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THE BEGINNING AND OUTLINE OF THE DOGMA OF THE TRINITY

Abstract. The present article outlines the beginnings of the dogma of one God in three Persons. Albeit its germ was already present in Jesus' teaching, its growth happened in conditions that were sometimes adverse. This is also testified to by the fact that the very notion and word "Trinity" (*Trinitas*) – as one more precise and distinguished from "Triad" (*Triás*) that was a little older – appeared only at the end of the 2nd century. This development resulted from the Christians' absolute necessity, for they had to find a plane, on which faith in Jesus Christ as God's Son is in accordance with the truth that there is one God. The early twilight, or even disappearance of the Jewish Christianity current that was more sensitive to confessing a strict – that is numerical, and not only qualitative – unity of God, was marked by an influence of Greek philosophy. Its popular form was Middle Platonism combined with Stoicism that was mainly characterized by the teaching about the Word (*ho Lógos*), that is a divine intermediate being between God and the world that, by the way, was supposed to be created by Him. Its way to the Biblical theology was cleared by an Alexandrian Jew whose name was Philo, a Jesus's peer, and this way influenced the Christian thought as soon as the middle of the 2nd century thanks to Justin, and then – to Origen and the Cappadocian Fathers. Even today it is a feature of history of Eastern theology, where the verdict of the First Council of Nicaea is an exception; and the verdict is not without a connection with the thought of Tertullian who worked in the Latin Carthage at the turn of the II and III centuries.

Key words: Trinity, *Logos*, *homoousios*, *homoiousios*, consubstantial, ditheism.

The conceptualised Dogma of the Trinity was sown by Jesus Christ on a mountain in Galilee [Mt 28:16], where soon before the Ascension, he crowned His teaching, which for the most part had been carried out there. It was then that he told the Apostles: "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore – *mathêtéusate* – and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit – *didáskontes autás* – teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" [Mt 28:18-20]. He hence summarised His previous speeches about His bond with the Father and the Spirit, as well as the significance of

what had taken place at the beginning of his public mission during His baptism in the Jordan, when upon coming up of the water, the Spirit descended on Him like a dove and a voice came from heaven: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” [Mk 1:11].

According to the Lord’s command, the disciples baptised in the name of the three Divine Subjects from the beginning, unwaveringly professing the faith in the Triune God. This inviolable unity had been expressed by Christ’s word in the phrase “*eis to ónoma*” (“in this only name”), which the Greek languages emphasises by the article “*to*.” From the point of view of the Hebrew-Biblical foundation, on the other hand, what is telling is that the word “name” indicates the essence of a being¹, in the same way as the expression “flesh and blood” points to humanity.² Therefore, they were to baptise in the only name and not “in the names,” hence the three Subjects remain in the one and only Being, even though they are distinguished, because none of Them is identifiable with the other.

The non-contradiction of this triality within the Divine unity was strongly sensed, but its conceptual and verbal outline matured slowly, which happened in the face of an urgent need for answering the question of how to reconcile the teaching about Christ the Redeemer – the One who is “Lord and God” [Jn 20:28] – with the sacrosanct truth about the oneness of God. A necessity of explaining the relationship between the Father and the Son arose. First of all, we must bear in mind that the Greek word “*hé Triás*,” which denotes the Trinity, did not appear until the second half of the 2nd century.³ At first, it in a rudimentary way indicated what the genius Tertullian would explicate 20 years later. He introduced the Latin word of richer meaning – *Trinitas*⁴ – and outlined the truth that we have happily professed ever since.

1. THE DEMAND OF THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

The disciples also needed the explanation of the relationship between the Father and the Son, even though having personally got to know this strange “Christ Jesus, Himself human” [1 Tim 2:5] as “a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people” [Lk 14:19], after the shock caused by

¹ Mt 1:21, Lk 1:32, Acts 4:12.

² Mt 16:17, Gal 1:16.

³ Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum*, no. 15.

⁴ We shall elaborate on this later, in the chapter devoted to Tertullian.

His disgraceful death – which was reserved to a criminal cursed by God [Deut 21:23] – they saw Him and heard Him speak as the Resurrected one, before He ascended into heaven after forty days. This illumination, which was deepened and strengthened at the moment of the descend of the Holy Spirit, contained the truth about Jesus as the true Christ (*ho Chrisós*), in Hebrew known as the Messiah, who had been announced by prophets “in partial and various ways” [Heb 1:1].

Two ways of looking at Christ ensued – the “top-down” one, whereby His eternal being was the point of departure, His being “at the Father’s side” [Jn 1:18], when He existed only in “in the form of God” [Phil 2:6], and the “bottom-up” one, where the attention is paid to the man, Jesus of Nazareth, in Him the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled during the baptism in the Jordan: “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord – *échristén me* – has anointed me [with oil]; He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly (*euaggelísasthai ptôchoís*)”⁵, which was confirmed and proved by His resurrection.

Both views go hand in hand in all writings of the New Covenant, but the “bottom-up” factor seems to prevail. St Paul begins his Letter to the Romans in the following way: “[This is] the gospel about his Son, descended from David according to the flesh, but established as Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness through resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” [Rom 1:3-4]. Much earlier, however, the Apostle Peter said: “God raised this Jesus; of this we are all witnesses. Exalted at the right hand of God, He received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father and poured it forth, as you both see and hear. ... Therefore let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made him – *kai Kýrion kai Christón* – both Lord and [Christ] Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”⁶

This main “bottom-up” view was summed up by Paul, who wrote: “For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race – *ánthrôpos Christós Iêsóús* – Christ Jesus, Himself human, who gave Himself as ransom for all” [1 Tim 2:5-6]. The approach of this kind was clear, if not necessary, for Jewish Christians, who preliminarily and justly asserted that Jesus of Nazareth, the expected God’s Anointed, could not have proclaimed something that – going further – would not fulfil what God had announced through patriarchs and prophets. This is the main reason why,

⁵ Isa 61:1-2, Lk 4:18.

⁶ Acts 2:32-33;36.

even in contrast with the Jewish Essenes, they took part in the prayers in the temple until its destruction in 70 AD by the army of Titus, and subsequently in the houses of prayer up until 85 AD, when Jews, worried by their growth, added a curse to their prayers: “Let the Nazarenes and the heretics be destroyed in a moment and let them be blotted out of the book of Life.”⁷

The expression of their image of Jesus in relation to the Father was the word *ho País*, “the Servant”⁸ of God that alluded to Isaiah’s prophecy about the innocent Servant of God (*Jahvéh*), who would expiate for the sins of the people with his suffering.⁹ This teaching about the Son is present in an ancient treatise “*Didachê tôn dôdeka apostólôn*” (“The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles”), which was written at the end of the 1st century, hence when the Apostle John was still alive and was writing his Gospel. According to its instructions, the consecration over the wine during the Mass was to be accompanied by the words: “We thank You, our Father, for the holy vine of David Your servant (*Dauid tou paidós sou*), which You made known to us – *diá Iêsoú tou paidós sou* – through Jesus Your Servant; to You be the glory for ever.”¹⁰ This image of the bond between the Father and the Son used to be the main and almost exclusive trend until the second half of the 2nd century, when emperor Hadrian expelled Jews after the fall of the Bar Kokhba revolt and Jerusalem, having been renamed *Aelia Capitolina*, became a Hellenic town with pagan temples and theatres.

It was when the theological factor of the Greek Christian origin, tinged with both philosophy and the Bible, came to the fore. The first kind of its work, except the letter, was the speech of defence (*apología*), written to fight against Christians’ enemies aimed to the people to whom its authors wished to explain the accusations levelled against themselves. It is the moment when the “top-down” theology started to take over. Its point of departure was the eternal state of the Son of God, i.e. of the Word (*ho Lógos*), who “in the beginning ... was – *pros ton Theón* – with God, and the Word was God (*Theós*)” [Jn 1:1]. The lack of the article *ho* before the word “God” in relation to the Son will be the reason for frail Hellenic imaginings, the results of which have been present there ever since.¹¹

⁷ Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin, 1993), 21.

⁸ Acts 3:13;26, 4:27;30.

⁹ Isa 52:13-53;11.

¹⁰ No. 9 (v. 2) in *Enchiridion patristicum*, ed. Marie J. Rouët de Journel, no. 6.

¹¹ Benedykt J. Huculak, “Jana Dunsza Szkota nauka o Osobie w Trójcy,” *Roczniki Teologii Dogmatycznej* 3-58 (2011): 114-23.

Even before that came to be, Jewish Christians annoyed a number of Hellenic Christians with observing the law of Moses. Therefore, after initial difficulties with coexistence¹², Jews created separate groups. They called themselves *ebioním* (“the poor”), acquiring the Biblical, and prophetic term for the faithful part of the people, who did not rely on the possession of goods, but on Divine Providence. It was to them that the announced Anointed (*ho Christós*) would – *euaggelísasthai* – proclaim the Good News about salvation [Lk 4:18]. Meanwhile, their initial “bottom-up” theology, seen in the New Testament, took more and more extreme forms. After the expulsion from Judea, their number in fact decreased, but their herds existed in Syria until the 4th century and later. Jerome, who went on to translate their “Gospel according to Hebrews,” also came across them.

It is different from the four, canonical ones in that it highlights the authority of the Apostle James, bishop of Jerusalem and the whole of Judea¹³, who was Jesus’s cousin – son of “his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas” [Jn 19:25], who was also called Alphaeus.¹⁴ It seems closer to the Gospel of Mark. However, whereas the latter enjoyed the reverence of all Christians, the Gospel of *ebioním* was not accepted, mainly because according to it, Jesus would apparently be the son of Mary and Joseph, and His identity of the Christ would begin at the baptism in the Jordan, when He was anointed by the Spirit. Mark writes that “Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee” then “saw ... the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased’” [Mk 1:10-11], while the Jewish Book has two specifications which made accepting it along the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke, and, above all, the Gospel of John, impossible.

What is written there is that upon coming up out of the Jordan, Jesus “saw the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove which descended and entered into him. And there came a voice from heaven saying, ‘Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased,’ and again, ‘This day have I begotten thee.’”¹⁵ The final words, taken from Psalm 2:7, were to indicate that the divine sonship of Jesus originated at that very day. This excludes His miraculous and virginal birth – according to Matthew and Luke – and even more so, His eternal existence, emphasized by John.

¹² Acts 6:1, Gal 2:11-12.

¹³ Acts 12:17, 15:13-21.

¹⁴ Mk 3:18; 15:40, Gal 1:19.

¹⁵ Epiphanius, *Panarion omnium haeresium*, XXX, no. 12:7-8.

Under this view, the Lord Jesus would be “the firstborn among many brothers” [Rom 8:29] in a bizarre sense – only as their leader and role model, perhaps bountifully endowed with the Holy Spirit, but this came to be their gift in the baptism as well, though in an unparalleled measure. Hence, this view would later be called adoptionism. It did not, however, allow for important Apostolic teachings, so that already in the 2nd century, an image of Jesus as a mere role model had become insufficient for the totality of the faithful, and soon afterwards – unacceptable and heretic.¹⁶ Almost simultaneously another error appeared. It stated that there were three modes (*modi*) of the one God’s activity. It was the answer to a philosophicised image of the Son of God as the Word (*ho Lógos*), which may have been eternal, but subordinated to the Father, hence the view came to be known as subordinationism.

2. THEOLOGY ALIGNED WITH “LÓGOS”

What occurred at the turn of the 2nd century, when Jews, expelled from Palestine by emperor Hadrian in 135 AD and spread across the vast territory of the Empire, began to compete with followers of Christianity in converting pagans, who were numerous, to the faith in one God.¹⁷ This situation is depicted in the work *The Dialogue with Trypho*, which was written in Rome by a Greek Christian from Palestine called Justin in 160 AD. His fictional interlocutor says “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.”¹⁸ An association with an image of two gods, even if the second one is dependent on the first, with whom he united his will, was unacceptable not only to a Jew, but also to any enlightened man. Hence, it seems odd that Justin should answer that Christ “reverting to the Scriptures ... is called God, is distinct (*héteros*) [God] from Him who made all things – numerically (*arithmô*), I mean, not distinct in will (*gnômati*). For I affirm that He has never at any time done anything which He who made the world –

¹⁶ Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 21-2.

¹⁷ Franz Dünzl, *Breve storia del dogma trinitario nella Chiesa antica* (Brescia: Queriniana, 2007), 30.

¹⁸ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyr-dialoguetrypho.html> [November 5, 2016].

above whom there is no other God – has not wished Him both to do and to engage Himself with.”¹⁹

This belief, thanks to Origen, who also spoke of the Son as a second God (*deuteros Theós*),²⁰ tarnished the history of the Greek theology.²¹ Soon afterward, however, Justin, jotting down his own reflections, realised their fragility and affirmed that both the Father and the Son ought to be so presented that they might not be imagined as separate being. He found the proper way in the teaching about the Word (*ho Lógos*), which in fact had been present in the Gospel of John, but in his land it had been acquired at the end of the 1st century from Greek philosophy thanks to the Biblical scholar Philon, a Jew from Alexandria, who was slightly older than Jesus.²² This doctrine had flourished in the Greek circles five hundred years before Christ.

Heraclitus of Ephesus was so troubled with the changes in the world, especially with such coming and going of things that they seemed to be flowing, which he indicated in the expression “*pánta réi*” (“everything flows”). Apart from these changes, he also discerned an unchanging factor that governed them as a driver reining in two bloody steeds. He called this factor of coherence *Lógos* (the Word). As a lot of Greek words²³, this one also has a few meanings. The “uttered word” may be the original one, but the indirect one also comprises the notion that this word denotes, or a view contained in the utterance, hence the conceptual harmony, the context of what has been said. The word thus understood is the law of the mind of the world, the factor of an agreement between contradictions and constancy of changeable things. Man through his mind indeed participates in the light of the Word, but few realise it. They stop at the surface of phenomena, not trying to reach for their root and source.

In such a form the doctrine of the Word entered philosophy and two hundred years later, i.e. around 300 BC, it unfolded considerably thanks to the school of Zeno of Citium in Cyprus (336-264), whose members used to gather in the Painted Porch (*Stoá Poikilè*) in Athens, thus their name – the school of Stoics. According to them, the world is an organism brought to life and united

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ *Contra Celsum* V, 39; *De principiis* I, 2:13.

²¹ Egyptians and Cypriots are exceptions. Cf. Andrew of Crete (ca. 650-740), *The Great Canon*, Monday Songs 2, 4, 6, Tuesday Songs 2, 3, Wednesday Song 3; Benedykt J. Huculak, “Wczesno-chrześcijańska nauka o Duchu Świętym w przekazie Dydyma Aleksandryjskiego, nazywanego Ślepce,” *Roczniki Teologiczne* 50 (2003), vol. 2: 115-16; Huculak, “Jana Dunsza Szkota,” 114-9.

²² He lived from 30 BC to 45 AD.

²³ E.g. *kalós*, *paráklēsis*, *pneúma*.

by the divine Spirit (*Pneúma*). In order to stress that it is not mindless debris of details, he utilised the doctrine of the Word (*Lógos*), which transcends the world and governs it by means of its instrument – the Spirit. Having the mind, man participates in the Word, which illuminates him. This is called his internal word (*lógos endiáthetos*) – the notion which is distinct from voicing it (*lógos prophorikós*). Inheriting and enriching the doctrine of the Word, Stoics passed it on to the Platonists of the middle stage. For their part, they had in fact defined the highest and purely spiritual being as *Noús* (the Mind), but it would work in the world only by means of the Word (*Lógos*), which is the mediator between the pure, inaccessible (*transcendens*) and perfectly one spirit and the world, full of changes and diversity.

The notion of the mediation amazed the learned Jew, Philon, who had lived on the verge of the old and new era in Alexandria. In the circle of the Greek culture of that region, he wished to make the Hebrew Book more accessible to the scholars outside Israel. In the doctrine of the Word, he noticed the point of contact with the Biblical doctrine about Wisdom (*Sophía*) that in the Old Covenant was perceived as a personal entity, coeternal with God [Prov 8:22]. For Philon, the Word is the principle of creation.²⁴ It is God's instrument and a mediator in this work – mainly seen as the prototype of the world. Philon calls it “God's image,” His “firstborn son,” as well as God, but in a derivative sense. Similar process, owing to Justin, would be initiated in the 3rd century by Origen, Philon's fellow Alexandrian, and in the 4th century by his admirers, the Cappadocians. If a Hellenic Jew, almost contemporary with Philon, Paul of Tarsus in Cilicia wrote that Jesus is “the image of the invisible God” [Col 1:15], or simply “the image of God (*eikôn tou Theou*)” [2 Cor 4:4], he but expressed it in a deeper way than sketched by Philon. The Books of Wisdom and Proverbs were the backdrop for both, as it is there that the Biblical Wisdom is associated with the philosophy of the Word, while it itself is described as *eikôn tês agathótêtos* – the image of God's goodness [Wis 7:26].

The notion of an image was useful to indicate the simultaneous unity and distinction, for, on the one hand, an image is not identical to the prototype and, on the other, it does partake in its identity, which it portrays. It is, as it were, a mirrored reflection of the prototype, hence in the Letter to the Hebrews, it is stated that the Son of God is “the refulgence (*apaúgasma*) of his glory, the very imprint (*charaktêr*) of his being” [Heb 1:3]. That is why we may

²⁴ Philon of Alexandria, *De opificio mundi*, 17:20.

address the Son in the same way as God, according to the Psalm: “Your throne, O God [the Son], stands forever and ever; ... therefore God [the Son], your God [the Father], anointed you with the oil of gladness above your companions” [Heb 1:8-9]. It is based on the words from the Book of Wisdom: “For she [the Wisdom] is the refulgence (*apaúgasma*) of eternal light, the spotless mirror (*ésoptron*) of the power of God, the image (*eikôn*) of his goodness” [Wis 7:26].

The Judeo-Hellenic doctrine of the Wisdom and the Word was passed down to the Hellenic Christians, even though there had been other attempts to describe the bond between the Father and the Son in such a way that they might express Jesus’s divinity without identifying Him with the Father. They are found in the “Second Epistle of Clement” from the period from 130 to 150, according to which the Son before Incarnation had been a spirit (*pneúma*), thus He had had the same existential tissue as the Father. This originated in light of the Lord’s words: “God is Spirit (*pneúma*)” [Jn 4:24]. A mysterious Hermas developed this idea in the middle of the 2nd century in a work called “The Shepherd.” He presented the Son as an advocate – a messenger (*áγγελος*) of God – because He is His representative and embodiment. Among a number of events of this kind, the special one took place when Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law at the foot of Horeb. “There a *malák Jahvéh* – an angel (messenger) of the Lord [whose name was *Jahvéh*] (*áγγελος Κυρίου*) appeared to him in fire flaming out of a bush Bush, though on fire, was not consumed. ... When the Lord saw him coming over to look at it more closely, God called out to him from the bush, ‘Moses! Moses!’” [Ex 3:2;4]. It was in fact a messenger (angel) that appeared in the bush, but it was God who spoke. Therefore, for him the messenger in question was a representative, with whom God mysteriously indentified Himself.

What transpires here is that the messenger is not an inferior, servile spirit, but God the Father’s plenipotentiary, His *alter ego* – the embodiment thereof, His representative in a much more perfect way than the one the Austrian emperor had in his *Kronprinz*, crown prince, in the person of his eldest son and heir to the throne. Just as the Lord Jesus had been announced as the prophet above any other prophet, so too is He the peculiar and only messenger (*áγγελος*). It was accurately pointed out in the Letter to the Hebrews: “[He, the Son has become] as far superior to the *angels* (messengers) as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs” [Heb 1:4]. He has become the *Kýrios* – the Lord (in Hebrew: *Adonái*), which indicated God’s proper name *Jahvéh* (“the Existing One”). God the Father at the moment of the resurrection “bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at

the [new] name of Jesus every knee should bend, ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (*Kýrios*), to the glory of God the Father,” [Phil 2:9-11] which is not belittled by the dignity of the Son, as it is the very same glory that shines from one Divine Being. Now, in contrast to the “Messenger” consubstantial with the Father that the Son is, other “messengers” are “ministering spirits (*leitourgiká pneúmata*) sent to serve, for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation” [Heb 1:14]. This consideration allowed the original Christians to discern that His eternal Son was the object of God’s theophanies in the Old Covenant (*theophaníaí*), before He assumed human nature in “the fullness of time” [Gal 4:4]. They felt that God the Father had been inaccessible, and it had been His Son that appeared to the patriarchs and to Moses.

Justin asserts that God, who spoke to Moses out of the bush, as well as the “messenger,” who appeared in the flame, is one and only divine Being, but should be distinguished from God the Creator and the Lord of the Universe.²⁵ It pertains to all God’s epiphanies in the times of the Old Covenant, about which Justin says: “It will not be the Creator of all things ... who has been shown to have manifested Himself to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob; who also is called and is perceived to be the Angel (*áγγελος*) of God the Maker of all things, because He publishes to men the commands of the Father and Maker of all things.”²⁶ The subordination (*subordinatio*) of the Son to the Father visible here should not be surprising, as the primitive theology – as well as the doctrine of Irenaeus about the Son and the Spirit as two hands of God²⁷ (ca 185) – would touch on the history of salvation only, which constitutes the content of the Bible, including the New Testament.

They were clearly aware that these outlines that made them think of an image of two Gods, one subordinated to the other, are not appropriate to express Christian doctrine about God, i.e. reconcile the unshaken faith in the one and only God with the doctrine about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, which was at the core of liturgy, starting from baptism.²⁸ One way, however, did seem promising – the Biblical and Hellenic doctrine about the Word-Wisdom, which Justin had pointed out.

²⁵ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* IV, praef. 4; 20:3; V, 1-6; *Demonstratio apostolicae praedicationis*, no. 11.

²⁸ *Didachè tôn dòdeka apostólón* (The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, 90-100 AD), ch. 7, no. 1; Justin, *Apologia prior* (150/155 AD), no. 61; Tertullian, *De baptismo*; Hippolytus, *Traditio apostolic* (ca. 215), no. 21.

In the second half of the 2nd century, it was clear for almost all the Christian speaking Greeks, owing to the popular Platonic doctrine, that the *Lógos* (the Word) mediates between the pure and otherworldly divine spirit – the Mind (*Noús*) – and the world characterised by multiplicity and diversity. Influenced by this, Justin wrote: “God begat before all creatures a Beginning, who was a certain rational power (*dýnamis logikḗn*),” which in the Bible is called “now the Son, again Wisdom, again an *Angel*, then God, and then Lord and Logos; ... 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.”²⁹ It is not, however, substantially separated or distinguished from Him, which is seen in an example of the human word. When we utter it, we, as it were, give birth to it, but not by means of separation, which would reduce the word (or the notion) in us.³⁰

Justin alludes to a then popular distinction between the internal word, the notion (*lógos endiáthetos*), and the same word that has been uttered (*lógos prophorikós*). He wishes to stress that God has His Word, His wisdom, but He does not lose Him, when He utters Him externally as the Power mediating between Him and the world; just as man is not robbed of a notion that he has expressed externally, uttering the word that it denotes.³¹

3. FROM DITHEISM TO MODALISM

A philosophical explanation of the conformity between the doctrine about the incarnate Son of God (*christología*) and the truth about one God (*monotheismós*, or more often *monarchía*) did not satisfy all theologians, and not only Judeo-Christians, but also Greeks. In their Biblical sensitivity and reverence for the Apostolic doctrine, they were surprised at pushing God in a nether world (*transcendentia*), because that implied introducing a second, inferior god, who would take care of the work of creation directly. First and foremost, however, they wanted to protect the truth about one God, which was then commonly indicated by the word *monarchía*, denoting one (*monḗ*) source of origin (*archḗ*), or, secondarily, the authority of one God.

²⁹ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ “*Sermo vocis [meae] ducit ad te intellectum verbi [mei seu conceptus]; et cum ad te duxerit sonus vocis intellectum verbi, sonus quidem ipse pertransit, verbum autem, quod [ille sonus] ad te perduxit, iam est in corde tuo, nec recessit a meo.*” Augustine, *Sermones* 293, no. 3, PL 38:1328.

Generally speaking, almost all Christians accepted this truth, but some more literally than others. A lot of Eastern theologians explicated the doctrine about two or three divine Subjects in such a way that despite their good intentions, they did not seem to realise that their arguments approximated a view that there might be two (*dy-theismós*) or three (*tri-theismós*) gods, ordered in such a way that the Father is a God in the fullest sense.³² The objection of the monarchians to the adherents of the philosophicised theology of the Word also stemmed from the fact that the Church had been fighting with gnosis, in which some Christian elements had been inscribed in the frame of Plato's dualism. Under it, however, the Creator of the world – or, according to the Bible, God – ceases to be the giver of salvific knowledge (*gnôsis*). His place is taken by an extremely more perfect and completely otherworldly God. The main work of Irenaeus (140-202), which is known as *Adversus haereses* (“Against Heresies”), but is in fact titled “On the Detection and Overthrow of the So-Called Gnosis” (*Élegchos kai anastrophê tês pseudonymous gnôseos*) is directed against them.

Irenaeus and the theologians of the Church used to contrast the doctrine about “one authority (*monarchía*)” of one God, who had both created the visible and invisible world and saved the whole man – not just the soul, which was what gnostics claimed, for whom the body, as the despised material element, was but the soul's prison. Modalists, in turn, who stated that the names of “the Father,” “the Sons,” and “the Spirit” indicated the modes (*modi*) of the activity of one and the same divine subject that followed one another, asserted that the Bible was in their favour, because God had spoken through Isaiah: “It is I, I the Lord; there is no savior (*Sôzôn*) but me.” [Isa 43:11]. And elsewhere: “So [the Lord (*Kýrios-Jahvéh*)] became their savior (*sôtêrian*) in their every affliction. It was not a messenger or an *angel*, but – *autos Kýrios ésôsén autoús* – He Himself who saved them. Because of His love and pity He redeemed them himself” [Isa 63:8-9]. The similar message is found in the Book of Baruch, where we have an additional outline of the announcement of the incarnate Son: “Such is our God; no other is to be compared to him: He has traced out all the way of understanding (*epistêmês*), and has given her to Jacob, his servant, to Israel, his beloved son. Since then she has appeared on earth, and moved among men” [Bar 3:36-28]. The Apostle John expressed the fulfillment of these words in

³² Origen would call Him *autótheos* and the only *ho Theós*. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, V, 39; Origen, *De principiis*, I, 2:13.

the Lord Jesus Christ, when he wrote: “And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory” [Jn 1:14].

Noetus of Smyrna, a town on the west coast of Asia Minor, articulated this concern. In the second half of the 2nd century, he was a bishop there, and a close successor of Polycarp – a disciple of the John Apostle. Noetus desired to protect the inviolable and preliminary truth about one God, whence the substantial identity of God the Creator and Redeemer in Jesus Christ must have resulted. In his opinion, the names of “the Father” and “the Son” did not signify two separate beings, but one divine being that is called in a different way depending on the circumstances. The name of “the Son” pertains to the incarnate God, who was begotten, because thus God became visible and passible. The name of “the Father,” on the other hand, refers to God as unbegotten and impassible. He remains as such even after the Incarnation, as it is but superimposed on His eternal being in time and space, without changing it. Both of the names of “the Father” and “the Son” would not then point to a factual difference (*realis*), but to the modes (*modi*), whereby one God is perceived in given circumstances. Hence this view was later called modalism.

It seemed to Noetus that in this way he would defend not only the message of the Old Covenant about one true God, but also the New Testament, in which Jesus Himself announces: “The Father and I – *hen esmén* – are one” [Jn 10:30] or later, answering Philip’s question: “‘Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, *Show us the Father?* Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?’” [Jn 14:8-10].

Noetus retained the Biblical truth about one and true God, clarifying that God had revealed Himself as man in Jesus, who suffered and accomplished salvation in human nature. Thus, Noetus distanced himself from both the duality present in the ideas of Christian Gnostics and the polytheism (*polytheismós*) spread among pagans. Even though this commentary heeded the testimonies of the New Covenant to various degrees, it did appear concise and lucid, so it won some people over. Its weakness started to become apparent toward the end of the century, when it was transferred to the principal cultural centres of the Empire, to Rome, Alexandria and Carthage³³. It was

³³ “The two centres of [early] Christian thought – Carthage and Alexandria.” Pierre Pierrard, *Historia Kościoła katolickiego* (Warszawa: PAX, 1984), 39-43. The school of Antioch with its proper, literal understanding of the Bible set itself apart as late as the turn of the 4th century,

there that theologians who distinguished the divine Subjects lectured; especially in the East, they might have also ordered them according to the seeming degree of their divinity.

To this group, after Justin, belonged: in Rome – Hippolytus, who wrote in Greek and came from the East; in Carthage – the great Tertullian; and afterwards in Alexandria – half a century younger Origen, who, through his disciple Gregory the Miracle-Worker, Eusebius of Caesarea and the Cappadocian Fathers, would become the main teacher of the Greek Church³⁴ on a par with Augustine in the Latin West.

At the beginning of the 3rd century, both movements met, which proves that not only mutual criticism of the weaknesses of the rival must have taken place, but also the revision of one's one theory ensued in order to the elements under attack might be shown in a new way and protected by new arguments. The opponents had sketched the interlocutors' views inasmuch as a biased way that the resulting image was unsustainable. For instance, the writers who stressed the Divine oneness accused the supporters of the *Lógos* that they tried to introduce two gods (*dytheismus*) by means of their wide-ranging approach. They, however, stood in for criticism for their supposed claim that God the Father had suffered on the cross (*patripassionismus*).

The teaching of Noetus was brought to Rome by his deacon Epigonus. Afterwards, also his disciple Cleomenes, who at the beginning of the 3rd century founded a school, worked there, possible with the consent of Pope Zephyrinus and his deacon and subsequent successor – Callixtus. The Libyan Sabellius joined this circle and soon became famous thanks to his movement called *Sabellianoi*. His popularity increased not necessarily due to the news of his exclusion from the Church in 218 by Callixtus, but rather to his followers' diffusion into the Greek Africa, i.e. to Egypt and Libya, where they countered the deep-seated Origen's idea of the three grades of divine beings (*hypostáseis*).

especially in regard to the mystery of Incarnation. The works of Lucian of Antioch, living in the second half of the 3rd century, who was considered master by Arius and Eusebius of Nicomedia, followed the paths of Origen, whose activity, prone to numerous influences, had taken over the entire Greek East with its centres in Caesarea Palestinae and Alexandria alike. Epiphanius, *Panarion*, no 63; Manilo Simonetti, *La crisi ariana nel IV secolo* (Rome: Augustinianum, 1975), 20-1.

³⁴ It was Gregory the Miracle-Worker, the direct and zealous disciple of Origen in Caesarea Maritima who transferred Origenism to Cappadocia, where he would be the teacher. Basil and his friend Gregory of Nazianzus went as far as to compile a collection of the works of their Alexandrian master that they called "The Love of the Beautiful (*Philokalia*).” On the other hand, one of the few early theologians who opposed Origen was Methodius of Olympus in Phrygia, who lived around the second half of the 3rd century.

There was yet another modalist called Praxeas who made his way into the very Latin Africa's capital, Carthage. However, he met here an outstanding theologian, Tertullian³⁵, who already at the end of the 2nd century had had the opportunity of lecturing on the truth about the Trinity and Incarnation so accurately that it has in fact remained untouched ever since. Meanwhile, the Origenic Greek East had hardly managed to reach a minimal level of elucidation of the key first mystery at the end of the 4th century, and it took them even longer, to the middle of the 5th century, to deal with the second one. It is true that at the beginning of the 2nd century, a Greek-speaking theologian of the East origin called Hippolytus³⁶ worked in Rome, but he was much younger than Tertullian, more or less same age as Origen, who, on top of that, living in the capital of the empire and getting to know the "the most ancient church of Rome,"³⁷ met Jerome in 212, and being full of admiration, desired to listen to his sermon.³⁸

Just as the previous Greek writers of the *Lógos* school, especially Justin and Theophilus, Hippolytus not only distinguished, like Origen, three subjects in the Divinity, but he also perceived them as separate beings, ordered according to their essence, which would later be called subordinationism. Due to the fact that at that time, and even as long as till the middle of the 4th century, the Holy Spirit had been spoken of sparingly and vaguely³⁹, thus it concerned mainly the relation of the Son to the Father. Hence, Pope Callixtus, contemporary with Hippolytus, called him *dýtheos* – a confessor of two gods. Driven by a bizarre zeal that occurred to Basil among other

³⁵ Jerome, who was a man of few words as for praises, especially for Latin authors, wrote of him as "the greatest Latin writer of African provinces," who "was a man of perspicuous and powerful mind." Jerome, *De viris illustribus*, no. 53, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2708.htm> [November 6, 2016].

³⁶ Pier F. Beatrice, *Introduzione ai Patri della Chiesa* (Vicenza: Istituto San Gaetano, 1982), 87.

³⁷ Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* CV, 15:10, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250106.htm> [November 6, 2016].

³⁸ "[Hippolytus] wrote some commentaries on the Scriptures, ... and an exhortation 'On the praise of our Lord and Saviour,' in which he indicates that he spoke in the church in the presence of Origen." Jerome, *De viris*, no. 61.

³⁹ John N. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines: Revised Edition* (New York, HarperOne, 1978), 126; Simonetti, *La crisi*, 6, 11 and 502: "La monade divina (Dio Padre) si sviluppa in una diade e, là dove si ha coscienza anche della funzione – se non della persona – dello Spirito santo, in una triade ... Origene..., sia pur a fatica, inserisce in questo schema anche lo Spirito santo, attribuendogli spicigici e limitati computi (ispirazione delle sacre scritture, santificazione dei fedeli) Fino al 360 la questione dibattuta fu soltanto intorno alla relazione Figlio-Padre, senza apprezzabile ripercussione sullo Spirito santo. Dopo il 360 invece, a seguito dell'insorgere della questione dello Spirito santo, si può finalmente parlare di teologia nel senso specifico della parola."

Greek followers of Meletius, Hippolytus on the other hand, accused Callixtus of Sabellianism⁴⁰, distorting, however, his teaching, which – according to the biblically-founded Western sense – stresses the oneness of the Divine being.⁴¹ Indeed, Callixtus, in the same way as his predecessor Zephyrinus, kept the balance between two extremes – a separative and grading doctrine of the Word, whereby only Father⁴² would be the only necessary God, and modalism, which was proved by the fact of the excommunication of Sabellius by Callixtus.⁴³

On the whole, Hippolytus was not much of a creative theologian, but rather an investigator of the Tradition⁴⁴, especially the Biblical one, because he was the first to initiate the custom of continual explanation of the Biblical text, book by book and sentence by sentence, which would skyrocket in the region of the Greek language thanks to Origen and John of Antioch, also known as Chrysostom (*Chrysóstomos*, “golden-mouthed”).⁴⁵ In his theology,

⁴⁰ Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* IX, 12:16-19; X, 27:3-4.

⁴¹ It was expressed in a clearer way several dozen years ago in a letter by Pope Dionysius to his namesake, bishop of Alexandria, who had been accused of separating the Trinity into three gods and Their gradation. Dionysius of Egypt had not only been Origen’s disciple and his successor as the head of *didaskáleion*, a catechetical school in Alexandria, but also such an ardent propagator of his doctrine that – according to Basil (*Epistulae* IX, 2) – his very own commentary on the Trinity made way for Arius’s error. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 134-135.

⁴² This view, mainly because of Origen, would last in Greek theology; cf. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* XXIX, *Theological* III. “De Filio” I, n. 2, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310229.htm> [November 6, 2016]: “But *Monarchy* [divine unity...] is that which we hold in honour. It is, however, a Monarchy that is not limited to one Person, for it is possible for Unity if at variance with itself to come into a condition of plurality; but one which is made of an equality of nature [of Subjects] (*phýseōs homotimía*) and a Union of mind, and an identity of motion, and a convergence of its elements to unity (*pros to hen tôn ex autoú sýnneusis*);” John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa* I, ch. 8 “De Sancta Trinitate”, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/33041.htm> [November 6, 2016]: “Wherefore we do not speak of three Gods, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but rather of one God, the holy Trinity, the Son and Spirit being referred to one cause, and not compounded or coalesced according to the synæresis of Sabellius.”

⁴³ Hippolytus, *Refutatio* IX, 11-12.

⁴⁴ It is evident in his work *Traditio apostolica*. His another merit was the presentation of errors opposed to the Tradition, which he described in the book titled *Refutatio omnium haeresium*, also known as *Philosophoumena*.

⁴⁵ His “Commentary on the Book of Daniel” is the oldest work of Christian Biblical writings. Jerome, in the above mentioned chapter about Origen and his meeting with Hippolytus in Rome, adds: “Ambrosius, who we have said was converted by Origen from the heresy of Marcion, to the true faith [cf. no. 56], urged Origen to write, in emulation of Hippolytus, commentaries on the Scriptures, offering him seven, and even more secretaries, and their expenses, and an equal number of copyists, and what is still more, with incredible zeal, daily exacting work from him, on which account Origen, in one of his epistles, calls him his ‘Taskmaster (*ergodióktês*).’” Jerome, *De viris*,

he borrowed heavily from the truly rich doctrine of Irenaeus of Lyon – who was a Greek settled in the West as well – who, with regard to the Trinity, had not accepted the philosophicised theology of the Word, which was steeped in cosmology, rather than the idea of salvation that was attainable in Jesus Christ.⁴⁶ The *Lógos*, on the other hand, had become the summary of Gnostic aeons – timeless indirect beings that God supposedly needed to create the world. They, nonetheless, were but phenomena (*phainómena*) of one mediator.⁴⁷ Therefore, Irenaeus stood by the Biblical image of God, who creates the world and man for His glory, thanks to the Son and the Spirit⁴⁸, using them as if they had been His hands.⁴⁹ Hippolytus moderately added to his commentary the ideas borrowed from the apologists who shared the Platonic and stoic philosophy of the *Lógos*.

Caught up in the dispute, both parties – modalists and philosophical subordinationists, for whom only Father was God – started to moderate their beliefs by making their ideas more precise and perfected in order to get rid of the reasons for slander on the part of their opponents. Now, modalists, concerned about the accusation of patripassianism, refined the understanding of the words “Father and “Son.” They asserted that with regard to Jesus Christ, who is both God and man, the word “Son” means the human element, for the body (*sarx*) is given life by the rational soul, whereas its divine element – the spirit (*pnéuma*) – goes by the name “Father.” Obviously, these attempts could not win over the theologians of the Word. Among those there were some who realised that they multiplied and graded divine beings, but few got worried – even Origen almost half a century later – except the Latin Tertullian of Carthage.

no. 61. Due to his fellow’s greater fame, Hippolytus was often called the Origen of Rome. Gerhard Rauschen, *Patrologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1926), 151-2.

⁴⁶ It could not have been any deferent, as Irenaeus saw the first task of theology in presenting and defending against the erroneous Christian knowledge (*gnósis*), which was expressed by his principal five-volume work entitled “*Élegchos kai anatropè tês pseudónymou gnóseôs*,” customarily called “*Adversus haereses*.”

⁴⁷ Simonetti, *La crisi*, 4-6.

⁴⁸ Job 10:8, Ps 119:73, Prov 3:19; 8:22-23; Berthold Altaner, Albert Stuiber, *Patrologia* (Warszawa: PAX, 1990), 192.

⁴⁹ Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* IV, preaf. 4; 20:3; V 1-6; Irenaeus, *Demonstratio apostolicae praedicationis*, no. 11.

4. TERTULLIAN

He was born around 160 in the capital of central-west Africa, which became not only the cradle of Christian literature in the Latin language – including the oldest translation of Scripture – but also the place of origin of the earliest Latin liturgy.⁵⁰ Before the destruction of this fertile garden of life and Catholic thought in the 5th century by the Germanic Vandals, who professed Arianism, and the subsequent flood of Islam, it had become the place of the unravelling of Augustine’s mind, which would last for centuries. Tertullian also spoke Greek fluently, thanks to which he had a profound insight into the works of the theologian of the East – from Justin to Theophilus to Irenaeus of Smyrna, bishop of Lyon.

Some scholars count Tertullian as a theologian of the *Lógos*, because his main work on the Trinity was written against a modalist, Praxeas, speaking of the Son and the Spirit as independent subjects. The same had been done, however less profoundly because of its pastoral character⁵¹, by Irenaeus, who was older and had not wished to stand by the authors philosophicising about the Word.⁵² Tertullian was careful in a similar way. His moderation became the golden mean between the Platonic and stoic concept of the Word as a secondary god (*theós*)⁵³ – also called “second god” (*deuteros theós*)⁵⁴ – who was

⁵⁰ Antoni J. Nowowiejski, *Msza święta*, vol. I (Warszawa: Antyk, 2001), 134.

⁵¹ A shorter, above mentioned Irenaeus’s work entitled “The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching” is a special example. It centres the teaching around two fundamental truths – the Trinity and Incarnation. It has catechetical features and proves the authenticity of the Gospel by means of excerpts from the Old Testament.

⁵² Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 104: “Their thought was more influenced by [the Plato-inclined Jew] Philon than John [the Apostle]... although [Irenaeus] was more of a self-conscious churchman than they, more openly attached to and more ready to parade the Church’s threefold ‘rule of faith’, the framework of his thinking remained substantially the same as theirs.”

⁵³ It was Justin who first misused the Gospel of John, whose Prologue states: “The Word was with God, and – *Theós ên Lógos* – the Word was God” [Jn 1:1]. He pointed out that the Word is called *theós* without the definite article, in contrast to the Father referred to as *ho Theós* (in the accusative: *ton Theón*), which was to denote that only the Father is God in the strict sense, and the Son (the Word) – in a generalised, thus secondary way. However, a misunderstanding occurred here, because the word *theós* in relation to the word “Word” is not a subject, but a predicate (*praedicatum*), hence if one wished, for instance, to prematurely state that that Father of Jesus, whom the Gospels speak about, was God, he would say in Greek: *ho Patêr estin Theós*, i.e. without the article. Despite what should have been clear, Origen would do the same as Justin, who, on top of that, had not hesitated to call the Son *deuteros theós* (the second god): Origen, *De principiis* I, 2:13.

⁵⁴ Origen, *Contra Celsum* V, 39; Origen, *De principiis* I, 2:13.

supposedly indispensable for the one God in the strict sense (*ho Theós*)⁵⁵ to create the world as His *dēmiourgós* – and modalism, which excluded the factual differentiation between the three divine subjects. Tertullian was far from the former extreme in that he, for instance, ruled out the substantial “distinction” (*diversitas*) between the Son and the Father.⁵⁶ On the other hand, he distanced himself from the other extreme by teaching about three divine subjects, factually and simultaneously distinct from one another. They are *tres cohaerentes* – the Three closely connected.⁵⁷

Tertullian had then become the follower of Irenaeus⁵⁸, whose demonstration – in fact, the first attunement of Christian doctrine – he borrowed, deepened and unfolded more than Hippolytus. What was the condition and guarantee of this heritage and growth was the sensitivity to the criterion – the “rule of faith” (*regula fidei*) – which was constituted by the principle of the Apostolic Tradition, which had unwaveringly lived in the Church thanks to the uninterrupted stream of sacramental succession (*successio*) of bishops, reaching back to the very source, to the Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ. This principle, which Irenaeus described in the third part of his main work⁵⁹, Tertullian demonstrated as the first one in a separate treatise entitled “*De praescriptione haereticorum*” (“The Prescription against Heretics”). “The most sacred teaching of the Church of God, as Pope Dionysius put it in the 3rd century, is the sacred unity [of the divine Trinity] (*he hagía mónas*), which is *to hágion kèrygma tēs monarchías* – the most sacred teaching of the one power,”⁶⁰ i.e. the oneness of God in the Trinity, and not only the Father as the supposed only God in the strict sense.

Ahead of the history of the Church, especially the Greek one, Tertullian arrived at such an approach to the two key truths⁶¹ that he had explained

⁵⁵ For Origen, He is “one only God (*autótheos*),” thus “primal goodness (*háplós agathós*),” while the Son is only an “image of His goodness (*eikón agathótétos*).” Origen, *Contra Celsum* V, 39; Origen, *De principiis* I, 2. And the Holy Spirit is, in his opinion, even inferior in essence to the Son: Origen, *De principiis*, praef. 4.

⁵⁶ Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeam*, no. 9, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0317.htm> [November 6, 2016].

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 25.

⁵⁸ Rauschen, *Patrologie*, 121: “Alle späteren Ketzerbekämpfer, von Tertullian angefangen, haben für die frühere Zeit aus Irenäus geschöpft.”

⁵⁹ Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* III, 3.

⁶⁰ Dionysius, *Epistula ad Dionysium, archiepiscopum Alexandrinum* (262), DS 112, <http://patristica.net/denzinger> [November 6, 2016].

⁶¹ Benedykt J. Huculak, *Herbem Trójca i Wcielenie. Wybór pism pomniejszych* (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Św. Józefa Sebastiana Pelczara, 2014).

their essence almost two hundred years before the Christian East worked out similar formulae, because this reference to three Subjects was in a way agreed upon there as late as the 4th century during the council of eastern bishops in Constantinople (381) – later affirmed as ecumenical, and the truth about Incarnation in the middle of the 5th century during the Council of Chalcedon (451).

What is telling is that it was Tertullian that used the word *Trinitas* for the very first time. He had coined it to denote the mystery of God. It was not an ordinary transfer of the Greek *Triás*, which had been used earlier by Theophilus of Antioch⁶² to signify a pretty primitive image. This word was used in informal speech to denote the number “three,” similarly as the Polish word “*trójka*,” or Russian “*trojka*,” often used with reference to the group of three horses, therefore its Latin translation would not be “*trinitas*,” but “*terna*” or “*ternarium*” (or English “ternary”). In contrast, “*trinitas*” conveys both triality and unity, for which reason Tertullian coined it.

What is more important, however, he also accurately expressed this Divine unity and triality, proving them non-contradictory in two different fields which they belong to. The first one refers to Divine substance (*substantia*), while the second one to Persons (*Personae*), who are mutually united by the bond of procession: “The connection of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Paraclete [the Holy Spirit], as he writes, produces three coherent Persons, who are yet distinct One from Another (*alterum ex altero*). These Three are one (*unum*) essence, not one (*unus*) Person.”⁶³ Therefore, “you ought to understand Him [God] to be *another*, I have already explained, on the ground of *Personality* (*persona*), not of *Substance* (*substantia*) – in the way of distinction, not of division.”⁶⁴

It is impossible to overestimate the fact the Tertullian used the word *persona* to denote three divine subjects. The word had been present in Old Latin, including the unequalled Roman law, where it signified an individual man – a human, thus mainly spiritual, conscious and free being. The Greek East, however, did not arrive at the concept of the person, even in the works of Plato and Aristotle; nevertheless, its essence was denoted spontaneously by the word *prósôpon*, whose primary meaning was the “face,”

⁶² Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum* II, 15. The *Triás* in question is God, the Word and Wisdom, yet the latter is, just as in the case of other apologists that make use of the name “Spirit,” presented vaguely. John N. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 126.

⁶³ Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeam*, no. 25.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 12.

“countenance.”⁶⁵ It had already been present in the 5th century BC on the rolls of first dramas in reference to their characters.

It is true that the word *prósôpon* is found in the Greek translation of the Bible, dating back to the middle of the 3rd century BC, as well as in the New Testament, but only with the primary meaning.⁶⁶ Jews were, in fact, even less interested in the explicit concept of the person and the word denoting it, since from the beginning, they had been more inclined to think of images of perceptible things, rather than general concepts. It can be seen in the writings of Paul from Tarsus in the Hellenic Cilicia, who uses the word for “form” (*morphê*) to convey the concept of nature [Phil 2:6-7], while it was common to denote human nature by the expression “flesh and blood.”⁶⁷ Taking responsibility for the harm of a man was called “bringing one’s blood upon oneself.”⁶⁸ Just as Greeks conveyed the general meaning of the person by the word “face” (*prósôpon*), so too Jews did, using the word “soul” (*psychê*).⁶⁹

Even though the latest parts of the Old Greek Bible – the Books of Sirach and Wisdom – that were written at almost the same time as the New Testament, show the Roman influence, the word *prósôpon* denotes there only the primary referent, the face.⁷⁰ This is the reason why younger and less creative Hippolytus borrowed the concept of the person from Tertullian’s

⁶⁵ Russians, culturally connected with Byzantium, are said to have borrowed this custom from Greeks. In Russian the word *licó* also denotes these two concepts.

⁶⁶ It also pertains to the frequent Biblical expression “*prosôpolêmpsiá*,” which was informally translated in the West to “respect of persons.” In fact, it derives from the verb “*prosôpolêmpéô*,” “take [into account] the face of a [given] man,” which implies acting not necessarily by doing him justice, but according to his position and influence.

⁶⁷ Mt 16:17, Gal 1:16.

⁶⁸ When the Jewish leaders were forcing Pilate to agree to kill Jesus and he kept refusing, “the whole people said in reply, ‘His blood be upon us and upon our children’” [Mt 27:25]. The very same leaders told the Apostles who were proclaiming the truth about Jesus: “We gave you strict orders (did we not?) to stop teaching in that name. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and want to bring this man’s blood upon us” [Acts 5:28]. And Paul says in Ephesus: “I am not responsible for the blood of any of you” [Acts 20:26], i.e. “I am not responsible for any of you,” especially their harm. Likewise, the Old Testament speaks of Susanna, whom Daniel protected: “Thus was innocent blood spared that day” [Dan 13:62].

⁶⁹ It occurs frequently in both Testaments, e.g. Gen 46:15;18;22;25, Ex 1:5; 12:4; 16:16, Sir 10:28, Isa 49:7, Ezek 18:4, Mt 16:25-26; Jn 15:13, Acts 7:14. The word “name” (*ónoma*) is used in this way only thrice: Acts 1:15, Rev 3:4, 11:13.

⁷⁰ It refers to Sir 10:5 too: “Sovereignty over every man is in the hand of God, who imparts his majesty to the [face of the] ruler,” and Wis 6:7-8: “For the Lord of all shows no partiality [respect of the face], nor does he fear greatness, Because he himself made the great as well as the small, and he provides for all alike; but for those in power a rigorous scrutiny impends.”

works – he lived in Rome and spoke Latin well.⁷¹ Staying within the Greek output, he was unable to equal the depth of Tertullian’s insight, which is proved by the fact that, unlike his fellow from Carthage, he never spoke of “three Persons,” mainly because he did not consider the Spirit as such.⁷²

A frequently, and too naively, repeated error is a partial misconception that the word *prósôpon* denotes the “mask,” for it had a different name in Greek.⁷³ One of the most notable expert on this issue, George Prestige, having studied and researched it thoroughly, had to “sa[y] at once, in passing, that no ancient Father until Basil uses the word *prósôpon* in this sense of mask. When the word is employed to describe the Persons of the Trinity, it means, not a transitory and superficial presentation, but simply and individual [subject].”⁷⁴ Hence, it transpires that Basil suspecting the word *prósôpon* (person) of a Sabellian and theatrical meaning of the mask, as well as “the word’s alleged consequent discredit in [Eastern] theology, with which modern text-books make so great a play, both seem to be pure legend.”⁷⁵ The most ancient Greek dramatists themselves did not have masks in mind when, introducing their works, they enumerated the characters, oftentimes historical ones, of the events presented on stage.⁷⁶ Just as it happens in modern theatre, so too they called them *Ta tou drámatos prósôpa* – persons of the drama.⁷⁷

Tertullian got to penetrate the dense darkness and even if he here and there expressed his opinion in a slightly different way than it would be affirmed later, he should not be at all discredited since the doctrine of faith was then in its germ form. The fact is that he said that the Word, who had eternally been with the Father, also known as the Wisdom, assumed the name of the Son only with regard to the creation of the world, yet it was in fact aligned with traditional theology – worked out mainly by Irenaeus – and was conditioned by Paul’s words: “Then comes the end [of this world], when

⁷¹ It is true that there are scholars who opt for the reverse order, but their justifications seem insufficient, yet they do not take other, and more important, circumstances into account.

⁷² Hippolytus, *Contra Noëtum*, ch. 7; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 110; George L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (Eugene: Wipf&Stock, 2008), 159f.

⁷³ I.e. *prósôpeion*, which not only was distinguished from the “face” (*prósôpon*) and, even more so its semantic derivative, the “person”, but it was clearly juxtaposed with it, e.g. by Clement of Alexandria, who about 195, accused some woman who made themselves up that they change their faces (*prósôpa*) into masks (*prósôpeia*). Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 3:3, 11:2.

⁷⁴ Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 113.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Claude Mossé, *Pericle, l’inventore della democrazia* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2006), 156-64; Indro Montanelli, *Storia dei Greci* (Milan: BUR, 2004), 18-22.

⁷⁷ Benedykt J. Huculak, “Jana Dunsza Szkota,” 119-21.

[Christ] hands over the kingdom to his God and Father, ... For [Christ] must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ... When everything is subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God [the Father] (*ho Theós*) may be all in all" [1 Cor 15:24-28].

Therefore it had seemed that what resulted from this was that the perceivable personhood of the incarnate Son will end after the final judgement, and that it had lasted not only from the moment of Incarnation, but since the beginning of the world, because "All things came to be through him [the Word], and without him nothing came to be" [Jn 1:3]. The state of the perceptivity of the Word would then be linked with the history of the world and, thus, Tertullian would call His autonomy the "perfect nativity," which was connected to the predicate "Son."⁷⁸ At the end of the world – after the last judgement – the Second Person will not disappear, but what will end will be His perceptivity, harmonised with the history of the word (*oikonomía*), which was to serve as the backdrop for the mystery of the Trinity.⁷⁹ Tertullian links this end with the return to the name "Wisdom," which the Word had before the work of creation.⁸⁰ Explanations of older theologians, like Justin, Theophilus and Irenaeus, were similar, but less profound. The subsequent concept of eternal generation would then prove lucky to Origen – one of the few elements of his output within the limits of orthodox doctrine. The detail in question was not fruit of genius, but an obviousness in relation to Origen's view that not only God, but also spiritual beings (*logiká*) – angels and souls – were eternal and, on top of that, the world had no beginning.⁸¹ Nevertheless, these ideas were condemned by bishops many times as extraneous to Christian doctrine since the beginning of the 3rd century.⁸²

⁷⁸ Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeam*, no. 7; Tertullian, *Adversus Hermogenem*, no. 3.

⁷⁹ Benedykt J. Huculak, *Najświętsza Trójca na tle dzieła zbawczego* (Kalwaria Zebrzydowska: Calvarianum, 2000).

⁸⁰ Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeam*, no. 7.

⁸¹ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 131: "As it [doctrine of the Trinity] is formulated by Origen, however, the underlying structure of thought is unmistakably borrowed from contemporary Platonism. A striking illustration of this is the fact that, in addition to the Son or Word, he conceived of the whole world of spiritual beings (what he called *logikoi* or *noés*) as being coeternal with the Father. Indeed, their relation to the Word is precisely parallel to that of the Word, at a higher level, to the Father; they are images of Him, as He is of the Father, and in their degree are equally entitled to be called gods. The reason for this is the axiom, which Origen picked up from middle Platonism, that the Father must always have had a world on which to exercise His power; but its effect is to undermine the Christian idea of a Triune God Who transcends the contingent order."

⁸² The first ones to have done that were Melito of Sardis, Peter of Alexandria and Eustathius of Antioch.

Tertullian stresses that also before the creation of the world, i.e. eternally, the Word proceeds from the Father as a personal and divine substantive being.⁸³ However, they are *unius substantiae* – of one substance⁸⁴ – thus one and the same substantial being. The Word, or the Son, is then “second to God the Father (*secundus a Patre*),”⁸⁵ because He proceeds Him “in degree (*gradu*),”⁸⁶ or the place in the order of the Three, which Greeks called *taxis* (order). The third place, still equal in regard to Divine nature, belongs to the Holy Spirit, who Tertullian, to avoid ambiguity caused by the origin of the phrase, would sometimes call by the Biblical name *Paracletus* (Advocate). Above all, however, he asserts that the Spirit is a Divine Person,⁸⁷ which is extremely important, or even genius, if we consider that neither Hippolytus, younger than him and speaking Greek, risked claiming so, nor did the Council of Constantinople (381) profess it explicitly at the end of the 4th century.

The Holy Spirit – according to Christ’s words about “another Advocate” he would give the faithful after the Ascension [Jn 14:16-18] – was sent, as Tertullian says, “instead of [the Son] (*vicaria vis*).”⁸⁸ He proceeds “from the Father through the Son,”⁸⁹ being the third after Them “as the fruit of the tree is third from the root, or as the stream out of the river is third from the fountain, or as the apex of the ray is third from the sun.”⁹⁰ Therefore, God is “the Trinity of the One Divinity (*Trinitas unius divinitatis*),”⁹¹ or of one substance (*substantia*) as a substantial being. Hence, “you ought to understand Him [the Son and the Spirit] to be another, I have already explained, on the ground of Personality, not of Substance – in the way of distinction, not of division.”⁹² For the Three are “of one substance, and of one condition, and of one power,”⁹³ thus they “are one essence, not one Person (*unum sunt, non unus*).”⁹⁴

⁸³ “The Word” [Jn 1:1-3] was eternally “an objective thing and a person (*res et persona*),” because of the “Divine Nature.” Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeam*, no. 7.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 2.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 7.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 9; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 103.

⁸⁷ Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeam*, no. 11.

⁸⁸ Tertullian, *De prescriptione haereticorum*, no. 13.

⁸⁹ Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeam*, no. 4.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 8.

⁹¹ Tertullian, *De pudicitia*, no. 4; Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeam*, no. 3, 11 and 12.

⁹² *Ibid.*, no. 12.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, no. 2.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 25.

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Here, the truth about the Trinity was summarised using the expression *una substantia, tres personae* (one substance, three persons). It had happened almost two hundred years before Basil in the East put forward a less valid formula in the form *mía ousía, treís hypostáseis*, which at best could stand for “one substance, three substantial beings,” were we to accept that the neo-Platonic *hypóstasis* corresponds to the Aristotelian *ousía prôtê* (the first substance), i.e. the given being, and not the genus that an individual belongs to, which Aristotle in turn called “the second substance” (*ousía deutéra*), i.e. the generalised one.⁹⁵ This, however, need not be obvious, as since time immemorial in Greek both words have been used interchangeably as synonyms, which we can find not only in Origen’s works, where he distinguished divine subjects with regard to “hypostases” and “substances” (*ousía*), or “the underlying thing” (*hypokeímenon*),⁹⁶ but also in the declaration of the Council of Nicaea (325): “But those who say that there was a time when the Son was not, ... [or that He] is of another substance or essence (*ex hetéras hypostáseôs ê ousías*) [from the Father] ... the Catholic and apostolic Church, your mother and our mother, anathematizes.”⁹⁷

We may speak of the theological genius of not only Origen in the East, or subsequently Augustine in the West, but also – or even mainly – in the case of their predecessor Tertullian of Latin Africa. Despite his problems in the Church, it must be stressed that, compared to Augustine’s Manichean period, they were of mere legal dimension, where it was Origen who had gone astray in faith.

In the doctrine of the Trinity, neither Origen nor even Augustine, who indeed slightly deepened his teachings, indicating the already described links of the procession of the Persons (*alterum ex altero*)⁹⁸ thanks to the notion of relation (*relatio*)⁹⁹, surpassed Tertullian. What is telling is also the fact that

⁹⁵ Huculak, “Jana Dunsza Szkota,” 117-19.

⁹⁶ Origen, *Commentarii in Ioannem* II, 10:6, 23:18; X 37:21; Origen, *Contra Celsum* VIII, 12; Origen, *De oratione*, ch. 15, 1.

⁹⁷ *The Nicene Creed*, DS 126.

⁹⁸ Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeam*, no. 25.

⁹⁹ He did not know Greek like Tertullian (Augustine, *Confessiones* XIV) so he prematurely wrote: “Omnes quos legere potui qui ante me scripserunt de Trinitate, quae Deus est, divinorum librorum veterum et novorum catholici tractatores, hoc intenderunt secundum Scripturas docere, quod Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus unius substantiae inseparabili aequalitate divinam insinuent unitatem, ideoque non sint tres dii sed unus Deus – quamvis Pater Filium genuerit, et ideo Filius non sit

with regard to the Incarnation of the Son, which is the second key truth of Christians, Tertullian anticipated Eastern theologians for almost two and a half centuries. It was not until the middle of the 5th century that at the Council of Chalcedon they painstakingly, having to resort to the help of the West, and especially to Pope Leo, arrived at the formula equal to the one of Tertullian. Again, neither his Punic compatriot Augustine, nor Pope Leo added much to it.

It was, however, Origen who would become the Eastern oracle of the doctrine of the Trinity. His image of three Divine beings (*hypostases*), graded by the degree of divinity, starting from the Father – the only God in the strict sense (*ho Theós*) – had got slightly improved by Basil in the second half of the 4th century. Influenced by Athanasius, who was closer to the Latins, Basil agreed on the equality of the subjects in Divine venerability (*homotimía*). It was expressed by the Constantinopolitan Creed, in which the Eastern bishops – summoned by the Byzantine emperor Theodosius in the summer of 381 – do not profess directly that the Holy Spirit is God, but they do it indirectly, stating that He is “the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father¹⁰⁰, and *to syn Patri kai Hyi sym-proskynoúmenon kai syndoxazómenon* – who together with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified” [DS 150].

The tension between the Latin trend of Tertullian and the Greek one of Origen manifested itself in the West at the end of the 12th century. The Fourth Council of Lateran in 1215 had declared against the treatise “which Abbot Joachim [of Fiore] published against Master Peter Lombard on the unity or essence of the Trinity, calling him heretical and senseless because in his ‘Sentenceshe’ said: ‘Since it is a most excellent reality (*quaedam summa res*) – the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit ...’ Thus he (Joachim) declares that Peter Lombard implies not so much a Trinity as a *quaternity* in God, namely the three Persons and that common essence as a fourth, openly protesting that there is no matter which is the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit [simultaneously], [and their] unity of this kind is not true and

[idem] qui Pater est; Filiusque a Patre sit genitus, et ideo Pater non sit [idem] qui Filius est; Spiritusque Sanctus nec Pater sit nec Filius, sed tantum Patris et Filii Spiritus, Patri et Filio etiam ipse coequalis et ad Trinitatis pertinens unikatem ... Haec et mea fides est, quando haec est catholica fides; sed in ea nonnulli perturbantur cum audiunt Deum Patrem et Deum Filium et Deum spiritum Sanctum, et tamen hanc Trinitatem non tres deos sed unum Deum.” Augustine, *De Trinitate*, I 7-8.

¹⁰⁰ Benedykt J. Huculak, “W sprawie odniesienia poglądu Focjusza do Symbolu Nicejsko-Konstantynopolińskiego,” *Analecta Cracoviensia* 25 (1993): 150-3.

proper, but is something collective and similar, as many men are called one people, and many faithful, one Church ...” [DS 803]. In relation to this, the Council asserts that “there exists a [only one] most excellent reality (*una quaedam summa res*), incomprehensible indeed and ineffable, which truly is the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, at the same time three Persons, and anyone of the same individually” [DS 804]. More than two hundred years later, during the Council of Florence, both the Latins and Byzantines – and especially the Egyptians – wishing to renew the unity professed through their representatives that “the sacrosanct Roman Church [as a community], founded by the voice of our Lord and Savior [Jesus Christ], firmly believes, professes, and preaches [the faith in] one true God ... Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; one in essence, [and] three in persons ... These three persons are one God, and not three gods, because the three have one substance, one essence, one nature, one divinity ...” [DS 1330].

Until today these have remained the most precise expressions of the dogma of the Trinity made by a general, or ecumenical, council. Making reference to them, especially the profession of the Council of Lateran, Paul VI at the 19th centenary of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul (June 30, 1968) declared in the solemn profession of faith: “We believe in one only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit We believe that this only God is absolutely one (*absolute unus*) in His infinitely holy essence as also in all His perfections God alone can give us right and full knowledge of this reality by revealing Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit The mutual bonds which eternally constitute the Three Persons, who are each one and the same divine being (*unum idemque Esse divinum*), are the blessed inmost life of God thrice holy, infinitely beyond all that we can conceive in human measure.”¹⁰¹

It was already in the 3rd century, however, whose beginning had been adorned with Tertullian’s works, that Pope Dionysius declared that faced with Sabellius’s error, Origenists in Alexandria – heirs of the Greek *Lógos* trend – were getting to the other extreme, because they “destroy the one power [of God] (*monarchían*) which is the most sacred teaching of the Church of God, dividing and rending it into some three powers and distinct substances and three deities. ... In a certain measure proclaim three gods (*treís theoús kêryttousin*), when they divide the sacred unity [of God] (*tên hagían mónada*) into three different substances, ... [yet] These know well that the Trinity

¹⁰¹ Paul VI, *Credo of the People of God* [June 30, 1968], 8-9, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio_19680630_credo.html [November 7, 2016].

is indeed proclaimed in divine Scripture, moreover, that three gods are taught neither in the Old nor in the New Testament” [DS 112]. Thus the Pope calls for moderation, to the golden mean, which in fact coincides with Tertullian’s idea. “Thus, he says, it is evident that the divine Trinity and the holy proclamation of the monarchy will be preserved intact” [DS 115].

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