

The Evolution of God (Part I)

Pristine Christian Monotheism

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The 8th principle of interpretation that 4Winds Fellowships and the Bereans Bible Institute follow, as outlined on the BBI homepage, is this:

VIII. "When possible, trace modern doctrines back to the source to see when, where, and why they originated."

This last principle is intended as a check, to keep us honest and unbiased as much as possible as we work through the fundamental doctrines of Scripture, to help validate our conclusions. Its importance should not be underestimated. Comparing our conclusions to the historical record of early Christianity helps ensure that we are not departing from what the Apostles taught, as understood by their faithful students. Examining the post-apostolic development of doctrines and tracing the evolution of doctrines back to their sources reveals a great deal about whether something is based on genuine apostolic tradition, wishful thinking driven by presuppositions, or subtle deception from the Enemy. Jesus warned that a tree is known by its fruit. A bad tree cannot produce good fruit neither can a good tree produce bad fruit. Therefore, investigating doctrinal evolution, the circumstances and men involved, and the philosophical, social, and political pressures that drove the changes all serve to give us a picture of the "tree" from which the "fruit" (doctrine) was produced.

A word of caution concerning this process is called for here. 4Winds Fellowships is not alone in claiming to use this principle. However, claiming to use it and actually doing so are two different things. Some authors put on a show of researching origins, while in reality they are revising history (or quoting earlier writers who have revised history) to make their view more palatable for their audience. The reader ought to be wary, carefully considering whether or not the historical points being alleged are **well documented in ancient primary sources** which speak for themselves, or whether the writer is selectively quoting later "scholarly" opinions which affirm his own preconceived ideas. There is a very broad spectrum of "scholarly" opinion, coming from all sorts of sources, and it is easy to pick and choose opinions on particular points that agree with the author's opinion, and then string together a series of quotes from these scholars in order to add the appearance of scholarly weight to one's views.

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Unitarian authors such as Anthony Buzzard and Kegan Chandler frequently employ this kind of pseudo-scholarship, selectively quoting Bible-denying scholars to support many of their conclusions. But they fail to inform their readers that the scholars they are quoting based their opinions on assumptions that no Evangelical Christian could possibly accept – denial that the Scriptures were “God-breathed.” For example, multiple times Kegan Chandler¹ quotes the late German scholar, Adolf Von Harnack, to support his claims. Yet Harnack believed the New Testament books were not actually written by Jesus’ Apostles (eyewitnesses), but were written much later by Christians who had already been influenced by Greek philosophy. Harnack believed the New Testament was a product of religious and philosophical syncretism. Chandler also quotes the late liberal scholar, Levi L. Paine, to support his points. Yet Paine believed that the Apostles themselves were influenced by Greek philosophy rather than guided by God’s Spirit.² These Unitarian authors rarely provide hard ancient documentation to support their historical claims of Greek philosophical syncretism. They just repeat the opinions of scholars who flatly denied the New Testament Scripture as accurate revelation from God.³ And this is why they portray Greek Philosophy as the real source of the biblical teaching regarding the Son of God. When Unitarian authors employ this kind of deception in their works, they are drawing water from a poisoned well and serving it to Christians with no warning label. The problem is that most readers of their books are not willing to do the hard work of verifying their research themselves.

If claims concerning how theology evolved are based upon quotes from modern theologians (all of whom are biased) rather than extensive quotes in context of the early Christian writers themselves, you can be sure that there is some fudging going on. The process that we follow – the 8th Berean Principle – is not about making our conclusions appear to be historic, but is all about being sure our conclusions actually are historic and linked to the Apostles’ doctrine. It is about removing theological filters, not imposing others. A true and unbiased Christian researcher will provide plenty of **original ancient source material which can be verified**. This is what this series of articles aims to do.

This series attempts to apply the 8th BBI principle to the doctrine of God, tackling when, why, and how the doctrine of God and His Son morphed into the dogma of Trinitarianism⁴ contained in the later Roman Catholic creeds and held today by the vast

¹ Kegan Chandler is author of the book, *The God of Jesus in Light of Christian Dogma*, a defense of Unitarianism and attack on Trinitarianism.

² <http://bib.irr.org/levi-paine-and-evolution-of-trinitarianism>

³ cf. John 16:13

⁴ Three co-equal and co-eternal Persons sharing the same essence, who are individually and collectively called “God.”

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majority of Christians. We will also consider briefly how, when, and why other non-Trinitarian views – first Modalism⁵ then Unitarianism⁶ – developed in the early centuries of Christianity. We will attempt to document this evolution away from the apostolic doctrine of the Godhead progressively, connecting the dots as best as we are able. In this first article, we will lay down a foundation from the earliest writings contiguous to the apostolic age.

Any fair and progressive reading of the early Christian writings shows undeniably that “God” has greatly evolved over the early centuries into something that would be unrecognizable to the primitive Christians who knew the pristine apostolic teaching. Of course, modern Trinitarians and Unitarians have their handy excuses for why their views do not mesh with the earliest Christian writings. The Trinitarian excuse is the claim that the early Christian writers were not as theologically sophisticated as the theologians who came centuries after them, and thus support and condone the idea of “evolving” theology as a good thing. The Unitarian excuse is to dismiss the actual evidence, revise history, claiming that the earliest Christian pastors and martyrs were already heavily corrupted by Greek philosophy and cannot be trusted. However, the historical record argues strongly against both Trinitarianism and Unitarianism (as fruit from a bad tree), and presents a third view of the Godhead as being pristine apostolic teaching.

It is important to understand that the corruption of pristine Christian monotheism began during the apostolic age, and is dealt with within the pages of the New Testament itself. With the martyrdom of Peter and Paul, followed by the destruction of Jerusalem and dissolving of the Jerusalem assembly, the ordained elders within the other local assemblies were largely left alone with the responsibility to “*contend earnestly for the Faith once for all delivered to the saints.*”⁷ Into this void of encroaching darkness stepped John, probably the youngest of Jesus’ Apostles, now an old man. John had taken up his residence in Ephesus, the hub of the Asia-Minor Christian assemblies. As the last remaining Apostle of Jesus Christ who could bear eyewitness testimony to Jesus’ bodily resurrection, he also could recall and record the words of John the Baptist and Jesus Himself regarding the question of utmost importance, who is Jesus.

⁵ “Modalism” is the view that one Person is God, who changes “modes” or roles, sometimes being in the role of Father, other times in the role of Son, and other times in the role of the Spirit.

⁶ In this series of articles, “Unitarianism” refers to those who deny the preexistence of Christ, denying that He was literally begotten out of God as a distinct Person at the beginning of creation week. Instead they believe Jesus was only a man. Some of these acknowledge the virgin birth and some do not.

⁷ Jude 1:3

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John's intention in writing his Gospel and Epistles was to validate all that Paul had taught to the Gentiles concerning who Jesus Christ was and is, placing mature⁸ Pauline theology right in the mouths of John the Baptist and Jesus Himself! John selectively chose very specific dialogues and events to include in his Gospel which the other Gospel writers did not include. Matthew, Mark, and Luke merely wrote historical narratives to document the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, and to show that He was the prophesied Messiah. The three synoptic Gospel narratives were already being truncated and misused by the false teachers. Pseudo-Gospels were being composed⁹ by men who were not eyewitnesses to Jesus' ministry or resurrection, nor Apostles commissioned by Jesus Himself.¹⁰ Thus, John stood head and shoulders above all "Christian" teachers in authority and credibility during the last few decades of the first century. Unlike the earlier writers of the Synoptic Gospels, John was much more interested in writing from a theological framework, settling disputes that had arisen concerning the person of Christ due to syncretism with Greek philosophy.

One of the most famous false teachers who was a contemporary of John in his later years was Cerinthus, a Gnostic teacher who was one of "*many antichrists ... [who] went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.*"¹¹ Irenaeus recalled a story passed down by Polycarp, disciple of John, concerning just how repulsed John was with Cerinthus and his false teaching.

"There are also those who heard from him [Polycarp] that John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, 'Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within.' ... Such was the horror which the apostles and their disciples had against holding even verbal communication with any corrupters of the truth; as Paul also says, 'A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.' ... Then, again, the Church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan, is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles."¹²

⁸ Jesus said that the Breath of Truth would guide the Apostles into all truth (Jn. 16:13). A survey of Acts also shows that the Apostles, including Paul, were being led by the Breath of Truth, and were still learning throughout their ministries. Thus, not until John's death about AD100 was the apostolic doctrine complete and mature.

⁹ The "Gospel of Thomas," which purports to give an account of Jesus' childhood, is an example of one of many Gnostic pseudo-Gospels which arose very early.

¹⁰ 2 Cor. 11:12-15

¹¹ 1 John 2:18-19

¹² Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. III, ch. iii:4

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Irenaeus described the teachings of Cerinthus as follows:

*“Cerinthus, again, a man who was educated in the wisdom of the Egyptians, taught that the world was not made by the primary God, but by a certain Power far separated from him, and at a distance from that Principality who is supreme over the universe, and ignorant of him who is above all. He represented Jesus as having not been born of a virgin, but as being the son of Joseph and Mary according to the ordinary course of human generation, while he nevertheless was more righteous, prudent, and wise than other men. Moreover, after his baptism, **Christ descended upon him** in the form of a dove from the Supreme Ruler, and that then he proclaimed the unknown Father, and performed miracles. But at last **Christ departed from Jesus**, and that then Jesus suffered and rose again, **while Christ remained impassible, inasmuch as he was a spiritual being.**”¹³*

It is noteworthy that Cerinthus (as with all Gnostics) distinguished between “Christ” and the Man “Jesus,” the former being a divine spirit Being who descended from heaven upon Jesus and the latter being just a man. This “dualism” concerning Jesus Christ was the result of Platonism’s claim that matter was inherently evil, but pure “spirit” was good. Thus, if the Christ the Son of God was a divine Person who descended from heaven and became flesh (as the Apostles taught) He would by necessity become corrupt by becoming flesh (in this Platonic thinking). This created the necessity to divorce the “Christ” who came from heaven from the man “Jesus” if the Platonic dualism was presupposed. Yet, in addressing Gnosticism in general and Cerinthus in particular, John wrote: *“Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.”*¹⁴

Irenaeus stated plainly that John’s purpose in writing his Gospel was to refute Cerinthus.

“John, the disciple of the Lord, preaches this faith, and seeks, by the proclamation of the Gospel, to remove that error which by Cerinthus had been disseminated among men, and a long time previously by those termed Nicolaitans, who are an offset of that “knowledge” falsely so called, that he might confound them, and persuade them that there is but one God, who made all things by His Word; and not, as they allege, that the Creator was one, but the Father of the Lord another; and that the Son of the Creator was, forsooth, one, but

¹³ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. I, ch. xxvi

¹⁴ 1 John 2:22-23

the Christ from above another, ... The disciple of the Lord therefore desiring to put an end to all such doctrines, and to establish the rule of truth in the Church, that there is one Almighty God, who made all things by His Word, both visible and invisible; showing at the same time, that by the Word, through whom God made the creation, He also bestowed salvation on the men included in the creation; thus commenced His teaching in the Gospel: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made. What was made was life in Him, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.' 'All things,' he says, 'were made by Him;' therefore in 'all things' this creation of ours is [included],... John, however, does himself put this matter beyond all controversy on our part, when he says, 'He was in this world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own [things], and His own [people] received Him not.'"¹⁵

One thing stands out here that ought not be missed. In answering Cerinthus' Gnostic dualism (and that of the Nicolaitans), John did not deny that the Christ was a spirit being who came down from heaven. In fact, in his Gospel, he affirmed Jesus' preexistence repeatedly in the very first chapter. He also affirmed Christ's having come down from heaven several times in the remaining chapters. His "line in the sand" against these Gnostics was to overthrow their divorcing the one who came down from heaven from the man Jesus. It is therefore evident that pristine Christian monotheism as taught by the Apostles included the idea of the preincarnate Son of God who became flesh – the incarnation.

The Students of the Apostles:

The earliest Christian writers whose works have survived, those known to have direct connections to the Apostles, were Clement of Rome (disciple of Paul), Polycarp of Smyrna and Ignatius¹⁶ of Antioch (both disciples of John). These authors had been personally instructed by the Apostles and were leaders within the Christian assemblies established by the Apostles. The writings of these men were addressed to fellow believers or assemblies, being pastoral in nature rather than apologetic. They did not attempt to correct or refute heresy. They did not attempt to define doctrines, since commonality of doctrine was assumed between writer and his audience. Yet, these ancient specimens still indicate the common Christian belief in the personal

¹⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Bk. III, ch. xi

¹⁶ The longer version of the Epistles of Ignatius have been heavily edited by later Roman Catholic writers, and cannot be trusted to actually reflect the views of Ignatius.

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preexistence of the Son of God as the “Word” (Logos) of John’s prologue, and acknowledge His deity as such.

Clement of Rome:

Clement of Rome referred to the author of certain statements found in the Old Testament as “the holy Word,”¹⁷ and then immediately referred to the same “Word” as a Person, (“and again He saith ...”). A second work, written about the same time John wrote Revelation, has historically been attributed to Clement of Rome also.¹⁸ This work is believed to be the oldest transcript of a Christian sermon outside the New Testament. 2 Clement affirms two critical points: (a) the preexistence of Christ (Logos) as “Spirit” of God, and (b) His willing transmutation from full deity to full humanity, exactly as both Paul¹⁹ and John²⁰ indicated.

“We must therefore preserve the flesh as the temple of God. For as ye were called in the flesh, ye shall also come [to be judged] in the flesh. As Christ the Lord who saved us, though He was first a Spirit, became flesh, and thus called us so shall we also receive the reward in this flesh.”²¹

This extremely early sermon indicates a belief in **the real transmutation of the Son of God** from “a Spirit” to “flesh,” from full deity to full humanity. Several decades after 2 Clement was written, Irenaeus continued to articulated this view.

“[B]ut following the only true and steadfast Teacher, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself. For in no other way could we have learned the things of God, unless our Master, existing as the Word, had become man. For no other being had the power of revealing to us the things of the Father, except His own proper Word. ... [N]or did He truly redeem us by His own blood, if He did not really become man, restoring to His own handiwork what was said [of it] in the beginning, that man was made after the image and likeness of God; ... And for this reason it was that He graciously poured Himself out,²² that He might gather us into the bosom of the Father. ... For blood can only come from veins and flesh, and whatsoever

¹⁷ 1 Clement, ch. lvi

¹⁸ Modern scholarship typically disputes Clement as the author. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged virtually by all that the author lived contiguous to John’s lifetime.

¹⁹ Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 2:5-18

²⁰ John 1:14

²¹ 2 Clement, ch. ix

²² Note here Irenaeus’ reference to Phil. 2:6, where the one who was “in the form of God” and “equal with God” chose to “empty Himself,” which Irenaeus interpreted as “poured Himself out.”

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else makes up the substance of man, such as the Word of God was actually made."²³

Over a century after 2 Clement was written, Origen quoted Celsus, who had attempted to refute Christianity on the basis of the Christian teaching that the divine Son of God was transmuted into human flesh.²⁴ According to Greek philosophy (which Celsus presupposed) what is truly good, spirit, and eternal – God – is incapable of change. This was his primary reason for rejecting the doctrine of Christ's incarnation.

*"But Celsus, ... proceeds, accordingly, as follows: 'God either really changes himself, AS THESE [Christians] ASSERT, into a mortal body, and the impossibility of that has been already declared; or else he does not undergo a change, but only causes the beholders to imagine so, and thus deceives them, and is guilty of falsehood.'"*²⁵

Note that Celsus offered only two options regarding the Christian claim of the incarnation, both based on the idea that the divine Son of God was fully transformed into a Man. Celsus considered this idea impossible because he assumed the Greek philosophical idea regarding the impossibility of "change" for a truly divine being as axiomatic. The only other option, which was in keeping with his Greek philosophical presupposition, was that the Divine Son of God only pretended to actually become flesh. There was no other alternative Celsus' thinking. Therefore, Celsus was not aware of any Christians who taught something other than a real transmutation of the Son of God into full humanity as Son of Man. That the Christian point of view was impossible in this Greek philosophical world-view shows that the incarnation could not have driven by syncretism with Greek philosophy, but was fundamentally opposed to it.

More than a century after John's death, Origen sought to defend the 'Incarnation 2.0' (Logos merely added humanity as a cloak without diminishing His divine nature). Unlike the earlier Christians with whom Celsus was familiar, Origen adopted Celsus' Greek philosophical presupposition that divine nature cannot change, and viewed the Son of God based on Platonic dualism. Yet his quote of Celsus provides us with significant proof that the common Christians in the latter half of the second century still believed in 'the Incarnation 1.0' – the transmutation of the divine Son of God into full humanity. Like Origen, the liberal scholar, Adolf Von Harnack, provided another

²³ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. V, ch. pref. – ii:2

²⁴ Celsus wrote his work, "On the True Logos," about AD 177 in opposition to the writings of Justin Martyr. Thus his characterization of the Christian belief in the Logos, and His transmutation to become Man, reflected Justin and the Christians of Rome from the second century.

²⁵ In Against Celsus, Bk. IV, ch. xviii

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similar ancient Christian quote which contradicts his own view, affirming the same ancient view that Celsus sought to refute: *“He has transformed Himself into a man who comes to us to redeem us.”*²⁶

This pristine concept of the incarnation was a real transformation (transmutation) of the divine Son of God (“Spirit”) into full humanity by “emptying Himself” of those qualities unique to God, what is not shared with mankind. The earliest Christians took Paul’s and John’s statements at face value. The one who was previously “in the form of God” and “equal with God” indeed “emptied Himself” of His unique divine attributes in order to take the “form of a servant,” to become “in the likeness of men,” and take “the fashion of a man.” Logos literally “became flesh and dwelled among us.” Christ was “made in all things like unto His brothers.” These Scriptures describe transmutation of essence and nature, when taken at face value, not His adding human nature and flesh to what He was formerly.

Ignatius of Antioch:

Ignatius, disciple of John, spoke of Jesus Christ as *“possessed both of flesh and spirit; both made and not made; God existing in flesh; true life in death; both of Mary and of God.”*²⁷ Again, Ignatius writes in another epistle: *“[T]here is one God, who has manifested Himself by Jesus Christ His Son, who is His eternal Word, not proceeding forth from silence, and who in all things pleased Him that sent Him.”*²⁸ As a student of John’s, it is virtually impossible that Ignatius would misunderstand John’s usage of the term “Logos” (Word) in the prologue of His Gospel.

Other Christian Writers Contiguous to the Apostolic Age:

There are other Christian works known to have been written very close to John’s death. While virtually nothing is known of the authors, and thus no direct link to one of the Apostles can be positively proven, they nevertheless provide specimens from Christian assemblies at the close of the apostolic age.

Barnabas of Alexandria:

The Epistle of Barnabas is usually dated to the end of the first century (AD 100), about the time of John’s death. It comes from the area of Alexandria where there were large Christian and Jewish communities. According to Barnabas, Christians believed the Son was God’s Agent in creation.

²⁶ Harnack, Adolf, History of Dogma (Ed. Buchanan), Vol. I, p. 195, from Apoc. Sophon. Ed. Stern. 4 frag. P. 10

²⁷ Ignatius, Epistle to the Ephesians, ch. vii (short {original} version)

²⁸ Ignatius, Epistle to the Magnesians, ch. viii (short {original} version)

“And further, my brethren: if the Lord endured to suffer for our soul, He being Lord of all the world, to whom God said at the foundation of the world, “Let us make man after our image, and after our likeness,” understand how it was that He endured to suffer at the hand of men.”²⁹

And again:

“For the Scripture says concerning us, while He speaks to the Son, “Let Us make man after Our image, and after Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the beasts of the earth, and the fowls of heaven, and the fishes of the sea.”³⁰

Aristides of Athens:

The other important very early document still in the shadow of John’s death is an apology written by Aristides of Athens and presented to the emperor Hadrian in AD 125.³¹ Its purpose was to show the superiority of Christianity to both paganism and Judaism, and perhaps ease the Roman persecution of Christians.

“Now the Christians trace their origin from the Lord Jesus Christ. And He is acknowledged by the Holy Spirit to be the son of the most high God, who came down from heaven for the salvation of men. And being born of a pure virgin, unbegotten and immaculate He assumed flesh and revealed himself among men that He might recall them to Himself from their wander-lug after many gods. And having accomplished His wonderful dispensation, by a voluntary choice He tasted death on the cross, fulfilling an august dispensation. And after three days He came to life again and ascended into heaven. And if you would read, O King, you may judge the glory of His presence from the holy gospel writing, as it is called among themselves. He had twelve disciples, who after His ascension to heaven went forth into the provinces of the whole world, and declared His greatness. As for instance, one of them traversed the countries about us, proclaiming the doctrine of the truth. From this it is, that they who still observe the righteousness enjoined by their preaching are called Christians.”³²

²⁹ Epistle of Barnabas, ch. V

³⁰ Epistle of Barnabas, ch. VI

³¹ Eusebius, has a chapter (Ecclesiastical History, Bk. IV., ch iii) titled, “The authors that wrote in defense of the faith in the reign of Hadrian, A.D. 117-138.” He writes: “Aristides also, a man faithfully devoted to the religion we profess, like Quadratus, has left to posterity a defense of the faith, addressed to Hadrian. This work is also preserved by a great number, even to the present day.” Eusebius in his Chronicon states that the Emperor Hadrian visited Athens in the eighth year of his reign (i.e., A.D. 125) and took part in the Eleusinian mysteries. In the same connection the historian mentions the presentation of Apologies to the Emperor by Quadratus and Aristides, “an Athenian philosopher;” and implies that Hadrian was induced by these appeals, coupled with a letter from Serenius Granianus, proconsul of Asia, to issue an Imperial rescript forbidding the punishment of Christians without careful investigation and trial.

³² Aristides, Apology, ch. XV

From this statement it is clear that Christians around Athens, of which Corinth was nearby, also held to the preexistence of Christ as Son of God, having come down from heaven to partake of humanity through the virgin birth. His subordinate position to the Father is noted by calling Him “*Son of the most high God.*” Notice also that Aristides claimed that this was apostolic tradition from Paul when he preached and taught in Greece (both Athens and Corinth).

Early Christian Worship of Jesus Christ

A critical point concerning the earliest Christian view of Christ can also be gleaned from the practice of Christians from apostolic times. The nature of the Son of God as being more than merely a man is clear from the fact that the earliest Christians worshipped the Son along with the Father. For Christians, no other beings were to be worshipped other than the Father, creator of all things, and His only-begotten Son. Jesus Himself, citing Moses, stated that “*You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.*”³³ Yet it was common knowledge from earliest times (even among the Jews) that Christians worshipped the Son of God just as they worshipped God Himself. Had the earliest Christians in apostolic times not viewed the Son as in some sense equal (or equitable) with the Father they could not worship Him as such without transgressing Jesus’ own words above or the Shema. In the Martyrdom of Polycarp,³⁴ the following account appears which is quite revealing:

*“But when the adversary of the race of the righteous, the envious, malicious, and wicked one, perceived the impressive nature of his martyrdom, and [considered] the blameless life he had led from the beginning, and how he was now crowned with the wreath of immortality, having beyond dispute received his reward, he did his utmost that not the least memorial of him should be taken away by us, although many desired to do this, and to become possessors of his holy flesh. For this end he suggested it to Nicetes, the father of Herod and brother of Alce, to go and entreat the governor not to give up his body to be buried, “lest,” said he, “**forsaking Him that was crucified, they begin to worship this one.**” This he said at the suggestion and urgent persuasion of the Jews, who also watched us, as we sought to take him out of the fire, being ignorant of this, that it is neither possible for us ever to forsake Christ, who suffered for the salvation of such as shall be saved throughout the whole world (the blameless one for sinners), **nor to worship any other. For Him indeed, as being the Son of God, we adore;** but the martyrs, as disciples and followers of the Lord, we worthily love on account of their*

³³ Matt. 4:10

³⁴ Early 2nd century

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extraordinary affection towards their own King and Master, of whom may we also be made companions and fellow-disciples!”³⁵

Note that it was the Jews in Smyrna who urged the governor not to release Polycarp’s body claiming that the Christians might cease worshipping Christ and worship Polycarp instead. It was therefore common knowledge among the Jews that Christians worshipped the Son of God. The unique place of worship of the Son of God by Christians was absolutely apostolic and biblical.

Philippians 2:5-8 (NASB)

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

These quotes are sufficient to show that the preexistence of Christ, His role as God’s Agent in creation, His transmutation to become fully human flesh, and His worship equal to the Father Himself were all accepted Christian teachings from multiple apostolic Christian assemblies at about the time of John’s death. As we now move beyond the shadow of John and his apostolic authority over the assemblies, we will see that these ideas remained constant for at least a half century.

The Early Apologists:

The earliest surviving extensive description of pristine Christian monotheism outside the New Testament comes from the capitol of the empire, Rome. Paul spent a great deal of his missionary activity inching towards the capitol city – his desired destination. His epistle to the Romans was his largest theological work, opening with his expressed goal to visit the Roman assembly, to establish them solidly in the message that Christ gave him for the Gentiles, “... making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established – that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often

³⁵ Martyrdom of Polycarp, ch. 17

planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. ... So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also."³⁶ Paul's earnest desire was to "preach the Gospel" to the Roman assembly, "so that you may be established" in the Faith. Paul wanted the Christian assembly in the capitol of the Roman Empire to be firmly grounded in Christian doctrine. "All roads lead to Rome," and Paul knew that a well-established center of Christianity in the capitol city would then have an impact throughout the empire, as merchants frequented Rome as their trading hub.

Paul finally achieved his objective by appealing his trial in Caesarea to the emperor. He arrived in Rome under armed Roman escort, surviving shipwreck along the way. "*Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.*"³⁷ After his release from prison, Paul was again incarcerated in Rome just prior to his execution. He once more had personal contact with the assembly there. Consequently, the Roman assembly had not only Paul's original written theological epistle to the Romans but also the benefit of over two years' worth of direct interaction and private oral teaching. There can be absolutely no doubt that Paul achieved his goal since this mission to Rome was orchestrated by Christ Himself.³⁸ The Christian assembly at Rome fully embraced the direct apostolic teaching concerning God and His only-begotten Son. Due to the apostolic authority of both Peter and Paul who were executed and memorialized there, the pristine apostolic tradition would be very difficult to displace quickly without a huge uproar from the faithful. Pristine apostolic tradition would continue to echo for at least a few generations after the Apostles, as long as those who heard Paul and Peter in person were still alive within that assembly.

Justin Martyr of Rome:

The earliest Christian writer outside the New Testament to give us a detailed description and defense of the Christian view of God and His Son was Justin Martyr,³⁹ born at about the time that the last Apostle, John, died at Ephesus. Justin was originally from Samaria of Roman ancestry. He had initially pursued Greek philosophy, but became disgusted with its schools, its teachers, and its failure to answer his nagging questions. Justin completely abandoned those studies when an older Christian man

³⁶ Rom. 1:10-15

³⁷ Acts 28:30-31

³⁸ Acts 23:11

³⁹ AD 100-165

pointed him to the superior, divinely inspired “philosophy” of the Hebrew prophets.⁴⁰ After becoming a Christian, Justin eventually settled in Rome as a member of the Roman assembly. There is no direct evidence that he held the office of elder or deacon. However, he was a highly respected Christian teacher, writer, and debater. He is considered the earliest Christian apologist whose works have survived. Justin defended Christianity in written works addressed to the Roman emperor,⁴¹ to the Roman Senate,⁴² and to the pagan Greeks and Romans.⁴³ He was no lightweight in the Roman assembly. Justin’s Apologies provide details of some of the beliefs and practices of Christians at Rome at the close of the apostolic age. Justin’s works addressed to the pagans contrasted pristine Christian monotheism with Roman and Greek polytheism, attempting to appeal to the polytheistic mind using terminology familiar in the Greco-Roman culture.

However, especially helpful for our purposes is Justin’s longest and greatest work, his *“Dialogue with Trypho (a Jew).”* Unlike his other apologetic works which do not go deep into theology or biblical exegesis, Justin’s Dialogue digs deep into the Scriptures. It is the transcript of an extensive theological debate between Justin and a Jew by the name of Trypho.⁴⁴ This debate occurred in Rome, *“while I was going about one morning in the walks of the Xystus.”*⁴⁵ The debate pitted Christian theology at the end of the apostolic age against the theology of the rabbis and synagogues of that time. The direct interaction is extremely helpful because Justin as a Christian and Trypho as a Jew shared a common starting point – their acceptance of the Old Testament Scriptures as inspired by God Himself. Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho sheds plenty of light on early Christian monotheism in Rome and the state of rabbinic Judaism just a few decades after the fall of Jerusalem. It is therefore extremely valuable for our purposes in understanding both apostolic Christianity and its historical standing within the current Jewish thinking.

⁴⁰ For Justin’s own testimony to this fact, see the first few chapters of his Dialogue with Trypho.

⁴¹ First Apology of Justin

⁴² Second Apology of Justin

⁴³ Discourse to the Greeks; Hortatory Address to the Greeks

⁴⁴ Some claim that the debate never took place, and that Justin wrote this as a means to educate Christians how to successfully interact with Jews. The fact that in the end, Trypho was not persuaded and did not become a Christian, argues against that conjecture. But even if it were true, in order to be an effective tool to evangelize the Jews, the theological positions of both Christians and Jews at the time would have to be presented accurately. So, in either case, it serves our purposes well in discovering what those views were.

⁴⁵ Justin, Dialogue, ch. I, the Xystus was *“(in ancient Rome) a covered garden walk or one lined with trees”*
<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Xystus>

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After offering his personal testimony, why he abandoned Greek philosophy in favor of the Hebrew prophets, Justin began by declaring to Trypho and his companions that the God of Christians is the same God that the Jews worshipped, the one and only God.

“There will be no other God, O Trypho, nor was there from eternity any other existing’ (I thus addressed him), ‘but He who made and disposed all this universe. Nor do we think that there is one God for us, another for you, but that He alone is God who led your fathers out from Egypt with a strong hand and a high arm. Nor have we trusted in any other (for there is no other), but in Him in whom you also have trusted, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.’”⁴⁶

It is clear from this statement that Justin and the early Christians claimed to be monotheists, that there was no other God besides the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet they also believed that the Son of God, Jesus the Messiah, existed before His birth in Bethlehem, appearing in the Old Testament to the patriarchs. That this was the well-known doctrine of Christians generally is evident from Trypho’s objection to Justin’s claim:

*“And Trypho said, ‘Sir, it were good for us if we obeyed our teachers, who laid down a law that we should have no intercourse with any of you, and that we should not have even any communication with you on these questions. **For you utter many blasphemies, in that you seek to persuade us that this crucified man was with Moses and Aaron, and spoke to them in the pillar of the cloud; then that he became man, was crucified, and ascended up to heaven, and comes again to earth, and ought to be worshipped.**”⁴⁷*

According to Trypho, the Jewish rabbis had forbidden their Jewish students from all dialogue with Christians. This was in part because Christians claimed that “this crucified man” (Jesus) preexisted as the one who had appeared to the patriarchs and Moses, and had afterward become fully human, and was crucified. That the rabbis had forbidden their students from entering discussions with Christians concerning the preexistence of Christ shows that it was indeed the common Christian teaching of the time, fully known to the Jewish rabbis, and was therefore not unique to Justin. Note that Trypho brought this charge against Christians after Justin announced that they worshipped the same God.

⁴⁶ Justin, Dialogue, ch. xi

⁴⁷ Justin, Dialogue, ch. xxxviii

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Justin then went on to defend the common Christian view of Christ as the preexistent, only-begotten Son of God. This was therefore unquestionably standard Christian theology at the close of the apostolic age which virtually assures its authenticity as apostolic teaching. Even though we have no direct proof that Justin himself had personal contact with those who were taught by the Apostles, yet men like Irenaeus, who was a disciple of Polycarp who was taught personally by John references Justin's earlier works in a favorable light, even quoting him regarding the doctrine of the Father and the Son. For example, Irenaeus wrote:

“Justin does well say: ‘I would not have believed the Lord Himself, if He had announced any other than He who is our framer, maker, and nourisher. But because the only-begotten Son came to us from the one God, who both made this world and formed us, and contains and administers all things, summing up His own handiwork in Himself, my faith towards Him is steadfast, and my love to the Father immoveable, God bestowing both upon us.’ For no one can know the Father, unless through the Word of God, that is, unless by the Son revealing [Him]; neither can he have knowledge of the Son, unless through the good pleasure of the Father.”⁴⁸

This very close association with the apostolic age and even with the Apostles themselves is an insurmountable problem for Unitarians who deny the preexistence of the Son. Justin's Dialogue with Trypho makes this fact abundantly certain that at the close of the apostolic age Christians in general were seeking to persuade Jews that it was Jesus Christ who led Israel out of Egypt, the one who was with Moses, and spoke in the pillar of cloud, rather than the God the Father.⁴⁹

To Trypho's charge that Christians claimed *“this crucified man was with Moses and Aaron, and spoke to them in the pillar of the cloud; then that he became man, was crucified, and ascended up to heaven, and comes again to earth, and ought to be worshipped,”* Justin replied:

*“I know that, as the word of God says, **this great wisdom of God**, the Maker of all things, and the Almighty, is hid from you. Wherefore, in sympathy with you, I am striving to the utmost that you may understand these matters which to you are paradoxical; but if not, that I myself may be innocent in the day of judgment.”*

That Justin referred to the preexistence of Christ as *“this great wisdom of God”* and that this was a mystery that was “hidden” from the Jews strongly implies that he was

⁴⁸ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. IV, ch. vi:2-3

⁴⁹ In 1 Cor. 10:1-4, Paul identified Israel's 'Rock' (from Deut. 32:4,15,18,30,31) with Christ. See also Exodus 23:20.

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relying upon Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 2:7-8. "*But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."*

A little later Trypho demanded that Justin prove to him from the Jewish Scriptures the preexistence of Jesus Christ from the beginning.

"And Trypho said, 'We have heard what you think of these matters. Resume the discourse where you left off, and bring it to an end. For some of it appears to me to be paradoxical, and wholly incapable of proof. For when you say that this Christ existed as God before the ages, then that He submitted to be born and become man, yet that He is not man of man, this [assertion] appears to me to be not merely paradoxical, but also foolish."⁵⁰

Justin responded to the first part of Trypho's challenge by first appealing to Genesis 18, the appearance of God to Abraham at his tent.

"Then I replied, 'I shall attempt to persuade you, since you have understood the Scriptures, [of the truth] of what I say, that there is, and that there is said to be, another God and Lord subject to the Maker of all things; who is also called an Angel [Messenger], because He announces to men whatsoever the Maker of all things — above whom there is no other God — wishes to announce to them.' And quoting once more the previous passage, I asked Trypho, 'Do you think that God appeared to Abraham under the oak in Mamre, as the Scripture asserts?'

He said, 'Assuredly.'

'Was He one of those three,' I said, 'whom Abraham saw, and whom the Holy Spirit of prophecy describes as men?'

'Assuredly,' he said, 'for up to this moment this has been our belief.'

Then I replied, 'Reverting to the Scriptures, I shall endeavor to persuade you, that He who is said to have appeared to Abraham, and to Jacob, and to Moses, and who is called God, is distinct from Him who made all things, — numerically, I mean, not [distinct] in will. For I affirm that He has never at any time done anything which He

⁵⁰ Justin Dialogue, ch. xlviiii

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who made the world — above whom there is no other God — has not wished Him both to do and to engage Himself with.”⁵¹

Justin continued using numerous Scriptures to prove that God has always interacted with humanity through His personal agent, never directly. This agent is referred to in Scripture as “the Messenger (Angel) of the Lord,” “the Word,” “Wisdom,” “Son,” and other titles. Yet this agent was begotten by God Himself, not created from matter, before any of His works of creation.

*“I shall give you another testimony, my friends,” said I, “from the Scriptures, that **God begat before all creatures a Beginning**, [who was] a certain rational power [proceeding] from Himself, who is called by the Holy Spirit, now the Glory of the Lord, now the Son, again Wisdom, again an **Angel** [Messenger], then God, and then Lord and Logos; and on another occasion He calls Himself Captain when He appeared in human form to Joshua the son of Nave (Nun). For He can be called by all those names, since He ministers to the Father’s will, and since **He was begotten of the Father** by an act of will; The Word of Wisdom, who is Himself this God **begotten of the Father** of all things, and Word, and Wisdom, and Power, and the Glory of the Begetter, will bear evidence to me, ...”⁵²*

This earliest recorded Christian view of God’s Son (outside the New Testament) was monotheistic in this sense: that there is one unbegotten, uncreated, all-powerful, eternal Being who exists outside of the creation – the Father. What appears to be a second Person referred to as “God” in the Old Testament was not another deity of equal power, as in the many competing gods of polytheism. Rather, the second Person was “*begotten by the Father by an act of the will*” at the beginning of creation week. Consequently, as a Son begotten of the Father, He necessarily was of the same kind, sharing in the divine attributes (just as a human son shares the human attributes of his father). Yet, the Son is not another self-sustaining, eternal Deity. Rather, His nature and authority was the Father’s (just as Adam’s sons took their humanity from Adam). The Son was begotten by the Father for the purpose of being His personal agent to mankind, playing a mediator role in the divine monarchy.

In the earliest Christian theology, God never interacted personally with mankind in the Old Testament. He instead interacted through His personal agent, His only-begotten Son, “the Messenger of the LORD”⁵³ whom God fathered at the beginning of time (the

⁵¹ Justin, Dialogue, ch. lvi

⁵² Justin, Dialogue, ch. lxi

⁵³ See: Justin, Dialogue, ch. cxxvii

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six days of creation), before creating anything. Thus, no one has ever seen God – the Father. The Son was entrusted with God’s personal name (YHVH) as a means of extending His authority to act on His behalf and to enter into covenants in God’s name,⁵⁴ even to forgive sins.⁵⁵ His authority was so complete to act on God’s behalf that what “the Messenger of the LORD” did, God is said to have done. Thus, “the Messenger of the LORD” was equal with God in authority (from man’s perspective). Worship of the unique “Messenger of the LORD,” God’s only-begotten Son, was considered vicarious worship of God Himself through His personal agent. This is how the earliest Christians maintained monotheism, yet at the same time acknowledged the deity of the begotten Son. They worshiped the Messenger as an expression of worship of the one true God who sent Him. Jesus Himself validated this concept of vicarious worship when He said, “Whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me.”⁵⁶

Next Justin appealed to the clause, “Let Us make man in Our image, and after Our likeness,”⁵⁷ claiming that God was speaking to His Son whom He had just begotten as a distinct Person to be His Agent.

*“And the same sentiment was expressed, my friends, by the word of God [written] by Moses, when it indicated to us, with regard to Him whom it has pointed out, that God speaks in the creation of man with the very same design, in the following words: ‘Let **Us** make man after **our** image and likeness. ... I shall quote again the words narrated by Moses himself, from which we can indisputably learn that [God] conversed with **someone who was numerically distinct from Himself, and also a rational Being.** These are the words: ‘And God said, Behold, Adam has become as one of **Us**, to know good and evil.’ In saying, therefore, ‘as one of **Us**,’ [Moses] has declared that [there is a certain] number of persons associated with one another, and that they are at least two. For I would not say that the dogma of that heresy which is said to be among you is true, or that the teachers of it can prove that [God] spoke to angels, or that the human frame was the workmanship of angels. But **this Offspring, which was truly brought forth from the Father, was with the Father before all the creatures, and the Father communed with Him; even as the Scripture by Solomon has made clear, that **He whom Solomon calls Wisdom, was begotten as a Beginning before all His creatures and as Offspring by God,****⁵⁸ who has also declared this same thing in the revelation made by Joshua the son of Nave (Nun). Listen, therefore, to the following from the book of Joshua,*

⁵⁴ Gen. 22:11-18

⁵⁵ Exodus 23:20-23

⁵⁶ Mark 9:37

⁵⁷ Gen. 1:26

⁵⁸ Prov. 8:22-31

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*that what I say may become manifest to you; it is this: 'And it came to pass, when Joshua was near Jericho, he lifted up his eyes, and sees a man standing over against him. And Joshua approached to Him, and said, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And He said to him, I am **Captain** of the Lord's host: now have I come. And Joshua fell on his face on the ground, and said to Him, Lord, what commandest Thou Thy servant? And the Lord's Captain says to Joshua, Loose the shoes off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. And Jericho was shut up and fortified, and no one went out of it. And **the Lord** said to Joshua, Behold, I give into thine hand Jericho, and its king, [and] its mighty men.'*"⁵⁹

"The Messenger of the LORD" was certainly known to Trypho because He is repeatedly mentioned in the Torah of Moses, Joshua, and Judges. He was the one who appeared in the burning bush, saying to Moses: "I am the God of your father – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."⁶⁰ "The Messenger of the LORD" is the one who called to Abraham out of heaven, telling him not to slay his son Isaac, and swearing the oath of the covenant: "'by Myself I have sworn,' says the LORD, 'because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son – blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.'"⁶¹

According to Justin, this Messenger was the Son of God, having been begotten at the beginning of creation (as "the Beginning" of God's works in measured time), and was also the agent through whom God created everything, including the angels. Justin's task was to identify from Scripture this divine Messenger who spoke in the first person as God Himself and how He could become Man, being the one who was crucified. Justin accomplished this by claiming that the only-begotten Son chose to become fully human by means of incarnation through the virgin birth. The incarnation was necessary to make God's immortal Son completely mortal so that He could die on our behalf. Worship of Jesus Christ by Christians was therefore vicarious worship of the Father Himself through His agent, and was not idolatry as the Jews charged.⁶²

After Justin had drawn many such arguments directly from the Old Testament Scriptures Trypho finally admitted that Justin had proven from the Scriptures that there

⁵⁹ Justin, Dialogue with Trypho, ch. lxii

⁶⁰ Exodus 3:2-6

⁶¹ Gen. 22:11-18

⁶² That the earliest Christians worshiped the Son of God shows that they did not view Him as a mere man. See: The Martyrdom of Polycarp, ch. xvii.

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was another – the “Messenger of the LORD” – who was numerically distinct from God, yet is called “God,” even called by God’s personal name, YHVH. He then insisted that Justin take the next step, proving from the Scriptures that this second Person called “God” became a human being capable of death.

*“And Trypho said, ‘This point has been proved to me forcibly, and by many arguments, my friend. It remains, then, to prove that **He submitted to become man** by the Virgin, according to the will of His Father; and to be crucified, and to die. Prove also clearly, that after this He rose again and ascended to heaven.’”⁶³*

“... you may now proceed to explain to us how this God who appeared to Abraham, and is minister to God the Maker of all things, being born of the virgin, became man, of like passions with all, as you said previously.”⁶⁴

There is a glaring omission on Trypho’s part which should not go unnoticed by the careful reader. Trypho made no charge at all against Justin or Christians concerning abandoning monotheism. The idea of a second Person called “God” in the Old Testament did not come as a great shock at all to Trypho, a second century Jew, nor did he consider it an affront to monotheism. In fact, Trypho acknowledged that Justin had indeed proven this critical point from the Jewish Scriptures, that there is a second Person called “Lord” and “God” who is the divine Messenger and personal agent of the one God, the sole authority who created all things. Trypho would have made no such admission if doing so had been viewed either by himself or by his Jewish teachers as abandoning the Shema – “Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.”⁶⁵ This fact should give pause to Unitarians, Rabbinic Jews, and Muslims, or anyone who would claim that a preincarnate Son, begotten by God of the same kind, is incompatible with monotheism. It was not considered incompatible with monotheism by the Jews in Justin’s day. Neither was it considered incompatible a century earlier in Jesus’ day as is proven by the reactions of the Scribes and Pharisees to Jesus’ repeated claims to being the begotten Son of God (particularly in John’s Gospel), having been sent down from heaven by His Father,⁶⁶ and even having “emerged out of God.”⁶⁷ No charges of abandonment of monotheism or the Shema were ever hurled at Jesus. Neither were

⁶³ Justin, Dialogue, ch. lxiii

⁶⁴ Justin, Dialogue, ch. lviii

⁶⁵ Rabbinic scholar, Alan F. Segal, in his major work, “Two Powers in Heaven,” has demonstrated that this very idea was not considered heretical (or contrary to the passages that claim monotheism) by Jewish authorities in the early second century. It was only labeled “heresy,” and contrary to monotheism, later due to Christianity’s claims that Jesus is “the second power in heaven.”

⁶⁶ John 3:13; John 3:31; John 6:33,38,51,62; John 8:23; John 16:28

⁶⁷ John 8:42 reads: εἰ ὁ Θεὸς πατὴρ ὑμῶν ἦν, ἠγαπάτε ἂν ἐμέ· ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐξῆλθον (Lit. “If God was your Father you would love Me, for **I emerged out of God** ...”).

such charges ever made against the Apostles as they interacted with the synagogues throughout the Roman Empire. The sole charge against Jesus and His Apostles by the Jews was that Jesus was making Himself out to be someone He was not. He therefore had no authority to supersede the Law of Moses with His own Law. They could not accept that Jesus was “the Christ” of prophecy. The reason no charges of polytheism were ever hurled by Jews at Jesus, the Apostles, or Justin was because the claims concerning Christ by Christians did no damage at all to monotheism (as defined by Temple Judaism), because Christians did not hold Him up as a co-equal and co-eternal second person of a Trinity. Rather, all claims concerning the Son were consistent with Old Testament monotheism, viewing Jesus Christ as the incarnation of the divine Messenger of the LORD, God’s begotten Son, a Person well documented in the Jewish Scriptures, just as Justin conclusively proved to Trypho. The concept of a single divine authority or “monarchy” (monotheism) was maintained because the Son was subordinate to His Father, from the Father’s own essence, His agent and mediator to mankind.

Trypho’s objection, after acknowledging the second divine Person in the prophetic Scriptures, was that He did not become Man generally, or “this crucified man” in particular. Justin responded to Trypho’s challenge “to prove that He submitted to become man by the Virgin, according to the will of His Father; and to be crucified, and to die,” by appealing to several passages including Isaiah 53’s statement concerning the incarnation, “who will declare His generation?”⁶⁸

However, Isaiah 7:14 was his strongest proof. The human virgin of the house of David would supernaturally conceive a Son, without a man, whose name would be called “Emmanuel,” meaning “God with us.”⁶⁹

Justin also appealed to Isaiah 9:6 as proof that “the Messenger of the LORD” of the Torah was later to be born as this human child who would be the Messiah. “*And when Isaiah calls Him the Angel [Messenger] of Mighty Counsel, did he not foretell Him to be the Teacher of those truths which He did teach when He came [to earth]? For He alone taught openly those mighty counsels which the Father designed both for all those who have been and*

⁶⁸ Isa. 53:6

⁶⁹ Justin, Dialogue, ch. lxvi. In the following chapter, Trypho disputed the Greek Septuagint that Justin quoted which has “ἡ παρθένος” (the virgin), insisting instead on the Hebrew text which has “הַעַלְמָה” (young woman), claiming that the prophecy was about the birth of king Hezekiah, who was a “son” of God by adoption. Justin went on to show that the prophecy could not refer to Hezekiah but only to the Messiah, and that even in the Hebrew Bible this term only refers to a virgin. Justin’s point concerning the term “virgin” was to show that the Son had no human father, which is why He is called “God with us.” (See: chs. lxxviii & lxxvii - lxxviii).

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*shall be well-pleasing to Him.*⁷⁰ Justin was quoting from the LXX⁷¹ which is significantly different from the modern Hebrew text in this passage. The modern Masoretic Text reads:

“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father,⁷² Prince of Peace.”

But the LXX reads:

ὅτι παιδίον ἐγεννήθη ἡμῖν, υἱὸς καὶ ἐδόθη ἡμῖν, οὗ ἡ ἀρχὴ ἐγενήθη ἐπὶ τοῦ ὤμου αὐτοῦ, καὶ καλεῖται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ **μεγάλης βουλῆς ἄγγελος**. ἐγὼ γὰρ ἄξω εἰρήνην ἐπὶ τοὺς ἄρχοντας εἰρήνην καὶ υἰγιαὶν αὐτῷ⁷³

A literal translation is as follows:⁷⁴

*“Because a child was⁷⁵ born to us, and a Son was given to us, of whom the Beginning⁷⁶ occurred⁷⁷ upon His shoulder: and his name is called **the Messenger of Great Counsel**. For I will bring peace upon the rulers, and health to him.”*

That the Septuagint reading which Justin quoted was known and considered valid by Trypho (rather than the modern Masoretic Text) is shown by Trypho’s response to Justin’s treatment of Isaiah 7:14 and this quote of Isaiah 9:6, both from the LXX.

“Then Trypho said, ‘I admit that such and so great arguments are sufficient to persuade one; but I wish [you] to know that I ask you for the proof which you have frequently

⁷⁰ Justin, Dialogue with Trypho, ch. lxxvi

⁷¹ LXX, the Roman numeral for 70, was the abbreviated title for the Greek translation of the Old Testament made around 250 BC by 70 Jewish scholars for Ptolemy, king of Egypt for his library at Alexandria. Throughout this discourse, Justin referred to “the Translation of the Seventy” in contrast to the Hebrew text extant at the time. This translation was in wide use in the synagogues in Jesus’ day, and is the basis for most of the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament.

⁷² The Hebrew אבִיָּאָה can also be translated, “Father of the age to come.”

⁷³ Alfred Rahlfs, Septuaginta, Vol. II, p. 578, Privileg. Wurt. Bibelanstalt Stuttgart (1935).

⁷⁴ The author’s literal translation from the Greek

⁷⁵ Note the use of the past tense (aorist indicative) throughout the prophecy, speaking from the perspective of after the events were to be carried out. This was a device for expressing the certainty of the prophecy.

⁷⁶ ἡ ἀρχὴ literally means “the beginning,” but can also be translated rule, authority, or government.

⁷⁷ The Greek verb ἐγενήθη means either to “happen” or “occur,” to come into being (be generated), or to become something else (a transformation).

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proposed to give me. Proceed then to make this plain to us, that we may see how you prove that that [passage] refers to this Christ of yours.”⁷⁸

Justin responded to the challenge by drawing many parallels between the prophecies of the Messiah in the Jewish Scriptures and the historical Jesus from the Gospel accounts. Yet after admitting that Justin had sufficiently proven from the Scriptures that there was a second Person called “God” recorded in the Scriptures who was both the Son of God and His Messenger to humanity, and after admitting that the Scriptures predicted that He would become Man through incarnation, Trypho in the end refused to take the final step and acknowledge that Jesus was indeed this Jewish Messiah. His admissions prove beyond doubt that the acceptance of a second Person called “God” (the Son), and even His incarnation in human flesh, was not antithetical to monotheism as expressed in the Shema. Rather, Trypho stopped short of acknowledging that Jesus of Nazareth, “this crucified man,” was indeed the Messiah of Israel. This is what was considered anathema by the Jewish authorities. And this is perfectly consistent with the picture we have in the Gospels, “for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue.”⁷⁹

The reason that this earliest view of God and His only-begotten Son was not incompatible with monotheism was because of His origin – begotten from God’s own being – and because of His subordinate status. The Jews understood that a monarch (sole ruler) had subordinate intermediaries who carried the king’s authority, yet this did not mean the king was no longer a “monarch” (sole ruler). The same understanding was held by Christians concerning the preincarnate Son of God.

In Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho there was no discussion concerning any disagreement between the Jews and Christians concerning the Spirit. This is because Justin and Trypho, Christians and Jews of this early period held the same view. In all of Justin’s writings (and all other Christian writers up to the middle of the second century), there is no hint that the Spirit of God was a third divine Person, distinct from the Father and the Son. In his First Apology, Justin spoke again concerning Isaiah 7:14 and the Virgin birth, this time referencing Luke 1:35, which reads: “And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The **Holy Spirit** will come upon you, and **the power of the Highest** will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.’” Consider Justin’s comments about this passage:

⁷⁸ Justin, Dialogue with Trypho, ch. lxxvii

⁷⁹ John 9:22

*“This, then, ‘Behold, a virgin shall conceive,’ signifies that a virgin should conceive without intercourse. For if she had had intercourse with any one whatever, she was no longer a virgin; but **the power of God having come upon the virgin, overshadowed her**, and caused her while yet a virgin to conceive. And the angel of God who was sent to the same virgin at that time brought her good news, saying, ‘Behold, **thou shalt conceive of the Holy Spirit**,⁸⁰ and shalt bear a Son, and He shall be called the Son of the Highest, and thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins,’ – as they who have recorded all that concerns our Savior Jesus Christ have taught, whom we believed, since by Isaiah also, whom we have now adduced, **the Spirit of prophecy** declared that He should be born as we intimated before. **It is wrong, therefore, to understand the Spirit and the power**⁸¹ **of God as anything else than the Word, who is also the first-born of God**, as the foresaid prophet Moses declared; and it was this which, when it came upon the virgin and overshadowed her, **caused her to conceive, not by intercourse, but by power.**”⁸²*

As will become evident as we examine some of Justin’s fellow Christian writers of this period, the “Spirit” was not considered a distinct Person apart from the Father and the Son, but rather a limited manifestation of God, whether coming from the Father Himself directly or from the Son. As Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, “God is Spirit.”

In Justin’s view, the divine essence which overshadowed Mary, which is called both “the Holy Spirit” and “the power of the Highest,”⁸³ was the divine essence possessed by the preexistent Son as He entered her womb. Justin’s view agreed with Paul’s in Philippians 2:5-11 that the preexistent Son chose to “empty Himself” in order to take the form of Man, a self-aware and self-accomplished act of the preincarnate Son.

Justin also stated plainly that “the prophetic Spirit” was the Word (Logos), but that sometimes He spoke through the Old Testament prophets FROM the Person of the

⁸⁰ The English translation of Justin has “Holy Ghost” here. This itself is an example of bias by the translator. The Greek is πνεύματος ἁγίου – of the Holy Spirit/Breath, πνεύμα literally meaning “breath” or “wind.” The rendering of “Holy Ghost” by the English translator imposes a later concept, “Ghost” being a personal conscious entity, while the Greek does not convey this idea at all.

⁸¹ Both “the Spirit and the Power” are held by Justin to be the same thing – the Word (Logos). Justin derived these two terms from the parallelism found in Luke 1:35: “the Holy Spirit will come upon you” and “the power of the Highest will overshadow you.” Parallelisms are a restating of a previous statement using other words, often separated by “and.” That Justin viewed this passage as a parallelism is proven by his application of both terms to the Logos, the preincarnate Son.

⁸² Justin, First Apology, ch. xxxiii

⁸³ Luke 1:35

Father, and at other times the Word as “the prophetic Spirit” spoke FROM the Person of the Son.

*“But when you hear the utterances of the prophets spoken as it were personally, you must not suppose that they are spoken by the inspired themselves, but **by the Divine Word who moves them**. For sometimes He declares things that are to come to pass, in the manner of one who foretells the future; sometimes He speaks **as from the person of God the Lord and Father of all; sometimes as from the person of Christ**; ... And this the Jews who possessed the books of the prophets did not understand, and therefore did not recognize Christ even when He came, but even hate us who say that He has come, and who prove that, as was predicted, He was crucified by them.”⁸⁴*

*“And that this too may be clear to you, there were spoken **from the person of the Father** through Isaiah the prophet, the following words: ‘The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib; but Israel doth not know, and My people hath not understood. Woe, sinful nation, a people full of sins, a wicked seed, children that are transgressors, ye have forsaken the Lord.’ And again elsewhere, when the same prophet speaks in like manner **from the person of the Father**, ‘What is the house that ye will build for Me? saith the Lord. The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool.’ ... What kind of things are taught through the prophets from [the person of] God, you can now perceive.”*

*“And **when the Spirit of prophecy speaks from the person of Christ**, the utterances are of this sort: ‘I have spread out My hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people, to those who walk in a way that is not good.’ And again: ‘I gave My back to the scourges, and My cheeks to the buffetings; I turned not away My face from the shame of spittings; and the Lord was My helper: therefore was I not confounded: but I set My face as a firm rock; and I knew that I should not be ashamed, for He is near that justifieth Me.’ And again, when He says, ‘They cast lots upon My vesture, and pierced My hands and My feet. And I lay down and slept, and rose again, because the Lord sustained Me.’ And again, when He says, ‘They spake with their lips, they wagged the head, saying, Let Him deliver Himself.’ And that all these things happened to Christ at the hands of the Jews, you can ascertain. For when He was crucified, they did shoot out the lip, and wagged their heads, saying, ‘Let Him who raised the dead save Himself.’”⁸⁵*

Never, when speaking of the prophetic Spirit, did Justin imply a distinct Person apart from the Father and the Son. Simply saying that the “Spirit” spoke was akin to saying that “God” spoke, without identifying the Person (whether Father or Son directly).

⁸⁴ Justin, First Apology, ch. xxxvi

⁸⁵ Justin, First Apology, chs. xxxvii-xxxviii

In Justin's Hortatory Address to the Greeks he claimed that Plato plagiarized many ideas from Moses and the prophets of Israel. He accused Plato of borrowing his concept of "virtue" from those passages that speak of the Spirit of God.

*"And if any one will attentively consider the gift that descends from God on the holy men, — which gift the sacred prophets call the Holy Ghost, — he shall find that **this was announced under another name by Plato** in the dialogue with Meno. For, fearing to name the gift of God "the Holy Ghost," lest he should seem, by following the teaching of the prophets, to be an enemy to the Greeks, he acknowledges, indeed, that it comes down from God, yet does not think fit to name it the Holy Ghost, but virtue. For so in the dialogue with Meno, concerning reminiscence, after he had put many questions regarding virtue, whether it could be taught or whether it could not be taught, but must be gained by practice, or whether it could be attained neither by practice nor by learning, but was a natural gift in men, or whether it comes in some other way, he makes this declaration in these very words:*

*'But if now through this whole dialogue we have conducted our inquiry and discussion aright, **virtue must be neither a natural gift, nor what one can receive by teaching, but comes to those to whom it does come by divine destiny.**'*

*These things, I think, **Plato having learned from the prophets regarding the Holy Ghost, he has manifestly transferred to what he calls virtue. For as the sacred prophets say that one and the same spirit is divided into seven spirits, so he also, naming it one and the same virtue, says this is divided into four virtues;** wishing by all means to avoid mention of the Holy Spirit, but clearly declaring in a kind of allegory what the prophets said of the Holy Spirit. ... You see how he calls only by the name of virtue, **the gift that descends from above;** and yet he counts it worthy of inquiry, whether it is right that this [gift] be called virtue or some other thing, fearing to name it openly **the Holy Spirit,** lest he should seem to be following the teaching of the prophets."⁸⁶*

That Justin was willing to equate the Spirit with something non-Personal shows that he did not consider the Spirit to be a Person distinct from God or His Son.

Thus these early writers viewed the term "Spirit" (as it relates to God) as the powerful essence of God Himself, akin to divinity itself, a divine essence or substance that God had in common with His only-begotten preincarnate Son (just as humanity is shared

⁸⁶ Justin, Hortatory Address to the Greeks, ch. xxxii

from Adam to all his descendants). And in a limited way, God bestows this essence upon His people as a “gift.”

Because of this view concerning the Spirit, some might be inclined to label Justin’s view as Binitarian. But doing so would misrepresent him. Binitarians (like Trinitarians) claim that the Son was co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. They differ from Trinitarians only in the number of Persons in the Godhead, claiming that the Spirit of God is not a distinct person, but a limited manifestation of God’s presence and power. While Justin’s view is consistent with Binitarians concerning the Spirit, it is not consistent concerning the Son. The earliest Christian view did not see the Son as either co-eternal (always existing alongside the Father as a distinct self-aware Person), nor co-equal with the Father (since God was unbegotten, self-sustaining, the very source of the Son, and the sole source of the Son’s authority). Rather, the Son was begotten from the Father’s own unique (Spirit) substance as “the Beginning” of His works of creation in measured time. Therefore the Son, as a distinct Person from the Father, had a beginning concerning His own unique consciousness and personage. Yet, since He was “begotten” of God, He shared in the divine essence (Spirit) and attributes of deity, just as Adam’s descendants share in his humanity despite of having a different origin from Adam individually. Adam was directly created by God but his descendants originated from within Adam’s own body, becoming self-aware and conscious during procreation. The Son’s deity, power, and authority were not independently inherent to His own person (as with “God the Son” in Trinitarianism and in Binitarianism). Rather, these things were always the possession of the Father who extended them by begetting a Son out of His own essence.

In Justin’s defense of post-apostolic Christianity, there is one God (one Monarch, one ultimate authority), the eternal uncreated, self-existing One. The preexistent Word, God’s Son, was God’s own offspring, begotten to become God’s authorized agent in creation and to interact with humanity in His name and on His behalf. The Spirit of God is a limited expression of the essence of God (exactly as in Judaism),⁸⁷ yet in early

⁸⁷ The reader of the English translation of Justin’s First Apology might suppose that Justin believed the Spirit to be a third divine Person who is worshipped along with the Father and the Son. Chapter vi reads as follows: “Hence are we called atheists. And we confess that we are atheists, so far as gods of this sort are concerned, but not with respect to **the most true God, the Father** of righteousness and temperance and the other virtues, who is free from all impurity. But **both Him, and the Son** (who came forth from Him and taught us these things, and the host of the other good angels who follow and are made like to Him), and the prophetic Spirit, **we worship and adore**, knowing them in reason and truth, and declaring without grudging to every one who wishes to learn, as we have been taught.” Note that the translator bracketed a portion which awkwardly interrupts the flow of Justin’s words, and introduces a heretical statement (that Christians worship angels know them in reason and in truth). In a footnote, the translator noted that worship of angels flatly contradicts Justin’s other comments in chs. 13, 16, & 61. This passage almost certainly contains a later addition. However, the translator should also have included the words “and the prophetic Spirit” as part of the interpolation and not the words “who

Christianity this “Spirit” essence was shared by both the Father and the preincarnate Son.

Justin’s description of the preincarnate Son is sometimes challenged by Unitarians as being unique to him. As we have seen, this idea is untenable on the following grounds: that before meeting Justin, Trypho was already aware from his Jewish teachers that Christians in general believed in the preincarnate divine Son and in His incarnation. Even the Epistle of Barnabas, which scholars date prior to Justin (about AD 100), written most likely from North Africa, acknowledges the preexistence of the Son. *“For the Scripture says concerning us, **while He speaks to the Son**, ‘Let Us make man after Our image, and after Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the beasts of the earth, and the fowls of heaven, and the fishes of the sea.’”*⁸⁸

The false charge by Unitarians that Justin’s former studies in Greek philosophy colored his thinking (which caused him to originate these ideas) is also untenable. This charge is made by certain Unitarians because they are unable to connect their view (denial of the preexistence of Christ) historically to apostolic teaching or times. Unitarians attempt to dispense with Justin’s detailed descriptions and interpretations of specific Scriptures by claiming that he originated the idea of a preincarnate Son, allegedly a carry-over from his former studies in Greek philosophy.

Yet, Justin’s own testimony at the beginning of this Dialogue claimed that when he became a Christian he abandoned Greek philosophy, having been persuaded by reading Moses and the prophets⁸⁹ the superiority of true divine revelation over the worthless speculations of the philosophers. He concluded that the Greek philosophers

came forth from Him and taught us these things.” The text flows much more smoothly without these words and without the heretical statement. *“But both Him, and the Son who came forth from Him and taught us these things [snip], we worship and adore, knowing them in reason and in truth ...”* Note also the word “both” (τε) which normally implies a second as opposed to multiple following entities. Again, in chapter xiii there appears to be another interpolation concerning a third Person. The text reads: *“Our teacher of these things is Jesus Christ, who also was born for this purpose, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judaea, in the times of Tiberius Caesar; and that we reasonably worship Him, having learned that He is the Son of the true God Himself, and holding Him in the second place, **and the prophetic Spirit in the third**, we will prove.”* That the words “and the prophetic Spirit in the third” are most likely an addition by a later editor is evident because Justin only went on to prove that Christians “reasonably worship” the Son. He did not attempt to show the same for “the prophetic Spirit.” Justin either failed to do what he said he would do, or else this is an interpolation. Also, in ch. xxxiii Justin stated plainly that the “Spirit of prophecy” was the Son. “[T]he **Spirit of prophecy** declared that He should be born as we intimated before. **It is wrong, therefore, to understand the Spirit and the power of God as anything else than the Word, who is also the first-born of God.**” In chs. xxxvii & xxxviii Justin said that the “Spirit of prophecy” speaks either from the Person of the Father or from the Person of Christ. It is therefore not a distinct divine Person in Justin’s theology.

⁸⁸ Epistle of Barnabas, ch. vi

⁸⁹ Justin, Dialogue, ch. ii - viii

were foolish and knew nothing.⁹⁰ All of his arguments concerning God throughout this discourse were drawn exclusively from the Jewish Scriptures⁹¹ from which he quoted extensively in support of virtually every point.⁹² His views are portrayed throughout his dialogue as the standard and universally accepted Christian view of God and His Son at the end of the apostolic age.

While other earlier writers, such as Clement of Rome and Polycarp, did not provide a clear description of these things, a comparison between their writings and Justin's Dialogue shows no point of disagreement. All of them can be easily harmonized with Justin's detailed description of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. An honest assessment of this available data should compel the reader to conclude that Justin's description of the Godhead was indeed the common Christian view at the close of the apostolic age, during the first half of the second century, at least in Rome where Peter and Paul spent their last days. And this alone should be sufficient evidence to connect it to apostolic Christianity. Yet, there is much more evidence of the universal nature of the view presented in detail by Justin from other writers in other locations from the same time period.

Tatian of Syria:

We now turn our attention from Rome to Syria in general, and then to Antioch in particular, the original launching pad for Paul's mission to the Gentiles. Tatian was a Syrian Christian, a contemporary of Justin in the early second century who wrote in Aramaic. He was a Christian missionary in Syria, and the author of the first known harmony of the four Gospels, called the Diatessaron. This work was intended for missionary purposes, to give a complete picture of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ in a single document, borrowing all of its text from the four Gospels arranged chronologically (as determined by Tatian). This evangelical work became the standard Christian Gospel on the life of Christ in the Aramaic language until it was eventually displaced by the Aramaic translation of the four individual Gospels in the Peshitta.

In harmonizing the four Gospels, Tatian began with John 1:1-5 which speaks of Logos being in the beginning with God, and the agent of creation. He then included Luke's account of the birth of John the Baptist, followed by the birth of Jesus from Matthew

⁹⁰ Justin, Dialogue, ch. v-vii

⁹¹ Justin used the Greek Septuagint exclusively. However, in his discussions with Trypho, he dealt with some variant readings between the Hebrew and Greek versions, showing that he had extensive knowledge of both.

⁹² Unitarians sometimes claim that Justin's view was shaped by his former studies in Greek philosophy. However, he claimed just the opposite in the introduction to his Dialogue, and the arguments that he used in opposition to Trypho were exclusively drawn from the Old Testament Scriptures.

and Luke, and then picked up John's prologue, that "Logos became flesh and dwelled among us." This arrangement shows that Tatian viewed the Son as preexisting "in the beginning," prior to His birth in Bethlehem.

Tatian's only other surviving work is his "Address to the Greeks." In that work, Tatian attacked and ridiculed polytheism and defended Christianity's monotheism.⁹³ His views are identical with Justin's on every major point. Of the Christian's God, Tatian wrote:

"Our God did not begin to be in time: He alone is without beginning, and He Himself is the beginning of all things. God is a Spirit, not pervading matter, but the Maker of material spirits, and of the forms that are in matter; He is invisible, impalpable, being Himself the Father of both sensible and invisible things. Him we know from His creation, and apprehend His invisible power by His works."⁹⁴

Tatian fully agreed with Justin concerning the begetting of the Son as "the Beginning" of the six days of creation.

"God was in the beginning; but the Beginning, we have been taught, is the power of the Logos. For the Lord of the universe, who is Himself the necessary ground of all being, inasmuch as no creature was yet in existence, was alone; but inasmuch as He was all power, Himself the necessary ground of things visible and invisible, with Him were all things; with Him, by Logos-power, the Logos Himself also, who was in Him, subsists. And by His simple will the Logos springs forth; and the Logos, not coming forth in vain, becomes the first-begotten work of the Father. Him (the Logos) we know to be the beginning of the world. ... And as the Logos begotten in the beginning, begat in turn our world, having first created for Himself the necessary matter, ..."⁹⁵

In Tatian's defense and description of the Christian God only two divine Persons are presented, the Persons of the Father and the Son (Logos), never a third Person. Tatian saw no conflict at all between this view and monotheism. He held the Christian view to be true monotheism in contrast to pagan polytheism. That Tatian the Syrian held the same view as Justin concerning the origin of the preincarnate Son is also strong

⁹³ Tatian was called a heretic by some later writers. But his surviving work does not display any reason for this charge. Neither does the later discovery of copies of his Diatessaron in Arabic support the false charges against it. Tatian argued against the Platonic "immortality of the soul" which could be part of the real reason for his being denounced by later writers who supported that doctrine.

⁹⁴ Tatian's Address to the Greeks, ch. iv

⁹⁵ Tatian, Address to the Greeks, ch. v

evidence against the charge that Justin developed this concept from Greek philosophical influence.

Theophilus of Antioch:

Theophilus⁹⁶ was a contemporary of both Justin and Tatian. Theophilus became pastor of the Christian assembly of Antioch, Syria (Paul's own home assembly), which had been pastored previously by Ignatius the martyr. Theophilus was a scholar and the first Christian chronologist.⁹⁷ His view of the preincarnate Son was identical to that of Barnabas of Alexandria, Aristides of Athens, Justin or Rome, and Tatian the Syrian.

“God, then, having His own Word internal within His own bowels, begat Him, emitting Him along with His own wisdom before all things. He had this Word as a helper in the things that were created by Him, and by Him He made all things. He is called “governing principle,” because He rules, and is Lord of all things fashioned by Him. He, then, being Spirit of God, and governing principle, and Wisdom, and power of the highest, came down upon the prophets, and through them spoke of the creation of the world and of all other things. For the prophets were not when the world came into existence, but the wisdom of God which was in Him, and His holy Word which was always present with Him. Wherefore He speaks thus by the prophet Solomon: “When He prepared the heavens I was there, and when He appointed the foundations of the earth I was by Him as one brought up with Him.”⁹⁸

Notice carefully in the above quotation that the “Word” is the same Person referred to as “Wisdom.” This is proven by the underlined statement, “He then, being Spirit of God and governing principle, and Wisdom...” Note that the pronouns “He” and “Him,” when not referring to the Father, are singular and have “the Word” as their antecedent. Consequently, by using the terms “Word” and “Wisdom,” as being “emitted” and “begotten” by the Father to become a second Person, Theophilus was drawing on two aspects of God's qualities which became two titles for the same person. The name “Word” was borrowed from John's Gospel prologue and the name “Wisdom” was

⁹⁶ Theophilus was born around AD 115 in the area of Iraq. He was originally a pagan, but was converted by reading the prophets. Late in life he became bishop of the church in Antioch around AD 168 and held that post until his death around AD 183. It is uncertain as to whether his treatise quoted here was written before or after he held the episcopate of Antioch.

⁹⁷ In his third book, Theophilus offered his own detailed chronology from Scripture from the creation to the beginning of the reign of Marcus Aurelius, the current Roman Emperor. According to his calculations, 5,698 years had passed. His much too long chronology was in large part due to his use of the LXX for the ages of the patriarchs. These are 100 years longer per generation in the LXX than in the Hebrew text, incorrectly adding almost 1500 years to the biblical chronology.

⁹⁸ Theophilus, To Autolycus, Bk. I, ch. x

taken from Solomon's famous statement in Proverbs 8. Then the term "begotten" is used of both.⁹⁹ Theophilus then explained how it was that "God" is said to have walked in the Garden of Eden with Adam, using John's prologue as his proof that it was the Son who became flesh.

*"You will say, then, to me: 'You said that God ought not to be contained in a place, and how do you now say that He walked in Paradise?' Hear what I say. The God and Father, indeed, of all cannot be contained, and is not found in a place, for there is no place of His rest; but **His Word, through whom He made all things, being His power and His wisdom**, assuming the person of the Father and Lord of all, **went to the garden in the person of God**, and conversed with Adam. For the divine writing itself teaches us that Adam said that he had heard the voice. But what else is this voice but **the Word of God, who is also His Son**? Not as the poets and writers of myths talk of the sons of gods begotten from intercourse [with women], but as truth expounds, the Word, that always exists, residing within the heart of God. For before anything came into being He had Him as a counselor, being His own mind and thought. **But when God wished to make all that He determined on, He begot this Word, uttered, the first-born of all creation**, not Himself being emptied of the Word [Reason], but **having begotten Reason**, and always conversing with His Reason. And hence the holy writings teach us, and all the spirit-hearing [inspired] men, one of whom, John, says, "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God**," showing that at first God was alone, and the Word in Him. Then he says, "The Word was God; all things came into existence through Him; and apart from Him not one thing came into existence." **The Word, then, being God, and being naturally produced from God**, whenever the Father of the universe wills, He sends Him to any place; and He, coming, is both heard and seen, being sent by Him, and is found in a place."¹⁰⁰*

It is apparent from Theophilus' explanation that "Logos" was the one who walked with Adam, and that He is called "God" in the Genesis account, is the reason that John stated, "And the Word was God." That is, He was "God" to Adam, representing His Father to the man.

Carefully noting the above particulars in Theophilus' treatise is very important in debunking what has been traditionally claimed by Roman Catholics concerning Theophilus – that he was a "Trinitarian."¹⁰¹ This false claim is based on one statement.

⁹⁹ Prov. 8:24 & 25 - Heb. יְהִיָּהוּ (begotten, born), LXX. γεννᾶ (begat); John 1:14,18 μονογενῆς (only-begotten)

¹⁰⁰ Theophilus, To Autolytus, Bk. II, ch. xxii

¹⁰¹ Catholic Encyclopedia article on The Blessed Trinity:
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15047a.htm>

Our English translation reads as follows: *“In like manner also **the three days** which were before the luminaries, **are types of the Trinity**, of God, and His Word, and His wisdom. And the fourth is the type of man, who needs light, that so there may be **God, the Word, wisdom, man**. Wherefore also on the fourth day the lights were made.”*¹⁰² In this section Theophilus was drawing types or allegories from the things that God created during creation week. There are serious enough problems with this quote that it cannot be used as evidence for early belief in any form of the Trinity doctrine for the following reasons.

1. The word “Trinity” does not appear in the text. The Greek word is τριάς, which was the common Greek word for a group of any three things,¹⁰³ similar to “trio” in English. Translator bias has read “Trinity” into this term. It should be translated as follows: *“In like manner also the three days which were before the luminaries, are types of the trio – of God, and His Word, and His Wisdom.”* Theophilus was speaking only of a group of three things, the latter two being contained in the first – God, in whom was both His Word and His Wisdom. Both of these aspects of God’s essence were “begotten” to produce His “Son.”¹⁰⁴
2. Theophilus did not consider the Spirit to be a third Divine Person. The third thing listed is Wisdom, not the Spirit. The use of “Wisdom” is a clear reference to Proverbs 8:22-31, which Theophilus already applied to the begetting of the Son.
3. Theophilus already defined the “Spirit” in the creation account as non-personal. In this section, he was giving metaphorical or allegorical meaning to the things God created in Genesis 1. He already defined the “Spirit” concerning the expression *“the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”*¹⁰⁵ Theophilus remarked: *“And by the Spirit which is borne above the waters, he means **that which** [neuter, not masculine] God gave for animating the creation, as he gave life to man, mixing what is fine with what is fine. For the Spirit is fine, and the water is fine, that the Spirit may nourish the water, and the water penetrating everywhere along with the Spirit, may nourish creation.”* Far from being a third divine Person, Theophilus considered the Spirit to be an impersonal, non-material divine substance, something of God’s own essence. He compared the Holy Spirit to the breath of life that animated Adam. And he referred to the prophetic Spirit which spoke through the prophets as the Son speaking through them.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Theophilus, To Autolyucus, Bk. II, ch. xv

¹⁰³ <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/τριάς>

¹⁰⁴ Theophilus, To Autolyucus, Bk. I, ch. x

¹⁰⁵ Gen. 1:2

¹⁰⁶ Cf. 1 Peter 1:11

The Evolution of God – Pristine Christian Monotheism

That Theophilus was a pastor from Antioch, the Christian assembly where Paul's missionary journeys began and where Ignatius, disciple of John, had preceded him in that office, implicitly link his views to the apostolic tradition preserved within that assembly.

The points of doctrine demonstrated from this survey of the earliest writers were not disputed or challenged within the assemblies generally for a few generations after the Apostles. The challenges came from the Gnostic cults that had sprung up, attempting to synthesize Christianity with Platonism. These earliest Christian pastoral and apologetic works show that pristine Christian monotheism was universal from Antioch to Asia Minor to Rome to Alexandria. The connection of these men to the Apostles is established by their pastoring and associations with the assemblies established by the Apostles, where *"the Faith once for all delivered to the saints"* had been deposited and entrusted by the Apostles, and in a few cases training by the Apostles themselves.

Anyone who claims that all of these earliest pastors, apologists, and martyrs were completely wrong is essentially claiming an absurdity – that the Christian assemblies established by the Apostles, and the very men ordained to lead them, defected from the faith within a single generation and that defection led all of them to the very same heresy, and no one put up a challenge! If this is true, if the Apostles could not even cement this most basic and fundamental doctrine in the minds of their ordained protégés, then the Apostles were miserable failures in the mission Jesus Christ gave them. And if that is so, then Jesus Himself was a failure in choosing such incompetent men, as was the holy Breath of God which continued to guide them. That is the logical implication of both the Trinitarian and Unitarian challenges to this earliest teaching on the nature of God and pristine Christian monotheism.