

God and the Trinity in the Fathers The First Two Centuries

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The declaration of one God, the Father and Creator of heaven and earth, formed the background and indisputable premise of the faith to the early Church, a faith inherited from Judaism, a faith which marked the dividing line between the Church and paganism. According to Hermas the first commandment is to believe that God is one and that He created and established all things and brought them out of nothingness (Mand. 1.1). For Clement God is the Father and Creator of the entire cosmos (19,2) and for the writer of the so-called letter of Barnabas and for the Didache (1,2) God is our maker, the Lord Almighty, who governs the whole universe and master of all things.

These ideas were derived from the Bible, but found their echo in contemporary philosophy, especially in the writings of the Apologists. Aristides in his Apology to the Emperor Hadrian proves the existence of God from Aristotle's argument from motion, and Justin's language is coloured by the Platonizing Stoicism of his time. Justin went so far as to say that the Greek philosophers derived their ideas from the works of Moses.

The problem, already evident in the New Testament times, was how to integrate the Christ-Event with the belief in one God. The early Church was convinced that God had made Himself known to Man in the Person of Jesus, the Messiah, raising Him from the dead and offering salvation to all men through Him, and that he had poured out his Holy Spirit on the Church. The Church's liturgy and the day to day catechetical practice clearly showed that the Apostolic Church firmly believed that God had sent his Son Jesus who died on the cross, rose again on the third day and ascended into heaven and would return a second time in glory. The writings of

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Ignatius and Justin clearly affirm this: Liturgy confirms this through the baptismal creeds of the early Church, the baptismal creeds for the Jews manifesting belief in Christ the Son of God, and the baptismal creeds for pagans manifesting belief in the Father, Creator and Master of all things and in Jesus Christ who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and in the Holy Spirit who foretold through the prophets the whole story.

Together with these confessional formulas, which later on became integrated in one formula (1), there are also several hymns, some of which we probably find quoted in the New Testament Scriptures (2) and to which reference is made in the famous letter of Pliny the Younger to the Emperor Hadrian: *Carmen Christo quasi deo dicere secum invicem*.

The early Church was fully conscious that the *mysterium Christi* was beyond words, and it grasped it more in a kind of spiritual intuition than in words and formulas. Fixed formulas proclaiming the faith of the Church resulted mainly from the encounter of Christianity with pagan philosophy.

The aim of these formulas was clarification of the relationship of Christ to the Father. The great task of the second century Fathers was to better grasp the data of revelation with the help of Greek philosophy; this proved to be the driving force to theological progress but also the starting point for heresies.

Leaving aside the Judaeo-Christian theology (3) on Christ which is at the basis of many of the apocrypha of the Old and New Testament as well as in Hermas and other writers of the Apostolic times, and leaving aside also the popular picture of Christ by means of which the Christian faith was kept alive in the hearts of the uneducated, a picture resulting from various myths and legends concerning the conception and birth of Jesus, his childhood, his temptations, his transfiguration, his passion, death and ascension, we will begin by considering the teachings of the Fathers of the Church from Clement of Rome onwards. But before doing this we have to make a reference to those, who already in Apostolic times, were trying to *solvere Christum*.

For the Jews the fact that Christ was the Son of God was a stumbling block. This is also true for many Jewish Christians, who are therefore generally included together under the name of Ebionites, so called either because they were followers of a certain Ebion, or because of the poverty of their intelligence or because of their

poor opinion about Christ. Opinions on the Ebionites' writings among scholars are as numerous as the interpretation given to the word Ebionite. To some extent the Ebionites did not consider Jesus as a mere man but they denied the virgin birth and his divine sonship; some hold that they embraced the gnostic idea of the union of a heavenly being with a man Jesus, resulting in the Christ the Son of God.

Another *solutio Christi* was ADOPTIONISM. The first adoptionist was Theodotus the Elder who justified his apostasy by saying that by denying Jesus, he did not deny God, but merely a man. According to him Christ was a mere man specially gifted by God.

DOCETISM takes us to another' extreme: the humanity and sufferings of Jesus are a mere semblance. The term docetism embraces a variety of sects all denying the reality of Christ's flesh.

The theological factor which in the second and early third century tries to dissolve Christ, was Gnosticism. Behind the material traditions and doctrines of Gnosticism, behind the elaborate pseudo-mythological phantasies and rudimentary theories derived from many religions to develop the elaborate myth of a redeeming gnosis, there stood a new experience of God, man and the world. Within the gnostic experience different systems were possible, and that is why we meet with pagan, Jewish, Judaeo-Christian and Christian Gnosticism.

Gnosticism with its pseudo-mythological phantasies could not be a danger to Christianity, but it was a real danger with its attempt to answer the great human questions concerning God, man, the world, the cosmos and history, death and after-life, body, matter and spirit.

Both Christianity and Gnosticism were concerned with man, but for Gnosticism man occupied the centre of the universe, his nature was derived from the world above. The world into existence through the incompetence or the clumsiness or the displeasure of God, and the divine element became imprisoned in the human body; the divine element is hidden in man as a mark of divine self-consciousness and must be redeemed. This divine element, this spark of light, must return to the Logos, the redeemer of the world from which it has fallen: this means the dissolution of man and a return to a pre-existent condition.

Gnosticism therefore is concerned with a physical redemption understood in

the context of a hostility between spirit and matter. In Christianity redemption is freedom from sin.

Gnosticism stems from a real experience of human existence and to explain it Gnosticism takes refuge in mythical genealogies and in magic enriched with elements from Jewish, Christian and other religions.

Christianity differs from Gnosticism in two ways:

- i) The transcendent God retains a constant relationship to the material world He has created: only sin, not matter separates from God. The fall is a historical, not a mythological event. To overcome sin, God intervenes to bring back to himself man in body and soul and the whole world.
- ii) God's action culminated in the incarnation of the Son of God who by his obedience lays the foundation for the restoration of all things in God already accomplished *in figura* in his resurrection.

Gnosticism and Christianity have in common the experience of man and the world and a longing for freedom from death, fate and sorrow: redemption. In Christianity, in contrast with Gnosticism, this experience is founded in the historical act carried out by God in Christ, which while resting on a revelation, in the last resort rests on a spiritual and a moral act accomplished by Christ.

The Apostolic Fathers

The Apostolic Fathers are rather witnesses of the traditional faith than its interpretation. CLEMENT of Rome (4) hardly gives us any hint of the Christian mystery except by mentioning the three persons together in an oath (58,2): "As God lives, and the Lord Jesus Christ lives, and the Spirit, and in the question (46,6) "Have we not one God, and one Christ and one Spirit of grace poured upon us?" Clement is averse to speculation, although a Judaistic and a Stoic tone is evident in his letter. His picture of Christ is developed along the lines of St. Paul (2 Cor 8,9; Phil 2, 5-11) and the letter to the Hebrews (1,2). The pre-existent Son of God, the brightness of the Father, came into the world not with the pomp of pride and arrogance, but in humility (16,2), he came as a man, but he is the High Priest of mankind and their way to blessedness (ch.36); he is above all creatures, King of the world, giver of Divine Gifts, i.e. light, knowledge and immortality. After his exaltation he is united with the Father in glory and receives divine honour.

IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH (5) is more revealing. The centre of Ignatius' teaching is Christ, but he assigns a proper place to the Holy Spirit: through Him Christ was conceived, He was the gift sent by the Saviour, through Him bishops, presbyters and deacons are established and confirmed. The Trinity is mentioned at least three times (Eph 9,1; Magn. 13,1 and 13,2). But much more frequently he speaks of God the Father and Jesus Christ, declaring that there is one God who has revealed Himself through His Son Jesus Christ who is his Word emerging from silence (Magn. 8,2).

Against Docetism and emergent Gnosticism, Ignatius clearly affirmed the objective reality of the Christ-Event and at the same time showed it to be a message about man and his salvation. Like St. Paul, Ignatius lives in the hope of future salvation: he calls Christ our hope and our life: the whole life of the Christian is drawn into a sacramental unity with Christ and thereby receives a sacramental character i.e. participation in Christ's passion, death and resurrection.

As in St. John, Ignatius speaks of the unity of the two kinds of being in Christ, the Logos and the man, as being in continual tension. To emphasize the distinction between the two kinds of being in the one Lord, and the genuineness and completeness of both kinds of being, excluding all hint of semblance (*dokein*), he uses a formula in Eph 7,2 which later on, when the christological controversies reached their climax, was so often used to express the orthodox position: our physician is

our physician is
 corporal and spiritual
 begotten and unbegotten
 in the flesh and God
 in death and true life
 of Mary and of God

first passable and then impassable
 Jesus Christ our Lord

The passage contains two series of statements about Christ, on the left those concerning Christ in the flesh; on the right those which are said about Him as the pre-existent Son of God. The passage is a clear recognition of the two kinds of being in Christ, both kinds of expression referring to one and the same reality, Christ.

The terms *gennetos* (begotten) and *agennetos* (unbegotten) caused difficulties during the Arian controversies, as we will see later on.

The Apologists

With the Apologists we have the first attempt of an intellectually satisfying explanation of the relation of Christ to the Father. Their explanation, reduced to essentials, was that, as preexistent, Christ was the Father's thought or mind, as manifested in creation and revelation. The Apologists based their explanation on the doctrine of the divine Logos, a doctrine familiar to later Judaism and Stoicism. The Apologists developed the Logos idea to explain the twofold fact of Christ's pre-temporal oneness with the Father and his manifestation in the world of space and time. They blended the Old Testament idea that by the Word of God the heavens were made (Ps 33,6) with the Stoic idea of the immanent Logos and the uttered Logos, and developed a theology of economic Trinitarianism, which became to be considered unorthodox only after the Arian crisis, on account of the subordinationism in the Trinity it implies. This explanation is clearly found in the writings of JUSTIN (6), who laid the first foundations of the Logos theology and Christology. Justin develops his ideas within the context of a historical understanding of revelation: basing himself on the prologue of St. John he identifies the Word made flesh with the pre-existent Logos who is also the mediator of creation and revelation. The incarnation – the Word made flesh – was the last link in a chain of events, during which the Logos had earlier already appeared on earth in other circumstances to reveal the will of the Father. The Logos continues being mediator of revelation till the end of the world, till the second Parousia, by being *Nomos* (Law) of the human race – this explains the expansion of Christianity: by believing in the Word, men free themselves from the confusion brought about by the demons who exerted their influence in the world through the *nomos* of the peoples – in Christ a new order has been created in the world.

The starting point of Justin's theology is the notion of the *Logos spermatikos*, i.e. the Logos considered in his activity of implanting a seed (*sperma*) of himself in man i.e. seeds of knowledge in human reason. All men, even pagans, have always possessed as it were, seeds of the Logos, and so were able to perceive some truths. Pagan philosophers had lived in accordance with the Logos, i.e. had had sown in them seeds of the Logos, but they had the Logos only *in part* – seeds – and so they knew the Logos only partially and obscurely, and therefore their teachings were incomplete and false. These pagan philosophers nevertheless were able to participate

more fully in the revelations of the Logos through the Old Testament writings, with which they were familiar; but their knowledge remained always partial. The Old Testament prophets received the Logos in an exceptional way, while Christians possess the whole personal Logos, dwelling with them in the freedom of grace. In Christ finally we have the supreme example of the conjunction of the Logos with man: our religion, says Justin (Apol. II, 10), is more sublime than any other teaching of man because Christ represents the Logos principle in its totality i.e. body and Logos and soul; in other words, the Logos has assumed shape and become man in Christ, he has become incarnate in his entirety in Christ.

According to Justin, the Logos is not only distinct from the Father in name but also numerically distinct because:

- (i) the theophanies of the Old Testament suggest that below the Creator of all things there is another who is also God and Lord since it is inconceivable that the Master and the Father of all things should make himself visible in a minute corner of the world (Dial. 56.4; 60.2)
- (ii) Old Testament passages represent God conversing with another who is a personal being like himself (Dial. 62.2)
- (iii) in Prov. 8, 22 ff. we read that “The Lord created me in the beginning of his ways....” (dial. 129.3)

The Logos being Word and first begotten of God, is also God and therefore to be adored.

According to Justin, the Father created and ordered the universe through His Logos; he revealed himself to man through His Logos. The Logos is God’s offspring and only-Son begotten before all creatures in the beginning; but this begetting does not entail any separation between Father and Son – to explain this Justin makes use of the analogy between human reason and its extrapolation in speech, and between the sun and its light.

TATIAN, a disciple of Justin, speaks of the Logos as existing in the Father as his rationality, and then, through an act of His will, being generated. Tatian put into greater relief than Justin the contrast between the two successive states of the Logos. Before creation the Father was alone, the Logos being immanent in Him as his rationality and His potentiality for creating all things; at the moment of creation the Logos came forth from the Father as His primordial work.

We find the same ideas in THEOPHILIUS OF ANTIOCH and in ATHENAGORAS. Briefly the Apologists:

- (i) When speaking about God the Father, the Scriptures were not speaking of the first Person of the Trinity but of the Godhead;
- (ii) Dated the generation of the Son not from eternity but from the moment of the creation: the Logos from immanent in the Father became “proferred”, was put forth, for the purpose of creation and revelation, from *logos endiathetos* to *Logos proforikos*.

Theophilus was the first Christian author to distinguish between the “immanent” and “proferred” Logos. He was also the first writer to use the term *trias* (trinitas) for the union of the three Persons in the Godhead.

The Apologists often speak of the Son as a *deuteros theos*, a second God – their object is not to subordinate the Son but to safeguard monotheism.

With regard to the Holy Spirit the Apologists have very little to say generally conceiving him as inspiring the prophets; generally they find great difficulties in distinguishing the Spirit from the Logos, v.g. the Spirit of the Most High in Lk 1,35 for the Apologists is not the Holy Spirit but the Logos who being the eternal Dynamis of the Father can himself beget his earthly existence in the womb of a Virgin (Justin Apol. I, 33).

Although Theophilus had already made use of the term *trias*, his contemporary IRENAEUS (7) never uses it. In his refutation of Gnosticism he prefers stressing the fact that God the Creator of the world is also the God of the Old Testament and the Father of the Logos. Although Irenaeus does not discuss the relationships of the Three Divine Persons within the Godhead, he is convinced that the existence of the Three Persons is clearly proved in the history of mankind: they existed before creation as the words: “Let us make man...” are addressed by the Father to the Son and the Holy Spirit, who are often called by Irenaeus, allegorically, the hands of God.

Irenaeus approaches the mystery of God from two directions: (i) in his intrinsic being, (ii) in his *oikonomia*, i.e. in the process of his self revelation.

God is the Father of all things, ineffable and unknowable; from all eternity He contains in Himself his Word and His Wisdom. In making Himself known in creation

and redemption he manifests His Word and His Wisdom as the Son and the Spirit: they are “his hands”, the forms of his self revelation. “Since God is rational, He created whatever was made by His Word”: here we have a conception, so familiar with the Apologists, of the Word as God’s immanent rationality which He prefers at creation. Nevertheless, Irenaeus avoids using philosophical language and refuses the analogy of God’s utterance of His Word with the declaration of human thought in speech, for God is identical with His Logos, and basing himself on Is 53,8 says: *Generationes eius quis enarrabit?*

With the Son Irenaeus closely associates the Spirit: as God is rational He has His Logos, and as God is spiritual He has his Spirit. The Word and the Spirit collaborated in the work of creation being as it were God’s hands: *Manus tuae fecerunt me et plasmaverunt me* (Job 10,8): through the Logos creatures came into existence and the Spirit ordered and adorned them: it is the Word who establishes things, i.e. gives them body and reality of being, and the Spirit gives order and form to these different powers (Demons. 5).

Creation does not exhaust the function of the Logos and the Spirit. God is ineffable and unknowable: it is the Logos who reveals the Father: the Son reveals the knowledge of the Father through his own manifestation – in the Old Testament theophanies it is really the Logos who spoke to the patriarchs. Then at the incarnation the Logos hitherto invisible to human eyes, became visible and disclosed for the first time that image of God in the likeness of which man was originally made.

The Spirit’s role is essential, for without the Spirit it is impossible to behold the Word of God, since the knowledge of the Father is the Son, and the knowledge of the Son of God can only be obtained through the Spirit, and according to the Father’s pleasure the Son ministers the Spirit to whomsoever the Father wills (Demonstr. 7). In other words, our sanctification is the work of the Spirit, for it is the Spirit who purifies man and raises Him to life of God.

Irenaeus, in his approach to the mystery of God in his *oikonomia*, aims at refuting the Gnostic notion of *olkonomia*. The Gnostic *olkonomia* – that of Valentinus – was a planned ordering of salvation, but it excluded the flesh from it, and thus the object of salvation was not the whole man, but only his soul.

Against Gnosticism, Irenaeus asserts the reality of the *substantia domini nostri*, he emphasises the reality of the incarnation and the true historicity of the act of redemption.

In doing this, Irenaeus emphasises against Gnostic dualism, the fact that Christ, God and man, is the embodiment and the real centre of unity in the cosmos and in history.

Non Christian elements – pagan philosophy – have no place in his understanding of Christ – Irenaeus is not a philosopher as Justin but a biblical theologian. His starting point is the Creed. Against the Gnostic dissolution and separation of God from the world, Irenaeus stresses the unity of God, of Christ, of salvation, and develops the idea of one universal *oikonomia* embracing both creation and the *eskaton*, with the Christ-Event at the centre. Creation, incarnation, redemption are different parts of an all embracing *oikonomia*. Christ's contribution to this *oikonomia* is his *anakephalaiosis*: just as in the invisible world the Logos is already head of all beings created through Him, so now in the incarnation He becomes head of the visible and corporeal world and above all head of the Church drawing everything to Himself. This represents the recapitulation of creation and above all of the fallen Adam, a renewing of the whole history of the world and of mankind by Christ the head, from its beginning to its end. The world, history, man are brought to their climax and at the same time they are brought back through Christ to God.

Some scholars have noticed a “Nestorian” ring in the concrete language used by Irenaeus, but we must not forget that at the end of the 2nd century theological language had not yet been fixed, it lacked the refined mode of expression we meet with in the Fathers of the 4th and 5th centuries. Irenaeus wants to stress the unity of the God-man; his concern is with the resurrection of the human body which in Christ had become a participant in the life giving divine power through its union with the Logos. For this reason he stresses that it is the flesh, the *sarx*, which was in need of redemption, although Irenaeus states that it is the whole man who is destined for salvation. It is because of Gnosticism that he lays so much stress on the flesh. But this does not mean that he denies a human soul in Christ. This is a problem belonging to a later period to the 4th century.

Concluding, we can say that in the 2nd century the two main theological problems of the golden age of Patrology are already emerging, i.e. the relationship between the Logos and the Father, and the unity of the Godhead and the Manhood in Christ.

FROM HIPPOLYTUS TO ORIGEN

Foundations for further development in Christology were laid by Origen in the East and Tertullian in the West. The controversy with Gnosticism made the Church

realize the value of a closed biblical and apostolic tradition within the framework of the *regula fidei*. This consciousness was a continual corrective in the trinitarian and christological controversies of the 4th and 5th centuries.

The Church found herself driven to thinking the traditional material of her belief more deeply, because the confession that Christ was the Son of God required a twofold demonstration, i.e. that it was compatible with Jewish monotheism and different from pagan polytheism. The problem was how to combine the unity of the Godhead with the Trinity of the Persons.

Because of Gnosticism, Christian theologians had to show that their belief in God the Father and in His incarnate Son fitted with the whole pattern of the relationship between God and the world – they had to construct a Christian picture of the world and of history. With the help of Stoicism, Middle Platonism and finally Neo-Platonism, Christian theologians saw a possibility of solving the problems just mentioned.

Pagan philosophies gave some little help to explaining the procession of the Son, and the procession of the world, creation and incarnation, but the help was very limited, and this help could easily lead to error if the corrective of faith and apostolic tradition was lacking, for in this case we would have had a hellenization of Christianity.

The process began with the Apologists, with the Logos doctrine of the Apologists, and it reached its first heights with Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria and Origen.

The two sources of the Logos doctrine of the Apologists were Christian tradition (St. John's prologue) and Hellenistic philosophy (Middle Platonism and Stoicism).

The step forward taken by the Apologists was positive: it was only through contemporary philosophy that the Apologists could speak to the intellectuals of their time, but it was always a risk – in fact Arianism was the consequence of the error committed by the Apologists, who considered the Logos as the servant, the angel of the absolutely transcendent Father, a *deuteros theos*. This subordination is still evident in Hippolytus and in Tertullian.

HIPPOLYTUS has a Logos theology which in its emphasis on the history of revelation directly recalls the second century, and above all Irenaeus. According to him, when God willed, He engendered His Word to create the universe, and His

Wisdom to adorn and order it. Later still, with the world's salvation in view, He rendered the Word visible at the incarnation.

Therefore alongside the Father (i.e. the Godhead) there is "an other", a second *prosopon* (person), while the Spirit completed the Triad. There are therefore Three revealed in the *oikonomia*, the Father, the Son who obeys, and the Spirit who makes us understand: the Father who is above all things, the Son who is everywhere, and the Spirit who is in all things. In *Contra Noetum* 10, Hippolytus writes: "When I speak of an other, I do not mean two Gods, but as it were light from light, water from its source, a ray from the sun; for there is only one power, that which issues from All. The All is the Father and the power issuing from Him, and He alone is from the Father."

Hippolytus is reluctant to designate the Word as Son before the incarnation. Against Noetus Hippolytus wants to stress the distinction in the same unity of Father and Logos, and so he stresses the fact of the incarnation, for at the incarnation the Father and the Logos are distinct from each other as now the Logos stands visibly against the Father as "Son". This does not mean that the Logos *qua* Logos came fully to himself at the incarnation; it only means that now the invisible procession of the Logos becomes visible to the world. These two stages are intimately related. At first the Father procreated the Logos as light from light, pronouncing his Word to create the universe – at this stage the Logos was visible to the Father, but invisible to the created universe. At the second stage he made his Logos visible to the world for our salvation. The incarnation is seen by Hippolytus as the unity of the procreation of the Logos from the lips, the heart and the loins of the Father and from David and the Virgin – the incarnation is not simply a coming of the Logos into the world but a procreation in respect of the world. Hippolytus speaks of a twofold birth of the Logos, from God and the Virgin (cfr. Ignatius, Eph. 7,5). The Logos is begotten of the Father, as it were, in the corporeality supplied by the Virgin, and thus is fully revealed as Son. The true Son of God, who has come in the flesh, is the Logos, who is called Son because he has become a man. "This is the new name for the love he has for us, a name he has taken by calling himself Son, for without flesh and in himself the Logos was not true Son, although he was truly Only begotten... and now he has manifested himself as the only Son of God" (C. Noet. 15). In the mystery of the *oikonomia*, the Logos through his birth from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin has shown himself true Son of God.

Hippolytus sees the one Christ in two stages, as the pre-existent Logos *asarkos*

(without flesh) and as the *logos ensarkos* by being born, in the flesh, of the Virgin Mary.

The theophanies of the Old Testament are a prelude to the incarnation, the beginning of the process of the incarnation in the full sense. At first the Logos only appeared “in part”, not in full human form, which he assumed in the incarnation, experiencing every age of man, taking upon himself all the realities of man’s sufferings. This idea, found also in Gnosticism, was later to be developed in the principle: *qued non assumpsit non redemit*.

Hippolytus does not mention, at least explicitly, the problem of the unity of the two natures in the one Christ. We are still far from the technical language developed in the 4th century, but he certainly excludes modalism. Nevertheless in Hippolytus we already meet with expressions which were to become so common later on: the Logos clothes himself with the flesh, he dwells in the body as in a temple: and there is a passage in C. Noetum where he uses the word which later on became a key-word in the Christological controversies of the 4th century. In a fragment from the C. Noetum we read: “The Logos... before the incarnation and when by himself was not perfect Son, although perfect Logos, only begotten; nor could the flesh exist by itself (*hupostanai*), apart from the Logos as it had its existence (*ten sustasin*) in the Logos”. The term *hupostanai* does not have here the technical meaning of subsistence it took later on, but simply “existence” – we are still too far away from a clear formulation of the unity and duality in Christ.

TERTULLIAN had to defend the *regula fidei* against pagan polytheism and against Christian monarchianism as well as against the disruptive tendencies of the Gnosticism of Marcion and Valentinus. In doing this, Tertullian coined his terminology derived from the Bible, Judaism, Gnosticism and the legal language of Rome at his time, thus giving the West its theological formulas long before the East was able to provide its own.

Tertullian’s task was to *probare Christum, probare divinitatem Christi*, (the theme of his *Apologeticum*), and he starts by making clear the Christian conception of God, the singleness of God. To do this he makes use of the concept of *monarchia*, introduced into Christian theology by the Apologists from the Hellenistic Jews of Alexandria. According to Tertullian the deepest mystery of the Christian faith i.e. that God has a Son is expressed by the term *monarchia*. God the Father is the supreme ruler but hands over the administration of the rule to His Son – thus Tertullian sees the *monarchia* in the framework of an economic Trinity. The

monarchia is further guaranteed by the inner unity in substance of Father, Son and Spirit: they are *una substantia*.

Tertullian imagines *substantia* to be some light, fine invisible matter which while being one, is differentiated within itself. Father, Son and Spirit are in the one total reality of God. The Son proceeds from this *una substantia* as it is in the Father and thereby receives his own reality; so does the Spirit, and they are distinguished through the order of their origin. The Father possesses the *substantiae plenitudo*, while the Son and the Spirit have a *portio* – a share – in this *una substantia*, not a *pars* but a share – *Pater enim tota substantia est, filius vero derivatio totius et portio*. With regard to the Logos, Tertullian says in the *Apologeticum*, we are taught that he is derived from God and begotten by derivation so that he is Son of God and called God because of the unity of substance: just as a sunbeam is an extension of the sun, and is one with the substance of the sun and yet distinct from it, so the Son of God is God from God. The *substantia* is not divided but extended on account of the special task to be accomplished by the Son in creation and redemption.

From the *una substantia*, there comes forth a special form of existence, the *status* in which God finds Himself; the Father, Son and Spirit are *tres non statu sed gradu, non substantia sed forma, non potestate sed specie, unius autem substantiae, et unius status et unius potestatis, quia unus deus*. By the status of God, Tertullian understands God's essential properties. The *una potestas* is the keystone of the unity of God. Although three, the Persons are several manifestations of a single invisible power, of a *una potestas* on the analogy of the imperial government – the *monarchia* – the one and same sovereignty exercised by coordinate agencies – the *monarchia* of God is preserved because the Son exercises only the one rule of the Father and gives it back to the Father at the end of this world.

Tertullian continually stresses the fact that the distinction between the Three did not involve division or separation – *distinctio* or *dispositio* but not *separatio* analogically illustrated by the root and its shoot, the source and the river, the sun and its light. The Three are one reality – *unum* – not one Person – *unus*.

Tertullian conceives the Trinity as an economic, organic, dynamic Trinity i.e. the second and third Person proceed from the *unitas substantiae* because they have a task to perform: the divine threeness unfolds itself with a view to creation and redemption. From Tertullian's Trinitarian doctrine logically follows his doctrine on the incarnation: the tri-personality of the one God is an unconditional

presupposition of his doctrine on the incarnation.

We must not confuse Tertullian's *monarchia* with monarchianism, which Tertullian refuted in his *Contra Praxeam*, who applied his trinitarian modalism also to the incarnation, interpreting Christ as the manifestation of the Father by saying that the Father became man and suffered (patripassianism), and by explaining that when the Scriptures ascribe the incarnation to the Son, they meant that the flesh was the Son: *Ecce, inqulunt haeretici (Praxeas) ab angelo praedicatum est: Propterea quod, nascetur sanctum vocabitur filius Dei. Caro itaque nata est, caro itaque erit filius Dei.* (Adv. Prax. 27, 4) *Filium carnem esse, id est hominem, id est lesum, Patrem autem spiritum, id est Deum, id est Christum* (ib. 27, 1).

Tertullian begins from trinitarian presupposition and introduces the Logos (Tert. uses the terms *Sermo* and *Spiritus*) as a person – *persona*. Before proceeding further, what meaning does Tertullian give to the term *persona*? He gives it the meaning of human individuality, and in this meaning it had already been accepted by a number of theologians at the end of the 2nd century with reference to the Trinity. A person is a being who acts and speaks. Now God the Father and the Son speak one with the other, the Bible uses the plural for God, it reports different *voces* which must therefore belong to different persons. Therefore, Tertullian concludes, the Logos is substance and person: *quaecumque ergo substantia sermonis fuit, illam dico personam* (Adv. Prax. 7, 9) for person is only realised in a substance and in a special reality in the substance.

The one *substantia* in God has three figures or forms: *species, gradus, personae*, by virtue of a distinction in the one divine substance (the *substantia* becomes a person when it has added to it the characteristics, the individual properties of the particular *ens concretum physicum*) these properties which Tertullian calls *species, forma, character*. The *una substantia* of the Godhead has three *species, gradus, personae*.

The Logos (*Sermo* according to Tertullian) already has a particular reality, a *status*, a *persona* in God. Assuming human nature this person of the Son has now a twofold *status*, Godhead and manhood: *vidimus duplicem statum, non confusum sed coniunctum in una persona, deum et hominem lesum*.

This *duplicem statum* is a permanent reality because the Godhead and the manhood in Christ are not mixed, but conjoined in *una persona*. To interpret the

unity of Christ, Tertullian makes use of the Stoic *krasis* doctrine. Tertullian, in the case of Christ, excludes the *mixtio secundum confusionem* of the Stoics i.e. the mixture of two substances which results in a *tertium quid*, for in this case there would be a *transfiguratio* and a *demutatio substantiae*; he also excludes a *iuxtapositio* for in this case there is no unity; but between these two, Stoics admitted a third type of union, a *mixtio* i.e. when two solid bodies compenetrates each other maintaining their co-natural characteristics and *concretio* i.e. the complete mutual penetration of two fluid bodies which maintain their corresponding properties. The *coniunctio* of the Godhead and the manhood in Christ is not to be explained as a *confusio* nor as a *iuxtapositio*, but as a *duo in uno esse*.

Tertullian stressed continually the reality of the incarnation; he even wrote a treatise *De carne Christi* to show that Christ was really born from a Virgin, and not that He had come into the world through a Virgin as the Gnostics taught. He was also subject to the *passiones humanae*, hunger, thirst, etc.

In *De carne Christi* Tertullian makes use of the early Christian practice of the *communicatio idiomatum* although later in the *Adv. Praxeam* he checks somewhat his language clearly distinguishing what belongs to the Godhead and what to the manhood. In *De carne Christi* we read: "The Son of God was crucified, I am not ashamed because men must need be ashamed, the Son of God died: it is by all means to be believed, because it is absurd; he was buried and rose again: the fact is certain because it is impossible."

The *in una persona* of Tertullian which was the key to the solution of the Christological problem at Chalcedon, remained unnoticed for two centuries, and only towards the end of the 4th century, in St. Jerome, and later, after 411, with Augustine, it acquired a new theological significance.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA's theology has the idea of the Logos at its beginning and basis: he made the Logos the highest principle for the religious explanation of the world: the Logos is the creator of the universe, the source and teacher of all gnosis, i.e. the ideal of all contemplative life involving separation from the visible world and communion with the intelligible realities. The Logos manifested God in the Law of the Old Testament, in the philosophy of the Greeks and finally, in the fulness of time, in his incarnation. He forms with the Father and the Holy Spirit the divine triad. It is through the Logos that we can recognise God, for the Father cannot be named as he is completely transcendent, ineffable,

incomprehensible. The Father (i.e. the Godhead) can be known only through His Logos, who is his image and inseparable from Him.

Clement's ideas are derived from Jewish-Alexandrian philosophy, Neo-Platonism, Middle Platonism and also from Gnosticism. Like the *nous* of Middle Platonism and Neo-Platonism, the Logos is at the same time unity and plurality, comprising in Himself the Father's ideas and also the active forces by means of which he animates the world of creatures, for the Logos is the image of the Father, he is his mind or rationality, inseparable from him. His generation from the Father is in him and He in the Father. The Spirit is the light issuing from the Logos, illuminating the faithful and pervading the world as the power of the Logos attracting men to God.

Clement clearly distinguishes the Three, although his language might have shades of Modalism, but this is due only to lack of the technical terms which came later; but Clement admits a certain subordination in the Trinity due to Platonic influences.

For Clement the special role of the Logos is the communication of the *gnosis*: he reveals the "secret tradition", in contrast to the common Christian tradition, a secret tradition reserved only for the "gnostics" who find it in the Scriptures hidden under the veils of symbolism (all Scripture is to be interpreted allegorically). The Logos alone can teach *gnosis* for he alone can enter the innermost sanctuary of the holy of holies, being the high priest himself (ideas in Philo and Gnosticism).

Like Justin, Clement sees in the theophanies of the Old Testament a preparation of the incarnation, which nevertheless is something altogether new. The incarnate Logos, while retaining his transcendence, which he has in common with the Father, enters history and completes the Old Testament theophanies, becoming the centre of all history.

Through incarnation the Logos becomes visible: he begets himself (Clement applies Lk 1, 35 to the Logos), but this does not mean that he has become twofold, he is one and the same who is begotten of the Father in eternity and becomes flesh.

Through the incarnate Logos, the Father is made visible and manifest, and thus the Logos is the *prosopon* of the Father, but this is so because the Logos is the *Imago* of the invisible God from all eternity.

Clement imagines three different stages of existence of the Logos with the Godhead: the first stage the Logos is the mind of God which contains his thought, and at this stage he is identical with God; the next stage is when the Logos becomes a separate hypostasis, distinct from the Father and thus he is the immanent law of the universe, the soul of the world; the third stage is being the revelation of the Father. Here again we notice the influence of Jewish Alexandrian philosophy, Middle and Neo-Platonism. To the threefold stage of the Logos in the Godhead, corresponds the threefold stage of the revelation of the Logos to the world, in creation, in incarnation, in the Church, for in the Church the Logos is father, mother, guardian, teacher and nourisher, he is the divine pedagogue.

Clement keeps his distance from Middle Platonism when he identifies the pre-existent Logos with the historical person of Christ, and stresses the fact of the descent of the Logos in the flesh, although he has been suspected of docetism. But this is due to the fact that Clement allowed himself to become enamoured of the Greek concept of *apatheia* i.e. emancipation from all passions, a condition which should be attained by the true gnostic. Clement actually distinguishes two types of *pathe*, one necessary for the preservation of the body, the other a suffering of the soul: the true gnostic will free himself from this second *pathe*. In Christ the *pathe* of the soul is unthinkable. The *pathe* of the body is necessary for ordinary man to maintain his bodily life, but in Christ it was not necessary, for the indwelling holy power in him – the indwelling Logos – substituted the impulses to which ordinary men are subject (v.g. pangs of hunger). In this idea we can see the influence of the Stoic *hegemonikon* i.e. the principal part of the soul, the soul of the soul, the seat of free will decision and power of thought. The Logos, according to Clement, it seems, is the *hegemon* in Christ: when the original appears, the copy loses its place and function: the Logos in the “inner man”, in Christ, is the all predominating physical principle. This should imply that the Logos substituted the human soul in Christ, but accusing Clement of Apollinarianism would be too harsh: the problem of Christ’s human soul had not yet risen, it had not even been thought of.

ORIGEN is the first Christian systematic theologian. His doctrine of the Trinity can be understood only with reference to his spiritual teachings. All his speculation about the mystery of the Trinity is a reflection of this speculation on the soul’s ascent to God.

Origen’s doctrine is mainly found in the *Peri arkon*, the first *Summa Theologica*; in this work Origen wanted *seriem quandam et corpus ex horum omnium ratione*

perficere, ut manifestis et necessariis assertionibus de singulis quibusque quid sit in vero rimetur et unum... corpus efficit. Cfr. also *C. Celsum*, and *Comm. in Evang. Ian* and *De Oratione*.

“God,” says Origen, “is *ex omni parte monas (one) et ut ita dicam hinas (unity)*... *incomprehensibilis, inaestimabilis, impassibilis.*” Yet man can naturally arrive at knowing God by freeing himself from matter. But God is also *trias* (trinity): Father, Son and Spirit.

Starting from the Incarnation, as expressed in the Creed, he states that the Son is God, distinct from the Father begotten from eternity and consubstantial with the Father.

Origen knew modalism, which he firmly opposed: “There are people who say that the Father and Son are not numerically distinguishable, separable only in thought, one not only in substance but also in subsistence. The truth is that the Son is other in subsistence (*hupokeimenon*) than the Father, they are two in respect of their Persons (*duo te hupostasei*) but one in unanimity, in harmony and identity of will.”

Speaking of the unity of the Three Persons, Origen sometimes represents it as a moral union (their wills are identical) or as the union of man and wife in one flesh, but these are only analogical expressions which do not reflect Origen’s real teaching which is based on the fact that the Son has been begotten, not created from all eternity – *non enim dicimus, sicut haeretici putant, partem aliquam substantiae Dei in filium versam ex nullis substantibus filium procreatum a Patre, i.e. extra substantiam suam, et fuerit aliquando quando non fuerit, sed abscisso omni sensu corporeo, ex invisibili et incorporeo Verbum et sapientiam genitam dicimus absque ulla corporali passione, velut si voluntas procedata mente* (*De princ.* 4, 28).

This passage clearly states (i) the Son is not a part (*pars*) of the substance of the Father i.e. when the Son was generated a part of the divine *ousia* was not separated from the Father and attained a distinct subsistence; (ii) the generation of the Son was not an act which had a beginning and an end, but it is *ab aeterno*, an eternal act as light continually generates its splendour.

Therefore, the Son is God *kat’ousian*, in essence, not by participation: He is of the same substance (*homo ousios*) of the Father. The term *homo ousios*

(consubstantial) which was the keyword to express the orthodox teaching against Arianism in the following century, may not have been used by Origen, for the Greek text of the fragment from his commentary in *Ep. ad Hebraeos* is quoted in Latin by Pamphilus in his Apology for Origen. The Latin text reads: *Sic et sapientia ex Deo procedens, ex ipsa substantia Dei generatur. Nihilominus et secundum similitudinem nudam corporalis aporrhoeae (effluence) esse dicitur aporrhoea gloriae omnipotentis pura et sincera. Ouse utraeque similitudines manifestissime ostendunt communionem substantiae esse filio cum patre. Aporrhoea enim homocosa videtur i.e. unius substantiae cum illo corpore ex quo est vel aporrhoea vel vapor.*

With regard to the Holy Spirit, Origen is very reticent. According to Origen the problems about the Holy Spirit had not been yet fully studied. Though he never doubted the divinity of the Holy Spirit, and held that nowhere is there evidence that the Spirit was *factura vel creatura*; for him the Spirit was eternal and had the same dignity and holiness of the Father and the Son, although he complained that there were people *minore quam dignum est de eius divinitate sentientes*; nevertheless he held that the problems *utrum Sp. S. sit natus an innatus vel filius Dei habendus sit necne* were still open to discussion. Origen, basing himself on St. John's prologue, (*omnia per ipsum facta sunt*), questions the manner of the Spirit's origin. The Holy Spirit is not *agenetos* – the Father alone is so – therefore his origin is *per Filium*, the first of all things produced a *Patre per Filium*. Origen thus distinguishes the origin of the Spirit from that of the Son: the latter is directly generated from the Father. The Spirit's origin is a *Patre per Filium*, but the Spirit's origin is not a *generatio*. The Son is *Unigenitus*, there cannot be another Son in the Trinity. This solution was later fully developed by Gregory of Nyssa.

Origen has been accused of subordinationism by St. Jerome, Theophilus of Alexandria and Justinian and accused of being a precursor of Arianism. This second charge is unjust, but the charge of subordination is serious and it is due to the fact that the underlying structure of thought in Origen is contemporary Platonism.

The Father alone is *autotheos* and *ho theos*, the Son is only *theos* not *ho theos* and merits only a secondary degree of honour for He is not absolute goodness or truth, but His goodness and truth are a reflection of the Father's goodness and truth, and the Son is the Father's agent executing His orders in creation. Therefore we should not pray to Christ but to the Father only. Whereas the Father's actions extend to all reality, the Son's are limited to rational beings, and the Spirit's to those being sanctified. Origen's Platonism led him to conceive a whole world of spiritual beings,

coeternal with the Father, in relation to the Logos, just as the Logos, at a higher level was in relation to the Father. These spiritual beings were images of the Logos, just as the Logos, at a higher level was in relation to the Father. These spiritual beings were images of the Logos as the Logos was of the Father. (8)

Briefly Origen's Trinity has the Father as the source and goal of all existence, transcending mind and being itself. Being perfect goodness and power He must have always had objects on which to exercise his goodness and power, and so brought into existence a world of spiritual beings co-eternal with himself. To mediate between His absolute unity and their multiplicity He has his Son, His express image, the meeting place of a plurality of "aspects" – *epinoiai* – which explain his twofold relation to the Father and the world. These *epinoiai* stand for the manifold characteristics of the Logos either in His eternal being (Wisdom, Truth, Life) or as incarnate (Shepherd, Physician, Priest, etc). These *epinoiai* are partly absolute, and partly relative ("for us" as our sanctification, our redemption, etc). These *epinoiai* can be also classified as those given only to Christ, those proper to Christ and to others, those which describe Christ in relation to others v.g. shepherd.

The Father also is Truth, Wisdom, Holiness, but in the Father these *epinoiai* are not objectively manifest because of His simplicity and transcendence; in the Son they have an objective multiplicity, for the Son, according to the Scriptures, has many names. Christ is *multiplex in constitutione* and therefore has a number of titles not only because of his redemptive role but also in respect of his constitution, Christ is called Wisdom, Power, Life, Logos, etc. already in his divine nature. By virtue of the supreme and first *epinoiai* i.e. in so far as He is wisdom, he is already a multiplicity: "*sapientia*" Dei "*multiplex*" dicitur, ut per haec mereamur participium sumere "*sapientiae Dei*" qui est "*Christus*" *Jesus Dominus noster* (In *lesu Nave VII*, 7).

As revelation of the Father and his mediator towards the world, He shows the transcendent properties of the Father in their objective inexpressible reality. Christians on their part, by means of participation can express these perfections of Christ, and further unfold the *epinoiai*: through the knowledge of these perfections we ascend to the Father. Applying this to the quotation above, we can say that Christ reveals to us the Wisdom of the Father, making us participate in it, and thus leading us towards the Father. The starting point of the soul's ascent to God is Christ's manhood: the way to the Logos-God is through the Logos – incarnate. With the progress of the ascent of the soul the manhood of Christ becomes more

and more (and finally in the beatific vision completely) transparent for the Godhead. The manhood of Christ is a filter – like the Scriptures – through which the Godhead is imparted in accordance to the capability of man. Ordinary Christians limit themselves to a literal reading of the Scriptures, the gnostic is able to see its spiritual meaning: the ordinary Christian remains attached to Christ's manhood, the true gnostic strains upward to the Logos, the soul's authentic life from which it originally fell away.

Christ's manhood was real – there is no sign of Docetism in Origen. The incarnation is the real new element in the New Testament, for it meant the real arrival of the Logos in the world. The incarnation was a real historic event, even though Origen, in his doctrine of the ascent seems to imply that Christ's incarnation is only relative and supposes that at some point corporeality would cease, being totally absorbed in the divinity. Nevertheless, the conjunction of the Logos with the human soul, which he assumed, is permanent.

In the manhood of Christ, the Godhead is present in all its fulness though hidden through the *kenosis*: the conjunction of the Godhead to the manhood of Christ is achieved through the mediacy of the soul of Christ between the *sarx* and the Logos. Christ's human soul had already been united from eternity to the Logos in complete understanding and love of God, Logos and human soul of Christ are conjoined through direct vision of love as spirit to spirit: completely united to the Logos in adoring contemplation, it properly belonged to a body, and thus formed the ideal meeting point between the infinite Logos and the finite human nature.

Origen insists on the duality of the nature in Christ: he even speaks of His *hypostasis* as man and his *hypostasis* as Only-begotten; interpreting Psalm 72, 1 he explains the king and king's son as referring respectively to the nature of the Word and the man whom He assumed. Both natures retained their special characteristics, the Logos remaining Logos in essence and undergoes none of the experiences of body and soul, whereas the human nature has to put up with the customary human lot. But the incarnate Lord is one, a unity, an actual union – *henosis*, a commingling, an *anakrasis*, resulting in the deification of the human nature. The Logos and the humanity are really one because the Logos has united himself substantially to Christ's human soul in a union more intimate than he ever effected with the souls of prophets or apostles by inspiration and grace.

This explanation could lead on to a false trial, for it could imply that the union

of the Logos with Christ's human soul was only "quantitatively" different from the union of the Logos with the just through grace.

Nevertheless Origen considers the union of the Logos and the human soul of Christ as a mystery, and points out that the final grounds of the difference between the union of the Logos and the human soul of Christ and the indwelling of the Logos in the just, is that in Christ the Logos is the *hegenmonikon*, the guiding principle. From this point Origen could have arrived at an interpretation of the unity of Christ through the concept of "person", for the real personality of man is rooted in his *hegenmonikon*; but Origen lacked this concept of "person".

Origen is a key witness of the traditional teaching of the soul of Christ, although mixed with strong philosophical elements, and he already advances the notion, already met with in Tertullian, that the whole man could not be redeemed had the whole man not been assumed by the Logos.

From Origen to the Council of Nicea

During this period two men emerge – Sabellius and Paul of Samosata – who were to arouse momentous reaction for centuries afterwards. Sabellius gave a systematic philosophical shape to the Modalism of the 2nd century. According to him, the Godhead expressed itself in three operations: the Godhead regarded as creator and lawgiver was Father; the Godhead as Son projected itself as a ray from the sun, for our redemption, and once accomplished it withdrew itself back; the Godhead as Spirit inspires and bestows grace. The three persons are simply outward appearances of the Godhead – the Godhead takes three different appearances according to its operations *ad extra*.

These ideas were in direct opposition to the teachings of the Alexandrians (Clement, Origen) who clearly acknowledged the distinction of the three hypostases in God, and especially the distinction between the Father and the Son.

DIONYSIUS, the head of the school of Alexandria after Heracles, who succeeded Origen and was head of the school for one year, strongly opposed Sabellianism, and in so doing perhaps he went so far and seems to have advocated tritheism.

From Athanasius we know that some bishops from the Pentapolis had embraced Sabellianism and accused Dionysius, who had become bishop of Alexandria, of

tritheism. The charges were the following:

- i. He separated the Father and the Son;
- ii. He denied the eternity of the Son;
- iii. He named the Father without the Son and the Son without the Father;
- iv. He rejected the term *homoousios* with regard to the Son;
- v. He spoke of the Son as a creature of the Father.

The Pope, Dionysius by name also, wrote to the Church of Alexandria taking the via media between Sabellianism and tritheism, condemning all those who “destroy God dismembering him in three forces and three separate deities and hypostases. Sabellius blasphemes God in saying that the Son is the same as the Father and viceversa, but they (the followers of Dionysius of Alexandria) proclaim three gods.... It is necessary that the divine Logos be united with the God of the universe and that the Holy Spirit also dwell and abide in God...”

Dionysius of Alexandria answered the charges against him in four books:

- i. He denies separating the Father and the Son: his argument proceeds from the terms ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ which mutually determine each other.
- ii. He grounded the eternity of the Son in the fact that He is the Logos, wisdom and power of God, and also from the fact that the Logos is termed the reflection of the eternal light (Hebr 1, 3). If light is always there, so is its reflection; if the Father is eternal, so is the Son as the terms are correlative. This is also the answer to the third charge.
- iii. Dionysius did not use the term *homoousios* because it is not found in the Scriptures, and because it only expressed in a limited way what he wanted to state with similar terms and certain comparisons: he wanted to express at the same time both the unity of and the distinction between those who are *homoousioi*, the Father and the Son. Though he did not use the term, he never rejected it. And then we should not expect too much of Dionysius here – there were still many years of long discussions before the term was accepted in the meaning it received in the Nicene Creed.
- iv. Dionysius perhaps compromised himself by speaking of the Son as a *poiema* of the Father, although he never meant to say that the Son was the work of the Father and that the Father was the maker of the Son – the comparisons he brings i.e. shipbuilder and ship, farmer and vine, were misleading, for he only meant to imply the pre-eminence of the Father. (9)

Athanasius tried to defend his predecessor by saying that he was speaking of Christ's manhood. Basil is more outspoken and says that Dionysius was the first person to have sown the seed of godlessness, for he gave Arius some footholds, some slogans; Arius even quoted Dionysius as his authority, together with the Scriptures.

Another writer who could be accused of having prepared the way for Arius, is THEOGNOSTUS, but of his writings only a few fragments have survived in the writings of Photius, who was particularly concerned with the use of the term *ktisma* (creature) with reference to the Son – but Theognostus was using the term in the same meaning as *poiema* by Dionysius of Alexandria – he did not mean to imply that the Son was created by the Father, but that he proceeded from the Father. Though subordinating the Son to the Father, he did not deny his divinity – the Logos was *deuteros theos*.

For Theognostus the Logos, the Son is still on the side of God, while for Arius, he is among the creatures.

Scholars feel that it is very difficult to say what were actually the teachings of PAUL OF SAMOSATA, as what we know of them are from his opponents. Generally he is considered as an Adoptionist. According to the synodal letter preserved in part by Euseblus in his Eccl. Hist. VII, 30, Paul denied the divinity of Christ: Christ has not come down from heaven but was from below. Later writers say that Paul taught that the Logos indwelt in a man with body and soul. The synod at Antioch, which deposed Paul, condemned the term *homoousios* as being unfit to describe the relation between Father and Son, but we do not know what meaning Paul was giving to the term – perhaps it had a modalist meaning. Paul's chief opponent was the priest Malchion, who, it seems held that Christ's unity of Logos and sarx corresponded to the unity of body and soul in man, which might imply that the Logos substituted the human soul in Christ (Apollinarianism). We can therefore say that the seeds of Arianism, Apollinarianism and some aspects of Alexandrian theology were sown during this period.

The last orthodox subordinationists were Euseblus of Caesarea and Lactantius.

EUSEBIUS was no theologian: this is quite evident from the fact that while confessing the orthodox faith, his theological reflection was often unorthodox. He clearly confesses "Jesus Christ, God from God, light from light", but when

interpreting the relationship between the Father and the Son of God he adopts a very difficult position. He wants to stress the singleness of God, monotheism, and so for him only the Father is *ho theos*, the Father is the only God, who has received his Godhead from nature i.e. from no one else. The Son occupies second place having received the Godhead from the Father – the relationship between Father and Son is the same as that between the original and its representation.

Eusebius solved the problem posed by Christian monotheism in terms of Origenist subordinationism, but Eusebius' subordinationism was more acute than that of Origen.

There is a supreme *hypostasis*, the 'first God', the one Father, 'wisdom unbegotten and without beginning'. The Son is 'second', *deuteros theos*, 'second lord'. While the Father has absolute primacy in rule, the Son is allotted only the second role in his reign. Subordination is expressed in the order of sovereignty. Influenced by Middle Platonism, Eusebius reduces the role of the Logos to that of a mediator between the uncreated God and the created beings. The Logos is the helmsman who directs the ship of the world according to the instructions of the Father who stands far above him; the Logos is always considered as the instrument of the Father, to carry out or restore the order of the Father; his chief task is to reveal the truth about God and educate all men in morality.

Eusebius hardly refers to the Holy Spirit in his writings; and he considers him the first of all creatures. For Eusebius the origin of the Logos is mysterious, incomprehensible to the human mind. He was the last to subscribe to the *homoousios* at Nicea and he never used the term: though begotten but not created, the Logos is not of the same substance of the Father, and he has no divinity of his own right. For Eusebius the incarnation is the supreme instance of the theophanies; the law of adaptation to corporeal men required that the incarnation be the last of the ways taken by the Logos. In visible form, Christ became teacher of knowledge of God and victor over death and the devil. The body is the clothing, the abode, the temple of the Logos, who is the decisive element in the total reality of the incarnate Christ. The *anima mediatrix* of Origen has disappeared for Eusebius cannot see the use of a human soul in Christ.

- i. the Son dwelling in the flesh, distinct from the Father, but begotten from Him and similar to Him;
- ii. by the unity of the Logos-Son and the *sarx*, Christ transcends the usual universal

nature; he is no mere man but a naturally higher being; Eusebius seems to make Christ a sort of mythical being between divinity and the created world;

iii. the Logos indwelling in the *sarx* physically accomplishes the spiritual actions by which he achieves God's pleasure; it is the Logos who is the moving element in the *sarx*. All soteriological acts are derived from the Logos. In the flesh the Logos proves himself before the Father and gains his good pleasure even in the voluntary acceptance of death. But because he is God he is not exposed to mutability and sin like angels. Christ has no real 'human' existence; all his soteriological acts are acts of the Logos qua Logos. What hindered Eusebius from making a true evaluation of the human element in Christ was his fear of the notion that Christ was a mere man.

LACTANTIUS was born in North Africa, but became a Christian in the East at Nicomedia in Bithynia. His most important works is the *DIVINAE INSTITUTIONES* where he tried to answer two pressing problems:

- i. how can Christianity confess monotheism, when it believes in the Son of God?
- ii. how can Christianity speak of the incarnation of God?

His solution to these two problems does not go beyond what Tertullian had taught. In both Father and Son there is one *mens*, one *spiritus*, one *substantia*. But the Father is like the spring and the Son the brook flowing from it. Lactantius also uses the term *portio*. While Tertullian used the analogy *monarchia*, Lactantius used that of the *paterfamilias* to show that distinction must be made between Father and Son in the one God. The Son belongs to the side of God and not to that of created things; he participates in the transcendence and unknown ability of the Father; he issues from the Father. But also 'spirits' issue from God – what is therefore the difference between them and the Son?

Lactantius makes use of an analogy from man: *sermo est spiritus cum voce, aliquid significante, prolatus* – words are a breath (*spiritus*) which is produced by the voice giving it a meaning – the word is produced in the *mens* and the *spiritus* is the breath, the vehicle by means of which the voice gives a meaning. But man also breathes (*spirat*) through the nose, therefore one must distinguish between the *sermo spiritus* the *vocalis spiritus*, the words and the *spirationes* (breathings). Analogically the Logos corresponds to the *vocales spiritus* while angels correspond to the *spirationes*. Angels, because spirationes of God are immortal, but they are not His Word, his Logos.

With reference to the incarnation, Lactantius tries to answer the question *Cur Deus homo?* He has different answers: He is the heavenly teacher, the bringer of divine knowledge, a model of virtue. To do this he had to assume a human body. Therefore incarnation means the proving of a heavenly being, in corporeality, so that he becomes a model to instruct fallen men. The Son is pre-existent, born of God before the world and thus not a creature; but also born in time, but the twofold birth of Christ does not destroy the unity of Christ: in his birth from God and by his birth from Mary, Jesus appears as the *homo coelestis*, a ‘middle being’ between the supreme God and all created beings, a sort of mythical being – Arianism is only a step away.

(*To be continued*)

NOTES

1. A study of the earliest history of the Creed reveals two distinct forms: the christological and the trinitarian formulas. The most primitive form of the Creed is found in the Acts of the Apostles (8,37): Philip baptised the eunuch of Ethiopia after the latter had professed his faith thus: “I believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God”. Other christological formulas are found in the letters of St. Paul and in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, e.g. “His Son, who was made to him of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was predestinated Son of God in power, according to the spirit of sanctification by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. (Rom 1,3). See also 1 Cor 15,3; 1 Peter 3, 18–22). Besides the christological formula there was also a trinitarian formula for the baptismal rite, and we find a reference to this formula in Justin’s Apology: candidates of baptism receive the washing with water” in the name of God the Father and Lord of the universe and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit. The trinitarian formula became the dominant form, and within it we find incorporated a christological formula which St. Ignatius of Antioch recalls in his letter to the Trallenses: “Jesus Christ who was of the race of David and of Mary, who was truly born ... was persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died ... who was also truly raised from the dead...” The earliest form of the ordination formula is found in the *Traditio Apostolica: Credo in Deum Patrem omnipotentem et in Christum Iesum, filium Dei, qui natus de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine, et crucifixus sub Pontio Pilato et mortuus et sepultus. Et resurrexit die tertia vivus ex mortuis, et ascendit in caelis et sedit ad dexteram Patris venturus iudicare vivos et mortuos. Et in Spiritum Sanctum et sanctam ecclesiam et carnis resurrectione.* This was the Baptismal Creed of the Roman Church and as early as the fourth century a tradition about it had spread over the whole western Church, attributing its composition to the Apostles before leaving the Cenacle to go into the world to preach the Good News. (Cfr. J. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 1, chap. I Utrecht 1950).
2. Ef 1, 3–10; Phil 2, 6–11; Col 1, 12–20 1 Tim 3, 16; 1 Peter 2, 21–24; Apoc 4,11; 5,9–2; Apoc 11, 17–18; Apoc 15, 3–4; Apoc 19, 1–7.
3. A characteristic of Judeo-Christian theology is the use of terms derived from Angelology to indicated the Logos and the Holy Spirit. In early times, the term “Angel” was applied to Jesus, but was no longer used after the 4th century on account of Arianism. The main sources for the use of the term, are
 1. the expression MALA’K JAHWE which in the Old Testament frequently indicated a theophany,

which Christians attributed to the Logos;

2. in the Judaism of the centuries immediately preceding the birth of Christ, angels were the intermediaries between God and man. Among the Jews themselves, the Logos was called an Angel v.g. Philo considers the Logos as the chief among the Angels, the MALA'K JAHWE, the *protos angelos*.

The term 'Angel' indicated a supernatural Being manifesting himself – it was the Semitic term indicating the Logos and the Holy Spirit as spiritual substances, as person. 'Angel' is the archaic term indicating 'Person' in the mystery of the Trinity.

II. The Logos (in The Shepherd of Hermas) is the “glorious Angel”, “the Most Vulnerable Angel”, clearly distinguished from the angel (the shepherd or the angel of penance) who visits and assists Hermas because (i) it is the glorious angel who sends the shepherd to Hermas (5th Vision), (2) therefore the glorious angel is the one who sends angels, *qui mittit angelos suos spiritus*.

- ii. it is the most venerable angel who justifies those who have done penance (5th precept), and justification belongs to God alone;
- iii. to the “glorious angel of the Lord” in the 8th Similitude various divine actions are attributed: he confers the crown, the white robe, the palms (Cfr. Apocalypse 2, 10; 7,3; 7,9).
- iv. “the glorious angel” is of immense height surpassing all other angels.

III. Contrary to common usage, Hermas spoke of six (not seven) archangels, and of a “glorious man of great height” who is the Son of God (9th similitude), which he identifies with the Archangel Michael (8th sim.) who in Jewish tradition was the chief of the archangels and prince of all the angels. Christians applied to the Logos the title *archestrategos* which the Jews gave to Michael the Archangel.

The identification of St. Michael with the Logos is also found in 2 Henoah (12, 11–16), in the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs (Edan 6,8), in the Homilies attributed to Clement of Rome (18, 4).

The Logos was also sometimes identified with the Archangel Gabriel (in the Epistle of the Apostles; Sybilline Oracles), while in St. Justin (Apol. 75, 2) he is identified with the Angel of Israel, and Origen (De Principiis 1, 3, 4) states that he had learned from a Jew (Philo) that the Logos and the Holy Spirit were to be identified with the two Seraphim of Isaias 6, an interpretation which St. Jerome wholly rejects. This identification seems to be found also in the Proof of the Apostolic Preaching of St. Irenaeus (ch. 10).

The names of Jesus – One of the most important titles given to Christ in the Jewish-Christian Communities was that of the “name” of God. This title was soon abandoned on account of its unintelligibility in the Grecian milieu.

In the Old Testament the title indicated Jahwe in his ineffable reality; in other words it corresponded to the Greek *ousia*. It also indicated the Power of God in accomplishing His works.

In the New Testament the title receives a new connotation. In the New Testament Scriptures, it has often the same meaning as in the Old Testament, but sometimes it is applied also to the Son, but mainly to indicate the unity of nature of the Son with the Father.

In the first century writings, the title is applied to the Son as a Person distinct from the Father. (Cfr. *Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* and the Shepherd of Hermas, 49th similitude) and references made to those who carry the Name of the Lord. This expression may have a liturgical meaning. In

fact it seems to imply a *signatio* which indicated the name of God (the letter 'Tau' for the Jews which became an X for the Greeks – later on this was interpreted as being the first letter of Christos, and also as symbolising the cross).

The title is also used to indicate Christ in the eucharistic prayers of the Didache, and in this case, it may also be an invocation of the Christ (an *epiclesis*).

It is also used in connection with persecution, in the Acts (5, 41), St. Paul (Eph 1, 2;3,1) speak of sufferings for His Name; this is also true of Hermas (Vis. 3, Sim. 9). But the text which clearly establishes the fact that in primitive Christianity the title "Name of God" indicated the Person of the Son, is the *Evangelium Veritatis* discovered at Nag Hammadi; though Gnostic in character the passage which speaks of the Name as distinct from the Father is orthodox. The passage in question is the following: "Now the ideal is to come to know Him who is hidden. He is the Father from Whom the Beginning came forth and towards whom all things who have come from Him and who have been manifested for the Glory and Joy of his Name will return. The Name of the Father is the Son. It is the Father who in the beginning gave a name to Him who came from him and was Himself, and whom He generated as Son. He gave Him His name, which belonged to Him – the Father, to whom belong all things existing after Him.... What is the Name? He is the one Name, the Name coming from the Father ... there is no other person to whom the Name has been given. But it was unnamed and unnamable until He who is Perfect, expressed it.... And so when He wanted that His beloved Son should be His Name, and when He gave Him His Name, he who has come out of the depths has spoken about his secrets."

Other names of Jesus were (a) Law & Testament. In Judaism at the time of Jesus the Thora was considered to be a divine reality, pre-existing before the world. We find the title applied to Christ in Hermas (8th Sim.) and in Justin (Dial. 51,3; 122,2) and Irenaeus applies the words of Ps. 77, 5–6 (suscitavit testimonium in Israel and legem posuit in Israel) to Christ (Adv. Haer. 4, 34,4),

b) The Beginning & the Day: The first word of Genesis *In principio* has been interpreted as meaning *In Filio* v.g. Origen in Hom. Gen 1.1 says: "Who is this beginning of all things, if not Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the firstborn of all creatures?"

Clement of Alexandria says in Eclog. proph. 73, 1 that Christ is often called the Day. According to Marcellus of Ancyra Christ called himself Day. The origin of the title is derived from speculations on Gen. chp. 1 & 2.

The Incarnation

The first characteristic of Judaeo-Christian christology is that the mystery of the descent of the Son of God was hidden from the angels. The principal text which explains this point is the Ascension of Isaias, where we read:

"I heard the voice of the Most High, the Father of my Lord, saying to my Lord the Christ, who will be named Jesus: Rise and descend through all the heavens; then you will descend to the firmament and to this world. And you will transform yourself according to the form of those who are in the five heavens and you will see that you transform yourself according to the form of the angels of the firmament. And no angel of this world is to know that you are with me the Lord of the seven heavens and their angels, so that you may judge and destroy the princes and angels and gods of this world.

Notice that the Son of God will take on not only the appearance of the good angels but also that of the fallen angels of the firmament and of the angels of the School.

We find the idea of the descent of Christ hidden to the angels in St. Paul (1 Cor 2,8; Eph 3, 10,12):

a wisdom which none of the rulers of this world have known – in order that through the church there be made known to the Principalities and the powers in the heavens the manifold wisdom of God), in Ignatius of Antioch (Eph 19,1 The Prince of this was in ignorance of the virginity of Mary), in Irenaeus (Dem. 34).

It is also found among the Gnostics, but the interpretation they give is unorthodox.

The second characteristic of Judaeo-Christian christology is the stress given to the supernatural character of the Incarnation. The birth of Christ is as marvellous as His virginal conception, the lack of labour at the birth and the absence of a midwife being chiefly stressed. The Apocryphal Gospel of James describes various marvels of nature which take place at the birth; other apocryphal gospels enlarge and develop these marvels.

A third characteristic are the theological considerations on the star that appeared to the Magi. Ignatius of Antioch (Eph. 19, 2–3) says: “The star blazed forth in the sky outshining the other stars and its light was undescribable ... and all the starry orbs with the sun and moon formed a choir round the star ... every form of magic began to be destroyed.....

The exceptional character of the star is due not to its brightness but to its significance ... the writers of the time v.g. Justin refer the star of Mt 2.2 to the star which will rise from Jacob (Num 24, 17). The appearance of the star brings about a destruction of all magic, for Christ overcame the devil from the moment of his birth, and Christ’s victory appears in the conversion of the Magi, whose magical and astrological practices were considered to be a worship of the devil.

Baptism

Another important event in the life of Our Lord for Judaeo-Christian theology is the baptism of Jesus; under certain aspects it was more important than the birth itself, e.g. the Gospel of St. Mark begins with the Baptism of Jesus. The Baptism of Christ must have been important on account of the Judaeo-Christian contacts with the Essenes and with John the Baptist: as an immersion in running water it must be referred to the baptismal movements common at that time and to which the Essenes were attached. As an effusion of the Holy Spirit it is to be referred to the eschatological effusions of the Spirit to which so great importance is given in the Qumran documents.

What aspects of the event are stressed in Judaeo-Christian theology?

The descent of Christ into the waters of the Jordan has been given various meanings:

a) Christ descended into the waters of death where the dragon reigns: Ps 73, 13 is taken as a reference to this (*contribulasti capita draconum in aquis*), and the idea has persisted in Christian tradition; it is a symbolical anticipation of the descent of Christ into hell after his death to conquer the devil. The idea appears continually in the Greek rite prayer for consecrating the water for baptism.

This idea establishes a connection between the baptism of Jesus and His Passion. St. Paul had established a connection between the Death and Resurrection of the Lord and Christian baptism, but here the baptism of Our Lord prefigures Christian baptism not only because Christ’s baptism has consecrated the waters for baptism, but also and chiefly because it associates the descent into the waters of the Jordan to the mystery of the Death and Resurrection of Christ. A reference to this may be seen in Ignatius of Antioch (Eph. 18, 2): He was born and was baptized that by His Passion He might consecrate the water.

b) Another line of development is in relation to the eschatological character of Christ’s baptism: the connection between the baptism with water and the baptism with fire (Mt 3, 11: *Ipse vos baptizabit in Spiritu sancto et igni*). Matthew’s words may have been an allusion to the end of the world, but in Judaeo-Christian theology this prophecy of the Baptist is realised at the baptism of Jesus: in fact

certain archaic texts (v.g. the Gospel of the Ebionites) mention the presence of fire on the Jordan at the Baptism of Jesus. There are two different traditions with regard to this idea: in the less common one the fire which appears on the Jordan is an allusion to the destructive fire of the last day (Justin. Dial. 88,3; Sybilline Oracles 6, 3–7; Clement of Alex, Extracts from Theodotus 76, 1): “as Christ’s birth has delivered us from fate, so his baptism has delivered us from the fire, as his passion has delivered us from our passions”; “Christ descends into the waters not because he had any need to be baptised, as he had no need to be born or crucified, but he suffered for the sake of humanity which and fallen in the power of death.”

A second tradition gives a different interpretation of the fire; in this second tradition the appearance of the fire is not connected with the descent of Christ into the Jordan, but only accompanies the baptism. Actually it is not a fire, but a great light: it is the light of glory which accompanies the divine manifestation of Jesus – the parallelism with the Transfiguration in this case is evident. We find also evidence of this light of glory in the account of the birth in Luke (*et gloria Domini circumfulsit eos* – the shepherds). This may most probably help us to understand the term used by Clement of Alexandria *photisma* and by Justin (*photismos*) to indicate Baptism. It is certainly the oldest name for Baptism as in Hebr 6,4 and 10,3 the baptised are called “Illuminated”.

The Redemption – The descent Into hell

A question which certainly troubled Judaeo-Christian was the fate of the just who had lived before the coming of Christ. The dead went to a place below the earth – the *Scheol* of the Jews, Hades for the Greeks, the *infern* for the Latins. The doctrine of the descent of Christ into the lower regions to give deliverance to the just detained there, is not found in the New Testament writings, but it originated in Judaeo-Christian circles.

Other themes have been integrated with this doctrine:

- a. the theme of the descent of Christ into hell was integrated with that of the descent of Christ through all the heavens down to earth (*Ascension of Isaías*)
- b. it was also integrated with Christ’s combat with the bad angels after his passion: this combat mentioned in Col 3, 15 took place in the air: that was the place of the bad angels in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, but by the 2nd century the place of the combat is transferred to the lower regions and this idea will prevail, and is developed still further. These are the various stages of its development:
 - i. Christ descended into Hell to announce to the just their redemption (Gospel of St. Peter; Justin: Dial. 72, 4; Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. passim).
 - ii. Christ descends into Hell to announce the redemption and to deliver the just from their prison – the just rise again – (crf. Mt 27, 53 *multa corpora sactomm visa sunt* in the Holy City at Christ’s death).
 - iii. Baptism is necessary for salvation, therefore even the just of the Old Testament must be baptized, and so according to Hermas (Pastor 9th parable 16, 5–7) the Apostles and Doctors descend into Hell to baptize the Just, while in the apocryphal Epistle of the Apostles, this baptism is conferred by Christ himself.
 - iv. To deliver the just Christ has to fight against the devil who detains them in his power (Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs), and in this connection Ps 67,19 is quoted: *ascendens in altum captivam duxit capbvitatem, dedit dona hominibus*.
 - v. Finally Origen synthesises the whole doctrine by saying (Comm. in Rom. S, 10): “He began by tying the demon on the Cross, and then, having entered his home, i.e. the lower regions, he led forth the captives and took them up with him to the heavenly Jerusalem.”

vi. In the Odes of Solomon we reach the last phase of the evolution of the doctrine of the descent into hell: it becomes connected with baptism – the idea will become fully developed in the baptismal liturgy of the Eastern rites, especially the Syriac. The theme is developed in this manner: Christ dying is a prisoner of death, but he conquers death and frees all the dead. Therefore Christ's combat with the devil, is first to free himself by rising again – *mors et vita duello confluxere mirando*. The victory of Christ over death is renewed sacramentally in baptism which frees the Christian from death and makes him participate in Christ's liberation. In the Odes the descent of Christ into hell and the liberation of the souls of the just, the descent of the baptised Christian in the font and his liberation from sin and death, the resurrection of the body are all intimately connected.

The Ascension Into Heaven

As the Incarnation in Judaeo-Christian cosmology was expressed as a "descent" so Christ's glorification was expressed as an ascension. We find the idea already present in the New Testament (Eph 4,9; Jnx 16, 28).

We have to note that theologically the ascension implies the exaltation of the sacred humanity of Our Lord above all creatures: his visible departure from the Mount of Olives is only a secondary aspect of the doctrine.

In Judaeo-Christian circles the exaltation of Christ's humanity is often attached directly to the resurrection: this does not mean that in those circles there was no belief in Christ's sojourn on earth after his resurrection (Cfr. Testaments of the Patriarchs, Benjamin 9,5; Gospel of Peter).

Other circles clearly distinguished between the resurrection and the ascension, which according to these circles took place on Easter Day: Christ arose from the dead, manifested himself to the Apostles and then ascended into heaven (Cfr. Epistle of Barnabas 15,9; Aristides, Apology, 15).

But among Judaeo-Christians the prevalent idea is to associate Christ's exaltation with his ascension, which took place after a more or less long stay on earth after the resurrection. In the ascension of Isaias (3, 16–20) we have first a description of the resurrection with more or less the same ideas with which Christ's exaltation is described in the Gospel of Peter; then, after the description of this first exaltation, we have the description of a second exaltation – the ascent of Christ through the seven heavens; and this takes place after the accomplishment of the mission with the Apostles.

The duration of Christ on earth after the resurrection, in Judaeo-Christian circles, is considerably lengthened: the Ascension of Isaias says that Christ remained on earth for 545 days: during all this period Christ instructed his Apostles. We have the same idea in the Epistle of the Apostles which purposes to be an account of all that Christ taught the Apostles before his ascension, but here the duration of Christ's stay on earth is said to be 'a few days': during this period Christ teaches the Apostles what is contained in St. John's Gospel ch. 14–17.

Gnosticism took up the same idea of a long stay on earth after the resurrection – the *Pistis Sophia* (3rd cent.) gives 12 years: this is due to the fact that this period was required to give to the disciples the superior gnosis which was not to be given to the ordinary believers.

Turning now to the visible ascent of Christ into heaven, the term **ascension** belongs to Jewish and Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic literature. It may either mean (i) elevation of a human being into heaven by means of a vision as the one about which St. Paul speaks in 2 Cor 12, 2–3, or it may mean (ii) elevation of a human being to heaven after his death.

Christ's ascension is his glorification after his death: in Judaeo-Christian circles this glorification is also given to some of the just of the Old Testament, but only after Christ's resurrection. Christ's ascension, formally, is not distinguished from these ascensions, in fact the description in the **Ascension**

of *Isaias*, of the prophet's ascension and that of Christ is more or less expressed in identical words; the same thing may be said with regard to the description of Christ's transfiguration in the Apocalypse of Peter and Christ's ascension in the Epistle of the Apostles. Christ's ascension is distinguishable from other ascensions on account of its significance.

Christ's ascension takes place on the shoulders of the angels (Cfr. Gospel of Peter; Ascension of *Isaias*) – we have here the idea of the *Merkeba*, the celestial throne of angels which we find in *Ezechiel*.

Christ ascending into heaven crosses all the heavens and all the hierarchies of the angels: we have here the contrast between the *descensus* and the *ascensus*.

Christ's ascension causes sorrow among the angels for they had failed to recognize Him when He descended on earth (Ascension of *Isaias* 11, 23–26). In the Epistle of the Apostles a further detail is given: Christ's ascension is accompanied by the angels until they are dismissed by Him – this is contrary to what had happened in the descent: then the archangels had accompanied the Lord till they were dismissed when He arrived at the fifth firmament.

Another source for Judaeo-Christian theology of the ascension is given to us from the *Testimonia*, mainly derived from the psalms: these express the regal instauration of the Messias. The first psalm to be considered is 109: the New Testament quotes it in relation to the glorification of Christ (Acts 2, 30 Eph 1, 2022; 1 Cor 15.25–26; Hebr 10,12–13), its expressions find their way also in the Rule of Faith: *sedet ad dexteram Patris*. Another psalm is Ps 67 which is also quoted by St. Paul with reference to Christ's glorification who carries with him to heaven those whom he has captured by conversion from paganism (Cfr. Justin, Dial. 39,4; Irenaeus, Dem. 83).

Finally there is Ps 23: we have already referred to the consternation of the angels at Christ's resurrection, but now there is a dialogue between the guardians of the heavenly gates and the angels accompanying the Lord; a similar dialogue took place at the *descensus* – Christ had taken the form of each successive angelic hierarchy and therefore was unrecognizable. Ascending into heaven he was unrecognizable on account of His Humanity, which causes consternation among the angels. Origen adds that Christ's humanity bore the marks of the passion and in this way it becomes common tradition from the 4th century onwards.

The Cross

Judaeo-Christian theology was a *theologia gloriae* – it mainly insisted on Christ's victory over sin and death: this is particularly evident in the Judaeo-Christian theology relating to the Cross. The Cross is not considered as the instrument of Christ's death or as an object of veneration, but as a theological symbol. As such it has to be considered under various aspects.

A. In the Gospel of Peter we read that at the resurrection of Christ three persons came out of the tomb, two carrying the third and the Cross followed them. The Cross is associated with Christ's glory: it follows Him out of the tomb, it is glorified with Him, it is a living reality, it ascends with Him into heaven (cfr. Sybilline Oracles), it speaks with divine voice, it will appear again at the parousia (Mt 24,30), it is identified with Christ Himself.

From a liturgical point of view the various passages from the apocrypha on the Cross have a particular interest: Christ's second coming will be from the East – this is the origin of the custom of praying facing the East; we know also that in early times a Cross on the walls of a house indicated the East (*Acta Hipparchi et Philotheae*): the custom of having a cross in one's home has its origin in the custom of praying facing the East and in the belief of the *parousia*. The Cross is not the image of the suffering Christ, but the Cross of glory which precedes Christ in His second coming. This insistence

of the glorious character of the Cross is also evident from the accounts of the various apparitions of the Cross in the 4th cent. (Cyril of Jerusalem, Catech. Instr.)

B. For Judaeo-Christian theology the Cross is not the wood on which Christ was crucified but a spiritual, mysterious, living reality accompanying Christ risen: it is often identified with Christ Himself. But it also means the redemptive value – the *dunamis* – of Christ's Passion, which is made visible to us through its material, its form and its position. This symbolism is derived either from the Scriptures or from nature.

A first group is from the Old Testament v.g. the Bronze serpent (St. John's Gospel, Epistle of Barnabas, Justin Dial. 94, 3, Tertullian, Adv. Marc. 3, 18), Moses praying with arms extended (Barnabas 12,2; Sybilline oracles 8, 25-3; Irenaeus, Dem. 46; etc); the door-posts and lintels of the Jewish homes covered with the blood of the lamb (Justin, Dial. 91,3); the homes of animals (Justin Dial. 91,2 on Deut. 33,1317); (also Tertullian Adv. Marc. 3,19).

A second group is from natural objects (Justin Apol. 55, 1-6). These natural symbols have nothing Judaeo-Christian in themselves, but actually they have a Jewish origin. In fact the symbol of man's standing posture is a transposition of the prayer of Moses; the symbol of the axe has Biblical antecedents (the axe of Eliseus); the symbol of the plough mentioned often by Justin and to which Irenaeus refers Is 2, 34; and finally the symbol of the masthead.

These symbols all refer to the form of the cross; but other symbolical meanings are derived from the material of the cross i.e. the wood which more often than not is associated with the water, and this gives a sacramental character to the symbol.

Justin gives us a list of Old Testament *testimonia* which refer to the wood of the cross; the tree of life in Eden, the rod of Moses, the oaktree of Mambre, the seventy willow trees near the twelve springs of the Jordan, the rod and staff of David (Ps 22,4) etc. Later on some of these figures received a different interpretation v.g. Noah's ark later on was taken to prefigure the Church, and the rod of Jesse later on indicated Christ himself. These *testimonia* insist continually on the power of the wood when coming in touch with water: they figure the ever present action of the cross as a *dunamis* acting through baptism. The Cross, say the Sibylline oracles, is a sign for all men, a noble seal will be the wood for believers ... a scandal for the world, enlightening the chosen in the waters of the twelve fountains, a rod of iron which governs. Notice that the Cross gives light, gives life, and this through baptism, through the twelve fountains which symbolise the Apostles.

In the 2nd century these speculations on the power of the Cross become the expression of the universal redemptive action of the risen Christ. St. Irenaeus in Adv. haer. 5, 17, 4 says: "As we have been lost by the wood, it is through the wood that he has manifested himself again to us, showing in him the length and the breadth, the height and the depth, and uniting two peoples in one God by extending his hands..." "These words recall Eph 3, 18 and Eph 2, 14-16: a double wall, one separating two peoples from each other, and another separating man from God, has been pulled down by Christ through the Cross for he has reunited man to God and the two peoples together.

According to Irenaeus the Cross symbolises the recapitulation of all things in Christ: He who is lifted on the Cross carries all things himself. The Cross, symbol of Christ, is the support of the whole creation (crf. Meliton of Sardis, Hippolytus, St. Cyril of Jerusalem and esp. St. Gregory of Nyssa whose *Oratio Resurrectionis* gathers together all the speculations of previous centuries on the symbolism of the Cross. (Cb. J. Danielou, *Theologie du Judéo-Christianisme*, Paris 1957, chps. V to IX).

4. Clement of Rome was the third successor of St. Peter in Rome; his Epistle to the Corinthians is the earliest piece of Christian literature outside the New Testament and deals with the factions, so severely reprimanded by Saint Paul, which had raged anew in the city of Corinth.

5. Ignatius, second bishop of Antioch, was sentenced during Trajan's reign to be devoured by wild beasts in Rome. On his journey as a prisoner to Rome he wrote seven letters, five of which were addressed to the Christian communities of Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Philadelphia and Smyrna, one to Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna and one to the church of Rome.
6. Justin is the most important of the Greek Apologists of the second century; born of pagan parents in Flavia Neapolis (Sichem) in Palestine, he became a Christian after honestly searching for truth first from the Stoics then from the Peripatetics, and finally from the Pythagoreans: none of the Greek philosophies satisfied him and he became convinced that Christianity alone was the true philosophy. Justin was a prolific writer but only his two Apologies and a Dialogue with the Jew Tryphon had survived.
7. St. Irenaeus of Lyons is the most important of the theologians of the second century: his principal work is *The Detection and Overthrow of the pretended and false Gnosis*, generally known as the *Adversus Haereses*; in the first part of the work Irenaeus gives a detailed description of the doctrines of the Valentinians, but makes reference also to the doctrine of other Gnostics; the second part, which comprises books II to V of the work, refutes the teachings of the Gnostics from reason, from the doctrines of the Church on God and Christ, from the sayings of the Lord, and concludes with a defence of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body denied by the Gnostics. Another work of Irenaeus which has survived is *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Teaching*, an apologetic treatise discovered in 1904 in an Armenian version.
8. J. Tixeront, *Histoire des dogmes dans l'antiquité chrétienne*, Paris 1930, vol. 1, pp. 303-308.
9. Eusebius of Caesarea gives us this information in his *Ecclesiastical History*, book VII, chap. 26,1.