Elliott 1993

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 incarnational theology a conception by the Holy Spirit does not bring about the existence of God’s Son” (p291 R. Brown 1977).

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 preordained⁸¹ 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 him⁸³ 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’.⁸⁵ These views are echoed in the epistles of Peter⁸⁶ (c.60) and are even written into the Gospel of Matthew (c.80).⁸⁷ By the end of the first century these views are still current, being employed in symbology of Revelation (c.95).⁸⁸

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”.⁸⁹ 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 [πνεῦμα].⁹⁰ 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”.⁹¹ He appeals to the Old Testament where angels act as intermediaries

⁸⁵ (II Timothy 1:9), also see I Corinthians 2:7, Ephesians 1:4, (Titus 1:2)

⁸⁶ I Peter 1:2, 1:20,

⁸⁷ Matthew 13:35, 25:34,

⁸⁸ Revelation 13:8, 17:8,

⁸⁹ p10 J. Knox 1967

⁹⁰ p25 J. W. C. Wand 1957, p143 J. N. D. Kelly 1989,

⁹¹ p107 W. H. Wagner 1994

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’ [‘αρπαγμόν] 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 ‘αρπαγμόν 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

⁹⁵ Matthew 13:41, Romans 8:38, I Corinthians 6:3, II Thessalonians 1:7, **Hebrews 1:4-13**, I Peter 3:22,

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",¹⁰³ 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.

Ensoulement 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 Ensoulement Christology.

Ensoulement 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 *μορφή* as is a "near synonym" for 'image' [*εἰκόν*] (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 believe 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;¹¹⁰ the pre-Hellenistic Old Testament writings do not have a concept of soul separate from the body.¹¹¹ It was only under Hellenistic influence that the Jews began to accept the concept of the soul as something that survives death.¹¹² Plato had espoused a belief in the pre-existence of the soul under the influence of Orphism.¹¹³ The Stoics rarely accepted the immortality and pre-existence of the soul; for them the soul “was a mode or function of matter”.¹¹⁴ The Epicureans also held that the soul had no existence apart from the body.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”.¹¹⁶ The Essenes believed in the pre-existence of the souls,¹¹⁷ and later the Rabbis, influenced by Platonism,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 ψυχή could die¹¹⁹ and died with the body.¹²⁰ There is no indication of the belief that soul existed prior to birth.¹²¹ It seems that the early Christians were materialists with regard to the soul.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.

the soul. Irenaeus writes “when his soul [i.e. Jesus’] became vigorous and pure it remembered what it had seen in its circuit with the unbegotten God, and therefore power was sent it by him so it could escape the world-creators by means of it” (*Against Heresies* 1.25.1).

¹¹⁰ p380 N. Solomon 1998

¹¹¹ p654 *Oxford Dictionary of Jewish Religion* 1997, p8 J. N. Bremmer 2002,

¹¹² p62 C. H. Moore 1931

¹¹³ p8-9, 18 C. H. Moore 1931

¹¹⁴ p39 C. H. Moore 1931

¹¹⁵ p42 C. H. Moore 1931

¹¹⁶ e.g. Philo (*De Mundi Opificus* 135) and Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.14-8); p8 J. N. Bremmer 2002

¹¹⁷ Josephus, *War of the Jews* 2.154f; p300 E. P. Sanders 1992

¹¹⁸ *Chag.* 12b; p83 A. Cohen 1937

¹¹⁹ Matthew 10:28, Mark 3:4, Luke 6:9, 9:56, Romans 11:3, Revelation 8:9

¹²⁰ Matthew 20:28, 1 Thessalonians 5:23

¹²¹ Although the Gospel of Thomas does include this enigmatic phrase: “blessed is he who existed before he was created” (19).

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 them¹²⁴).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 woman¹²⁸ and juxtaposed against the figure of the harlot, who represents the path of folly.¹²⁹ Wisdom is associated with the commandments¹³⁰ 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

¹²⁴ Matthew 13:41, 16:27, 24:31, 25:31, 26:53; Mark 1:13, 13:27; Luke 22:43;

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 written¹³⁵ and it contains a more developed discourse about the figure of Wisdom. In Proverbs the creation of Wisdom by God is strongly implied,¹³⁶ in *Sirach* it is explicit.¹³⁷ Again she is personified as a woman¹³⁸ and she was active in Creation.¹³⁹ According to *Sirach* Wisdom was present in the Tabernacle and dwelt in Jerusalem.¹⁴⁰ Wisdom is also identified with the Law of Moses.¹⁴¹ The most significant development is that in *Sirach* is that Wisdom is described as being spoken by God.¹⁴²

In the *Wisdom of Solomon* (c. 100 BC)¹⁴³ we see a further development of the concept of Wisdom. It is still personified as a woman,¹⁴⁴ but is also called ‘Word’ [λόγος].¹⁴⁵ The agency of Wisdom in Creation is now much more explicit¹⁴⁶ but her generation is described in more mystical terms.¹⁴⁷ We see in the *Wisdom of Solomon* a more developed theology. God’s transcendence is emphasized and Wisdom is seen as an intermediary,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.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,¹⁵⁰ but she is no way independent of God – in this sense, she is (a part of) God.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 [ἐκτίσθη] 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 1:15-18.¹⁵²

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,¹⁵³ and it is possible that the phrase ‘the image of God’ mirrors the Jewish understanding of Wisdom.¹⁵⁴

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 suspect¹⁵⁵ and the other may well only refer to Jesus being the **purpose** of Creation.¹⁵⁶

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

¹⁵⁴ *Wisdom of Solomon* 7:25, p55 E. G. Clarke 1973, p64-66 E. Schweizer 1982

¹⁵⁵ Ephesians 3:9; ‘through Christ’ is found in “D³, E, K, L, etc, Syr., al., Chr., Thdrt., Thl., Oec.” It is omitted in “xABCDFGP 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 δῆ, 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 δῆ 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 δῆ 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 2:5-11,¹⁵⁷ 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,¹⁵⁸ 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”,¹⁵⁹ 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.¹⁶⁰ There are several passages where *τά πάντα* is used in the context of spiritual regeneration, or reconciliation, in Christ.¹⁶¹ The word ‘created’ [ἐκτίσθη] is also used allegorically by Paul to refer to the concept of the believer being created anew in Christ.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.¹⁶³ The phrase “in heaven and on earth” is also used metaphorically by Paul to refer to the Church.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]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.¹⁶⁶

Wisdom in the Followers of Paul

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.

¹⁶¹ II Corinthians 5:17-18, Ephesians 1:22-23, Colossians 1:20

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); “...put on 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);

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.

¹⁶⁴ Colossians 1:20, Ephesians 1:7-15

¹⁶⁵ NKJV here is preferable to ESV which interpolates the phrase “the fullness of God”.

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" [διὰ] 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 Psalms¹⁷⁰ 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 αἰῶνος, rather than κόσμος. 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 Creation¹⁷²).

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,

¹⁷⁰ 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.

¹⁷¹ *TDNT* asserts that αἰῶνος 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 αἰῶνος in reference to physical creation. He lists translations including: 'lifetime', 'eternity' and Gnostic 'aeon' (pp55-6 *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* 1976).

¹⁷² 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.¹⁷³ In one passage Clement even quotes the words of Wisdom as a warning¹⁷⁴ 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’ **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.

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.¹⁷⁵

Traditional commentators, Barclay for instance, have viewed the gospel of John as an attempt to reconcile Christianity to Greek thought,¹⁷⁶ thereby feeling legitimized in tracing John’s *λόγος* back to Heraclitus.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”¹⁷⁸ and reasoning that Greeks simply would not have understood the Synoptic tradition because of its Jewish character.¹⁷⁹ The former claim seems baseless¹⁸⁰ and the latter uncharitable.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.

¹⁷³ I Clement 20:1, 26:1, 33:2, 35:3, 59:2, 59:3, 62:2

¹⁷⁴ I Clement 57:3-58:1, cp. Proverbs 1:23-33

¹⁷⁵ John 1:1-3 [ESV]

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)

¹⁷⁷ p11 [Vol.1] W. Barclay 1964

¹⁷⁸ p2 [Vol.1] W. Barclay 1964

¹⁷⁹ pxxi [Vol.1] W. Barclay 1964

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.

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,¹⁸² John makes no effort to do so, using imagery such as the sacrificial Lamb without such much as a footnote.¹⁸³ 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.¹⁸⁴ Some scholars, like Buchanan, go further and pinpoint the Samaritans as the specific group for which John is writing¹⁸⁵ but Cullmann urges caution, seeing Samaritan question as only one factor in the origins of John's gospel.¹⁸⁶ 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'¹⁸⁷ 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.¹⁸⁸

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

¹⁸⁸ p102 E. R. Goodenough 1962, p159 J. Dillon 1977, p85 P. M. Casey 1991

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**¹⁸⁹

Obviously the opening phrase, “in the beginning” is a direct quotation, but other elements are also mirrored, including the concepts of creation¹⁹⁰ and light.¹⁹¹ It is therefore likely that the Logos in John is primarily an allusion to the creative word of God in Genesis.¹⁹² 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,¹⁹³ was never regarded as being a separate being. Wisdom is frequently personified as a woman, but never regarded as a literal person.¹⁹⁴ 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.¹⁹⁵

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 Mēmṛā (‘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.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 heaven¹⁹⁷ 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,¹⁹⁸ is a strong argument against the hypothesis that such a doctrine was preached earlier by Paul or the writer to the Hebrews.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.

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 (1 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.

¹⁹⁷ e.g. John 3:13, 8:42, 13:3, 17:5,

¹⁹⁸ "[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).

¹⁹⁹ "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 Jesus²⁰⁰ yet the only explicit reference to pre-existence is *Magnesiensians* 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.²⁰¹ Ignatius elsewhere describes Jesus as "the expressed purpose of the Father",²⁰² which implies that he understood Jesus' pre-existence in terms of foreknowledge.²⁰³

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,²⁰⁴ in other passages his language is much more personal:

And when He had a great and inexpressible thought, he communicated it to His child alone²⁰⁵

Now while it is possible that "child" [παῖδι] 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.²⁰⁶ The *Paraleipomena Jeremiou* (c.130) refers to Jesus appearing to Jeremiah and performing miracles before him.²⁰⁷ 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".²⁰⁸

²⁰⁰ *Magnesiensians* 7:2, 8:2; *Ephesians* 7:2

²⁰¹ "Jesus Christ His Son, who is His Word" *Magnesiensians* 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 *Paraleipomena 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 us²⁰⁹

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”.²¹⁰ This philosophical discourse, particularly (Middle) Platonism, was now taking the place of the traditional pagan gods.²¹¹ 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,²¹² 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”.²¹³

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 classes²¹⁴

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.²¹⁵ 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. Kyratos 1987

²¹⁵ p204 J. Dillon 1977

Christianity.²¹⁶ 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.²¹⁷ Some of the apologists styled themselves ‘philosopher’,²¹⁸ others addressed the emperors as philosophers.²¹⁹ 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.²²⁰

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*,²²¹ the Demiurge may appear in the *Republic*,²²² and it is even possible that Plato linked the Demiurge and the Form of the Good (though this is nowhere stated).²²³

In his later years²²⁴ 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.²²⁵ Like the Pythagoreans, he postulates as first principles the One (Monad) and the Indefinite Dyad.²²⁶

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.²²⁷

The World-Soul becomes "the supreme mediating entity" between the Realm of the Forms and the physical world.²²⁸ 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.²²⁹

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:²³⁰

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 sort²³¹

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 is²³²

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.²³³The 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

years or more after the nominal date of composition ... Our manuscripts report a doubt (perhaps going back to Thrasyllus) about Letter XII’s authenticity, and from their content other can hardly be by Plato” (pp1634-5 J. M. Cooper 1997).

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).²³⁴

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.²³⁵ 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?²³⁶

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”.²³⁷ Philo states that God is ‘qualityless’ [αποιος],²³⁸ ‘unnameable’ [ακατόνομαστος] and ‘unutterable’ [αρηρητος],²³⁹ 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 universe²⁴⁰

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”).²⁴¹ 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”,²⁴² in opposition to writers like Wolfson who favoured the Stoic influence for Philo’s use of the term.²⁴³ 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.²⁴⁴ 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.²⁴⁵ 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.²⁴⁶ The Logos is often personified and even called “the Son of God”.²⁴⁷ Dillon supposes that Philo could not have thought of the Logos as a divine being in and of itself because of his monotheism,²⁴⁸ yet this monotheism does not prevent Philo from referring to the Logos as “the second god”.²⁴⁹ Young supposes that Philo held “a kind of binitarian view of God”,²⁵⁰ 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 monotheism²⁵¹ 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.²⁵² For Philo the Logos is not one of the created things²⁵³ and yet he is not un-create like God: “neither unbegotten as God, nor begotten as you [man], but midway between the two extremes”.²⁵⁴ Philo describes a

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).

²⁴⁷ p256 H. A. Wolfson 1947; 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). O’Neill’s view of Philo is not new; Eusebius believed that Philo taught the doctrine of the Trinity (p35 D. Winston 1981).

²⁵¹ p102 E. R. Goodenough 1962

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).²⁵⁵ 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).²⁵⁶

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.²⁵⁷

Numenius posits three gods. The First God is identified as the Form of the Good (or ‘Good-in-itself’).²⁵⁸ He is “eternal, immutable ... [and] concerned only with the intellectual realm”.²⁵⁹ Like other Neopythagoreans, 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 divisible²⁶⁰

The First God may not undertake creation²⁶¹

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’ [ἐκτίσῃ] Wisdom before He created the earth. Philo interprets this ‘obtained’ [ἐκτησατα], suggesting that he wished to deviate from the implications of ἐκτίσῃ. 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 γὰρ ἐστὶ Πλατῶν ἢ Μωσῆς Ἀττικίζων;] (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 Judaeus” (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 King²⁶²

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 God²⁶³ 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 pp371-2 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,²⁷¹ He is knowable.²⁷² 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".²⁷³ One of Paul's recurring themes in his epistles is that God (in some sense) dwells in/amongst the believers.²⁷⁴ 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.²⁷⁵ Paul does assert that God cannot be seen,²⁷⁶ in line with Old Testament teaching,²⁷⁷ 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.²⁷⁸

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...²⁷⁹

Jesus is in turn described as "the word of His power" by which God made all things.²⁸⁰ 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),

²⁷² 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 Son²⁸¹

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,²⁸² features that will recur in other apologists.

The Apology of Aristides (c.125)²⁸³

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:²⁸⁴

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 controlled²⁸⁵

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"²⁸⁶ 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 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 cp. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII.6-9

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 it²⁸⁷

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 ...²⁸⁸

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.²⁸⁹ Like the *Preaching*, Aristides condemns the worship of idols²⁹⁰ and criticises the practices of the Jews.²⁹¹ 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*,²⁹² 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.²⁹³ It will suffice for our purposes to note that all three come from the same milieu, all three writing against the worship of idols²⁹⁴ 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

Jews.²⁹⁵ Likewise the transcendence of God is emphasized – “which cannot be comprehended by humans”²⁹⁶ – 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.²⁹⁷ 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”.²⁹⁸ 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’.²⁹⁹

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 than this claim implies.³⁰⁰

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 *Diognetus* 3:1-4:4

²⁹⁶ *Diognetus* 7:2

²⁹⁷ “he sent the Craftsman [δημιουργον] and maker of all things” (*Diognetus* 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

³⁰¹ p20 R. M. Price 1988

³⁰² One solution to Price’s difficulty that readily recommends itself is the idea that Justin’s acquaintance with Platonism is mediated through Philo, who employed ‘Logos’ as a term for the Demiurge. After all, the works of Philo were later zealously adopted and preserved by the Christians (p35 D. Winston 1981). Yet we must be careful; there are some several points where Justin’s teaching conflicts with Philo’s (e.g. p61, 64 R. M. Grant 1988), and it is unlikely that Justin originally studied Platonism from the works of Philo given the apparent lack influence Philo had upon of Platonists (p144 J. Dillon 1977). We will deduce parallels with other Platonists, particularly Numenius; an overemphasis on the influence of Philo could be misleading.

³⁰³ p4 J. Dillon 1989

³⁰⁴ “the first power after God the Father and Lord to all things is the Word, who is also His Son” (*First Apology* 32). “God has begotten of Himself a certain rational power as a Beginning before all other creatures” (*Dialogue* 61).

³⁰⁵ “everything that the philosopher and legislator discovered and expressed well, they accomplished through their discovery and contemplation of some part of the Logos” (*Second Apology* 10)

³⁰⁶ *Dialogue* 60; 127;

³⁰⁷ *First Apology* 53; *Second Apology* 6; *Dialogue* 127;

³⁰⁸ *First Apology* 63; *Dialogue* 127;

³⁰⁹ “God is the Being who always has the same nature in the same manner” (*Dialogue* 3)

³¹⁰ “No proper name has been bestowed upon God, the Father of all, since He is unbegotten. For whoever as a proper name received it from a person older than himself” (*Second Apology* 6)

first to describe God as unnameable and ineffable.³¹¹ 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”³¹² 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).³¹³ 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 Father³¹⁴ and identifies Him with the Demiurge when quoting Plato’s *Timaeus*.³¹⁵ Justin emphasizes the role of the Logos in bringing the light of knowledge to men.³¹⁶ 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.³¹⁷ 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,³¹⁸ 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”.³¹⁹ 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”.³²⁰ 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”.³²¹ 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.

³¹⁶ p85 L. W. Barnard 1967, p104 J. L. González 1987. Justin does not ignore the role of Jesus in Creation, he is the mediator but no the Creator (p47 R. A. Norris 1966).

³¹⁷ p148 E. R. Goodenough 1968

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 the Prophetic Spirit, sometimes the Logos and sometimes God” (p180 E. R. Goodenough 1968).

³²⁷ *First Apology* 60; Plato, *Letters* II.312e;

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.³³⁰ 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 [νοῦς] and Reason [λόγος] of the Father".³³¹ He identifies the Logos with the sum of the Forms, and describes the Holy Spirit as "an effluence of God".³³² 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,³³³ 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.³³⁴ 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.³³⁵ 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 one³³⁶

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.³³⁷ 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”.³³⁸ He says that this ‘strict’ monotheism was based on the *Shema*.³³⁹ 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.³⁴⁰ 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”).³⁴¹ It does not, of itself, state that there were no other gods, though it is implied and is indicated elsewhere in the Old Testament.³⁴² 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.³⁴³ 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.³⁴⁴ The gospel of Mark quotes the *Shema* confidently, stating that it forms part of the greatest commandment.³⁴⁵ Paul not only alludes to the *Shema*, but even adds a second clause stating that Jesus also fulfils a unique role.³⁴⁶ 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.³⁴⁷ 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.³⁴⁸ 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”.³⁴⁹ To bridge this gap between God and man, Jewish thinkers of this period emphasized the roles of intermediary figures.³⁵⁰

Angels for the first time are named³⁵¹ and are ascribed the “day-to-day operation of His handiwork”.³⁵² “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;

³⁴⁷ p328-333 W. O. E. Oesterkey & T. H. Robinson 1952, p115 H. Küng 1992

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 covenanters 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”.³⁵³ As we have seen, during the Hellenistic period the oft-personified Wisdom was used as an important intermediary between God and the world.³⁵⁴ Philo’s Logos, not only functions as an intermediary, but can also be called ‘god’.³⁵⁵ At Qumran “divine beings” (presumably angels) are also called “gods” (*elohim*).³⁵⁶ Casey lists a number of intermediary figures who “seem to be of almost divine status”.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”.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.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),³⁶⁰ but

³⁵² p255 J. Vanderkam & P. Flint 2002

³⁵³ p317 (Vol.1) *Encyclopaedia of Dead Sea Scrolls* 2000

³⁵⁴ also see Baruch 3:37

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 (*On Dreams* 1.227ff)” (p84 P. M. Casey 1991).

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).

³⁵⁷ Moses (Philo, *Life of Moses* I.158), Logos (Philo, *Qu in Gen* II.62), Wisdom (*Wisdom of Solomon* 7:21ff), Melchizedek (IIQMelchizedek), angels (4QShirShabb), Metatron (III Enoch 12.3-5) (p79 P. M. Casey 1991).

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).

³⁵⁹ p11 S. Sandmel 1969, p5 R. Bauckham 1999

³⁶⁰ *War of the Jews* 2.162-65, *Antiquities* 10.278 (p68-70 G. Stemberger 1995).

they did not believe in angels (or other spirit-beings).³⁶¹ The Pharisees, on the other hand, believed both in angels and God's involvement in the world.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.³⁶³ It was because of this environment that Christianity originally existed as a sect of Judaism.

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 example³⁶⁴ - Christians were allowed to preach both within the Temple precinct³⁶⁵ and in the synagogues of the Diaspora.³⁶⁶ The attitudes of the Sanhedrin were divided over the Christian question: the Sadducees were antagonistic³⁶⁷ whereas the Pharisees were (generally) more tolerant³⁶⁸ (and were even appealed by Christian ideas).³⁶⁹ Jewish Christians seem have generally been tolerated by the rest of Judaism.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.³⁷¹ With the focal point of Judaism removed it could have fractured into various sects or, perhaps, ceased to exist altogether. But Roman

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

³⁶⁶ Acts 13:5, 13:14f, 17:1-4, 17:10, 18:19-20, 19:8

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 Arimathea, Nicodemus

³⁷⁰ also see p11 W. H. Wagner 1994, p83 G. B. Caird 1975, p106 T. Callam 1986

³⁷¹ p34 G. B. Caird 1975

recognition “fell upon the group of Pharisee Rabbis who were settled at Jamnia [Yavneh]” headed by Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai.³⁷² 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.³⁷³ This group composed the Mishnah, and many of the other traditions³⁷⁴ which helped to formalize Judaism and establish an orthodoxy.³⁷⁵ However the Rabbis of Yavneh were strongly anti-Christian.³⁷⁶ 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 arrogant³⁷⁷

Justin Martyr (c.150) refers to the “cursing in your synagogues [of] those who believe in Christ”.³⁷⁸ 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.³⁷⁹

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,³⁸⁰ generally showing small interest in the internal doctrinal disputes of Judaism.³⁸¹ 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

³⁸⁷ *Exod.R.xxix*5, quoted p6 A. Cohen 1937 (cp. Isaiah 44:6).

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 Fathers³⁸⁹ 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*,³⁹¹ and once to show that the Law is not ignorance, since Christ quotes it.³⁹² Clement of Alexandria also quotes the *Shema* twice: once to show that the Scriptures condemn the worship of idols³⁹³ and once to show that the beliefs of Greek philosophers came from Moses.³⁹⁴

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.³⁹⁵ Gnosticism developed independently of Christianity; efforts to read Gnosticism into the early Christian writings, for instance in the New Testament, are generally unconvincing.³⁹⁶ It now seems likely that several of the similar features, such as the Gnostic redeemer myth, arose and developed independently of Christianity,³⁹⁷ 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 Judaism³⁹⁹ 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

³⁹⁹ For instance, the Sadducees emphasized the transcendence of God, distancing him from the created world (p8 M. Avi-Yonah & Z. Baras 1997, p290 A. J. Saldarini 1988, pp68-70 G. Stemberger 1995).

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.⁴⁰⁴ 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.⁴⁰⁵ 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.⁴⁰⁶

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 word⁴⁰⁷

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.⁴¹⁷ 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.⁴¹⁸ 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.⁴¹⁹ 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 οὐσία);⁴²⁰ 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 ὑποστάσις and so, dependent on context, it could mean whatever ὑποστάσις 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 grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all [ESV]

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.

⁴²⁴ Romans 16:20, I Corinthians 16:23, Philippians 4:23, I Thessalonians 5:28, II Thessalonians 3:18, “... with your spirit” Galatians 6:18, Philemon 1:25

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 Spirit⁴²⁶

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 εἰς (τό) ὄνομα creates difficulties ... εἰς (τό) ὄνομα means 'with respect or regard to', 'because ... is'".⁴³² As an idiom εἰς (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 incidentally (sic) associated with the one who bears it. The name is an indispensable part of the personality" (p243 [Vol.5] TDNT 1978)

⁴³² p274 TDNT 1978, citing examples: Matthew 10:41f, Mark 9:41, Matthew 18:20, Hebrews 6:10.

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' Creed⁴³³ (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 εἰς (τό) ὄνομα and εἰς are essentially equivalent⁴³⁶ 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. Moehlan 1933

⁴³⁴ p151 J. L. González 1987; also see p90 E. Ferguson (ed.) 1997; cp. Hippolytus, *Trad. Ap.* 21 :12-18 ; Cyprian *Ep.* 69 :7; Tertullian, *De Virg. Vel.I.*;

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 ..."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),⁴⁴⁴ he never makes similar claims about the Spirit.⁴⁴⁵ For this reason commentators have sometimes labelled Justin 'binitarian'!⁴⁴⁶ I have identified three triadic formulas in Justin's writings. One is the baptismal formula paraphrased from

⁴⁴³ *Magnesians* 13:1

⁴⁴⁴ *First Apology* 62

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).

⁴⁴⁶ p52 S. G. Hall 1995

Matthew's gospel⁴⁴⁷ and so is not particularly enlightening. Another is notoriously difficult to translate⁴⁴⁸ 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 third⁴⁴⁹

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" (*First Apology* 61)

⁴⁴⁸ "We do proclaim ourselves atheists as regards those whom you call gods, but not with respect to **the Most True God** ... we revere and worship Him and **the Son** who came forth from Him and taught us these things, and also the legion of good angels ... and **the Prophetic Spirit**" (*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 (*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 **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 [ἄλλος] 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" [ἄλλος] 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" (*First Apology* 33). Given these difficulties, we cannot use this passage as a reliable indicator of Justin's opinion.

⁴⁴⁹ *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' (τριάς) is used in Christian literature with reference to God. Theophilus does not use τριάς 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 [παῖδός], 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 Autolytus* 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 Autolytus* II.x

D6.6 - Irenaeus

Although it is likely that Irenaeus knew the work of Theophilus,⁴⁵³ the word ‘trinity’ is not contained in either *Against Heresies* or his later work *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*.⁴⁵⁴ 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 Lord⁴⁵⁵

The prophets and the apostles confess the Father and the Son; but **naming no other as God**⁴⁵⁶ ... to the Greeks they preached one God, who made all things, and Jesus Christ His Son⁴⁵⁷

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 God⁴⁵⁸

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 Haitoun 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. 1 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 Lord⁴⁵⁹

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, **prophetically through the Spirit**, and seen too, **adoptively, through the Son**; and He shall also be seen **paternally in the Kingdom** of Heaven, the Spirit truly preparing man in the Son of God, and the Son leading his to the Father⁴⁶⁰

Thus, therefore, was God revealed; for God the Father is shown forth through all these [operations], **the Spirit indeed working and the Son ministering while the Father was approving** and man's salvation being accomplished⁴⁶¹

So while on the one hand Irenaeus thinks of the Spirit, along with the Son, as one of the 'two hands of God',⁴⁶² through which God created the world, on the other he does not appear to be motivated by a belief in the essential three-ness of God.

The approach is different in *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 *Demonstration* Irenaeus includes triadic phrases with respect to baptism.

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 **in the Holy Spirit of God**⁴⁶³

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

⁴⁵⁹ *Against Heresies* III.6.1

⁴⁶⁰ *Against Heresies* IV.20.5

⁴⁶¹ *Against Heresies* IV.20.6

⁴⁶² *Against Heresies* IV.20.1; p4 G. Wingren 1959;

⁴⁶³ *Demonstration* 3

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.⁴⁶⁴ 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”.⁴⁶⁵ 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),⁴⁶⁶ 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”.⁴⁶⁷ 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”.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.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.

⁴⁶⁸ Gregory of Nazianus, quoted p369 J. H. Broughton & P. J. Southgate 2002

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 ηη, instead of κυριου 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

⁴⁷⁰ p600 L. H. Schiffman 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.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 1st century BC bears the divine name, though many of the Qumran LXX fragments do not.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. Schiffman and Vanderkan refer to other uses of the Tetragrammaton in texts found at Qumran.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,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.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, Ἰησους, Χριστός, and υἱός, can be explained

⁴⁷⁶ p10-11 N. Walker 1953, p 73 G. Howard 1977

⁴⁷⁷ 4QLXXLev^b, vs. 4QLXXNum, 4QLXXLev^b, Exod 28:4-7 and the Letter of Jeremiah 43-44; p65 G. Howard 1977

⁴⁷⁸ p601 L. H. Schiffman and J. C. Vanderkan 2000; 4Q380, 381, IIQPSalms, 4Q411, 4QJubilees, 4QLXXLev^b

⁴⁷⁹ (based on discoveries made at Qumran) p66 G. Howard 1977

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

⁴⁸⁶ Luke 1:32, 1:35, 1:76, 6:35, Acts 7:48,

God Almighty’ is used in Revelation.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 θεός and 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”.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 θεός to be as sacred as the divine name.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”,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.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 *homoousios* of their referents.

A1.4 - Θεός

One of the few titles of the Father applied to the Son in the New Testament is that of ‘God’ [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

⁴⁸⁷ Revelation 1:8, 4:8, 11:17, 15:3, 16:7, 19:6, 21:22

⁴⁸⁸ p26-7 C. H. Roberts 1979

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).

⁴⁹⁰ p125 C. P. Thiede and M. D’Ancona 1996

⁴⁹¹ p39 C. H. Roberts 1979

fives probable (John 1:18; Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13; II Peter 1:1; I John 5:20).⁴⁹²

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).⁴⁹³

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, μονογενής θεός ('only begotten God'), though seemingly contradictory, does convey the paradox of the incarnation. The latter reading, 'ο μονογενής 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. Μονογενής θεός is generally accepted to be the better attested variant,⁴⁹⁴ 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).⁴⁹⁵ 'ο μονογενής υιός is attested by the

⁴⁹² p1048 *The New Dictionary of Theology* 1987

⁴⁹³ p1142 *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* 1997

⁴⁹⁴ p15 B. F. Westcott 1902; p85n J. N. Sanders 1968; p81n R. Bultmann 1971; p141 C. K. Barrett 1955; p39 C. F. Burney 1922; p17 R. E. Brown 1982

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 Johannine usage (cp. John 3:16, 3:18, I John 4:9).⁴⁹⁷ Brown states that the θεός 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 μονογενής, 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 God⁵⁰²

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 'ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ 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 'ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων without ὢν". Since "'ὁ ὢν 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’ [θεοῦ] could be a predicate of ‘Jesus Christ’ [Ἰησοῦ 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 σωτηρος (‘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 σωτήρ.⁵⁰⁵ Alford adds that σωτήρ “is joined with ημων, 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

⁵⁰⁵ p195 (Vol. IV) *The Expositor’s Greek Testament* 1900. Cp. II Thessalonians 2:8, I Timothy 1:1, 4:10.

“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).

⁵⁰⁶ cp. Luke 1:7, Romans 1:7, I Corinthians 1:3, II Corinthians 1:2, (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.⁵⁰⁸

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 θεός 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 θεός is a vocative in the LXX.⁵⁰⁹ Against this Guthrie states “that the king could be addressed as God” as he was God’s representative.⁵¹⁰ Gordon refers to Isaiah 9:6 as evidence that the Israelite king could be called God.⁵¹¹ 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’.⁵¹²

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 θεός,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 κ, Ψ, pg, vg^{mss}, 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, 81, syr^{p, h}, cop^{bomss}, arm, Speculum

variants, saying that “in order to clarify the reference of the adjective, copyists added θεοῦ, either before τὸν ἀληθινόν (629) or after (A Ψ 33 614 1739 vg cop^{homss} eth).”⁵¹⁸

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,⁵¹⁹ though one of these is textually suspect and should be discounted.⁵²⁰ 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 juxtaposed 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 juxtaposed with “Jesus Christ”.⁵²¹ 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.⁵²² Now Ignatius’ use of θεός is a departure from New Testament precedent⁵²³ but it is still far from attributing full divinity to Jesus, as Schoedel requires.⁵²⁴

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 θεος (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*⁵²⁵ or *The Epistle to Diognetus*.⁵²⁶ 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).⁵²⁷

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)",⁵²⁸ 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.⁵²⁹ 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 Christ⁵³⁰

⁵²⁵ The Armenian fragment does include the phrase "God-bearing" 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' [θεός] and the usual word for 'divine' [θεῖον] 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’.⁵³¹

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.⁵³² 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, trustees and also of rulers, sometimes deified (e.g. Ptolemy XIV, Cleopatra) and sometimes not (e.g. Herod).⁵³³ 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),⁵³⁴ husbands,⁵³⁵ fathers,⁵³⁶ owners,⁵³⁷ and as a formal address (i.e. ‘sir’).⁵³⁸ 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.⁵³⁹ 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

⁵³⁸ Genesis 23:6 LXX; p272 J. Lust, E. Eynikel & K. Hauspie 1996

⁵³⁹ p787 G. W. H. Lampe (ed.) 1976

used of God but also of property owners,⁵⁴⁰ of masters (as opposed to slaves),⁵⁴¹ and as a formal address.⁵⁴² Hence the *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* gives the meaning of κύριος as ‘one having legal power’⁵⁴³ and *Strong’s Concordance* gives ‘supreme in authority’ and ‘controller’.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 κύριος⁵⁴⁵ and even in the New Testament κύριος is used of angels⁵⁴⁶ and false gods.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 1st 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.

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

⁵⁴⁰ Mark 12:9

⁵⁴¹ Luke 12:43

⁵⁴² John 4:11

⁵⁴³ p240 T. Friberg, B. Friberg & N. F. Miller 2000

⁵⁴⁴ *The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* 1990

⁵⁴⁵ *Kephal* 1.183, II.13, 16

⁵⁴⁶ Acts 10:4

⁵⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 8:5; p459 W. Bauer 1979

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",⁵⁴⁸ i.e. that 'Son of God' = 'God the Son'.⁵⁴⁹

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'⁵⁵⁰ or 'son of a god',⁵⁵¹ 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.⁵⁵² 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'⁵⁵³ and the nation of Israel referred to as a child,⁵⁵⁴ but the phrase 'the Son of God' is never used.⁵⁵⁵ 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"⁵⁵⁶ and even called "a son of God",⁵⁵⁷ 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".⁵⁵⁸ 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,⁵⁵⁹ but do refer to the faithful as “sons of their God”.⁵⁶⁰

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.⁵⁶¹ Similar phrases are used in Luke’s nativity narrative.⁵⁶² 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”.⁵⁶³ 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 documents⁵⁶⁴ 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 dominate 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.⁵⁶⁵ A believer is a servant of Jesus and his faith is in Jesus, but it is God that calls the believers⁵⁶⁶ and provides for their needs.⁵⁶⁷

In Paul's epistles the subordination of Jesus is far more explicit. For Paul, Jesus is 'the Son of God',⁵⁶⁸ and God is his Father.⁵⁶⁹ Jesus is the mediator⁵⁷⁰ and intercessor.⁵⁷¹ God works through (διὰ) and in (ἐν) Jesus to bring redemption,⁵⁷² victory,⁵⁷³ love,⁵⁷⁴ peace,⁵⁷⁵ and grace,⁵⁷⁶ to make us heirs,⁵⁷⁷ to make us a 'new creation',⁵⁷⁸ to

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”,⁵⁷⁹ to supply all our needs,⁵⁸⁰ and to reconcile Himself to the world.⁵⁸¹ Jesus has been exalted by God to a heavenly status, having been “given ... the name which is above every name”,⁵⁸² but he is still subordinate to his Father since he is revered “to the glory of God the Father”, rather than his own glory.⁵⁸³ 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”.⁵⁸⁴

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.⁵⁸⁵ This highlights the belief in the subordination of Jesus, particularly since the writer says “Christ did not exalt himself ... but was appointed”.⁵⁸⁶ 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”.⁵⁸⁷ 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,⁵⁸⁸ he was made of “flesh and blood”,⁵⁸⁹ he suffered and was tempted,⁵⁹⁰ and this subordinate nature needed ‘perfecting’ (τελειωθείς) by the intervention of God before he could be made (ἐγένετο) High Priest.⁵⁹¹ 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.⁵⁹²

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 Son⁵⁹³ and God is the Father.⁵⁹⁴ 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.

⁵⁹³ Matthew 4:3, 8:29, 14:33, 26:63, 27:40-43; Mark 1:1, 3:11, 15:39; Luke 1:35, 4:3, 8:28, 22:70;

⁵⁹⁴ Matthew 7:21, 10:32, 11:27, 12:50, 16:17, 18:10, 18:19, 20:23, 24:36, 26:39-42; Mark 8:38, 13:32, 14:36; Luke 2:49, 10:22, 22:29, 24:49;

⁵⁹⁵ Mark 10:18; Matthew 19:17, Luke 18:19

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” [διὰ] 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 forevermore”.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 own⁶¹⁸

I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me⁶¹⁹

I do not seek my own glory⁶²⁰

The Father is greater than I⁶²¹

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]

A2.5 - The Later Epistles (c.110)

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.⁶²³ He uses *διὰ* and *ἐν* as Paul did, indicating that Jesus is a mediator.⁶²⁴ Ignatius also expresses his ideas of subordination more explicitly:

And so, just as the Lord did nothing apart from the Father ...⁶²⁵

Be submissive to the bishop and to one another – as Jesus Christ was to the Father, [according to the flesh]⁶²⁶⁶²⁷

Be imitators of Jesus Christ as he is of his Father⁶²⁸

All of you should follow the bishop as Jesus Christ follows the Father⁶²⁹

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".⁶³⁰

Polycarp also follows in this tradition, seeing Jesus as a mediator "through" [*διὰ*] whom God works (like Paul)⁶³¹ and as the "eternal priest" (like the writer to the Hebrews).⁶³²

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, *Smyrneans* 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 miserable⁶³⁶

For though they see their gods ... slain as victims ... they have not perceived that they are not gods⁶³⁷

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”.⁶⁴¹ However 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”⁶⁴² and mediates for God, who Himself does not (cannot) leave the “super-celestial realm”.⁶⁴³ The Father cannot be given a proper name because he is the Creator,⁶⁴⁴ whereas the Son is “properly called” ‘Word’, ‘Christ’ and ‘Jesus’.⁶⁴⁵ Jesus is “another God and Lord **under** the Creator”,⁶⁴⁶ the only (true) God.⁶⁴⁷ The Father “bestowed” power on the Son⁶⁴⁸ and “gives” him glory.⁶⁴⁹ The Son has “the **second** place” in the hierarchy of heaven, and the Holy Spirit the third.⁶⁵⁰

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 Son⁶⁵¹

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.⁶⁵² Irenaeus is also not consistent as to whether the Son is co-eternal⁶⁵³ or was born before Creation.⁶⁵⁴ 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

⁶⁴¹ *Dialogue* 58

⁶⁴² *Dialogue* 129, also see *Dialogue* 56

⁶⁴³ *Dialogue* 60, 127

⁶⁴⁴ “whoever has a proper name received it from a person older than himself” (*Second Apology* 6)

⁶⁴⁵ *Second Apology* 6

⁶⁴⁶ *Dialogue* 56

⁶⁴⁷ *Dialogue* 11

⁶⁴⁸ *Dialogue* 30

⁶⁴⁹ *Dialogue* 65

⁶⁵⁰ *First Apology* 13

⁶⁵¹ *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 47

⁶⁵² “. . . in this way, according to His being and power and essence, one God is demonstrated” (*Demonstration* 47)

⁶⁵³ “always with Him” (*Against Heresies* IV.20.1)

⁶⁵⁴ “born before all Creation” (*Demonstration* 30); “born of God” (*Demonstration* 47)

Jesus to have died.⁶⁵⁵ 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”.⁶⁵⁶ 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.⁶⁵⁷

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 tenacious⁶⁵⁸

Bell is correct to say that “the Platonic scheme was also a subordinationist scheme”,⁶⁵⁹ 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.⁶⁶⁰ Arius was like most fourth century theologians: Arius believed Jesus to be “unchangeable” like God⁶⁶¹ and he used the word “Trinity” when talking of the relation between Father and Son.⁶⁶² 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

⁶⁶² Athanasius, *On the Synods of Arminum and Seleuceia*, 15 – p331 J. Stevenson 1987

could have no temporal beginning and yet remain a distinct person from the Supreme Being (Father).⁶⁶³ It is 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 beliefs⁶⁶⁴ and Arianism achieved “great popularity” under Constantine’s son, Constantius,⁶⁶⁵ creating a controversy that by 341, Chadwick judges, “clearly threatened a schism of the first magnitude”.⁶⁶⁶ This shows that even as late as the fourth century subordinationism, and a belief in the creation of the Son, were widespread.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.

⁶⁶³ p84 R. P. C. Hanson 1988

⁶⁶⁴ His confession of faith (327 AD), while containing the phrase “begotten of Him before all ages”, does not contain *homoousios* or any indication that Arius had actually accepted the Creed of Nicaea (*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)

⁶⁶⁵ p67 *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).

⁶⁶⁶ p139 H. Chadwick 1993

⁶⁶⁷ “the defence of well-established and well-known orthodoxy could not possibly account for such widespread and long-lasting disturbances” (pxix R. P. C. Hanson 1988)

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

⁶⁶⁹ pp109-110 M. Goulder 1994.

⁶⁷⁰ *Against Heresies* 1.26.2

⁶⁷¹ p12 J. K. Elliot 1993

⁶⁷² *Against Heresies* 1.26.2

⁶⁷³ *Against Heresies* 1.25.1

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**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+)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 Didache⁶⁷⁷ and quotes from the gospel of Matthew.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 sins⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁵ p15 J. K. Elliot 1993

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.

⁶⁷⁷ Barnabas 19-20

⁶⁷⁸ Barnabas 4:14

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 *αυτου*, 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 us of the Two Paths material found in both Barnabas and the Didache⁶⁸⁵ 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

⁶⁸⁴ p27 C. Osiek 1999. Osiek does note one possible allusion to the Didache.

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”.⁶⁸⁹ 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.⁶⁹⁰

Now this parable has many familiar elements from the Gospel parables.⁶⁹¹ 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”.⁶⁹² Now while the phrase “the son is the Holy Spirit” is only included in the Vulgate,⁶⁹³ 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”.⁶⁹⁴ 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*

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