

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD
Part I: The Fathers and Apologists

Summary:

- I. INTRODUCTION.**
- II. THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN THE CHURCH FATHERS.**
- III. THE DOCTRINE OF GOD AND HERETICAL SOLUTIONS.**
 - A. The Ebionite or Unitarian Monarchians.
 - B. The Dynamic Monarchians.
 - C. The Modalistic Monarchians.
- IV. THE DOCTRINE OF GOD AND THE APOLOGISTS.**
 - A. Trinitarianism in the Second Century.
 - B. Trinitarianism in the Third Century.
- V. CONCLUSION.**

I. INTRODUCTION.

Parallel with the ongoing struggle to formulate the canon of Scriptures was the discussion of Theology Proper (i.e., Trinity). The church, due to its Jewish origins and high view of the O.T., was strictly monotheistic. As the centuries passed and the church became an intellectual force the ringing debate gradually focused on the credibility of the relationship of Christ and the Holy Spirit to God. If you confess their elevation to that of deity, does that not alter monotheism for the adoption of tritheism? If Christ is not eternally God, a view which would preserve the seeming integrity of monotheism, when was he elevated to such esteem? How does a less than eternal God effect the notion of redemption (Athanasius' concern)? The church struggled for intellectual honesty and their advances brought forth the doctrine of the "Trinity" (a non-biblical term though certainly in harmony with the witness of Scripture). That struggle is the topic of our discussion for the next several lessons.

II. THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN THE CHURCH FATHERS.

In summary Neve (*A History of Christian Thought*, I, 106) wrote, "The early writers of the primitive Christian church were not given to doctrinal speculations about the Baptismal Formula; they used the trinitarian formula; but this formula did not provoke them to a discussion of the relation of the three to each other." Kelly concluded (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 95), "The evidence to be collected from the Apostolic Fathers is meagre, and tantalizingly inconclusive."

A. Clement of Rome [d. ca. A.D. 99]

1. The Unity of Persons. Clement in his Epistle to the Corinthians coordinated the three persons by saying (58:2), “As God lives, and the Lord Jesus Christ lives, and the Holy Spirit” and elsewhere (46:6), “Have we not one God, and one Christ and one Spirit of grace poured upon us.”
2. The Pre-existence of Christ is taken for granted (22:1; 16:2) since He spoke through the Spirit in the Psalms.
3. The Holy Spirit (8:1; 13:1; 16:2; 63:2) is regarded as inspiring God’s prophets in all ages.

B. II Clement opened by advising its readers (1:1) to “think of Jesus as of God, as of the judge of the living and dead.”

C. Barnabas stressed Christ’s pre-existence by citing His cooperation with God in creation (5:5; 6:12), the reception of commands before the incarnation (14:3; 14:6), and that He is “Lord of the entire cosmos” (5:5; 12:7).

D. Ignatius spoke of the triadic formula three times in his letters (*To the Ephesians* 9:1; *To the Magnesians* 13:1, 2). He declares that He is “our God” describing Christ as “God incarnate” and “God manifest as man” (*To the Ephesians* 7:2; 19:3). In his pre-existent being Christ was seen as “ingenerate” (*agennetos*) the technical term reserved to distinguish the Uncreated from creatures) (*To the Ephesians*, 7:2; *To Polycarp*, 3:2).

E. Hermas clearly envisioned three distinct persons, but scholars such as Bauer, Harnack, and Kelley believe that Hermas was Adoptionistic and binitarian (This has been questioned by Heick and Orr).

III. THE DOCTRINE OF GOD AND HERETICAL SOLUTIONS.

As the latter half of the second century emerged, the church began to grapple with the implications of the baptismal formula as it relates to Christ. The attempts to resolve this issue are usually discussed under the topic of Monarchianism.

N.B. The term “Monarchian” has specific reference to the sole government or rule of God as distinct from Polytheism. The term seems first to have been coined by Tertullian (*Against Praxeas*, 3). It denotes in general the tendency which emphasizes the unity of God and rejects a plurality of disjoined persons.

A. The Ebionite or Unitarian Monarchians.

1. The term. The first attempt to speak of the person of Christ so as to deny His deity was the Ebionite sect that both Hippolytus (*Refutation of the Heresy*, 7, 35.1) and Tertullian say was founded by one Ebion (*Perscription*, 33). Tertullian makes it clear that the Ebionites were a Judaistic sect (“Then, writing to the Galatians, he inveighs against those who observe and defend circumcision and the Law. That is Ebion’s heresy,” [*Perscription*, 33]).
2. The theology. The Ebionites, as evidenced in Tertullian’s analysis, were a legalistic sect. They rejected the virgin birth regarding Christ as a man born of Joseph and Mary, a human that he was predestined to be Messiah (deliverer).

B. The Dynamic Monarchians.

The Monarchians made an attempt to reconcile monotheism and the deity of Christ; they sought to defend the unity of God while rejecting binitarianism. The attempt was valiant, but given to several difficulties. There were two major tendencies in the early explanations of Christ, adoptionism and modalism. The dynamic Monarchians regarded the divinity of Jesus as a power or influence that came upon him (i.e., a human Jesus that was deified).

1. The Origins of the Movement. Some historians trace the roots of dynamic monarchianism to a late second century sect, the Alogi (*ca.* 170–180), the deniers of the *Logos* doctrine. The obscure sect (sometimes referred to as Synopticians) emerged in Asia Minor and rapidly spread to Rome where by the third century the popular movement was led by Theodotus of Byzantium, then one Theodotus (a banker), and finally in the kindred party of the Artemonites under Artemon.
2. The Leaders of the Movement
 - a) **Theodotus of Byzantium**, a fuller, brought the teachings to Rome about A.D. 190 where **Hippolytus** refuted his teachings; he was excommunicated by bishop Victor of Rome. Hippolytus wrote (*Refutation*, 7.35): “A certain Theodotus, a native of Byzantium, introduced a novel heresy, saying some things concerning the origin of the universe partly in keeping with the doctrines of the true church, insofar as he admits that all things were created by God. Forcibly appropriating, however, his idea of Christ from the Gnostics and from Cerinthus and Ebion, he alleges that He appeared somewhat as follows: that Jesus was a man, born of a virgin, according to the counsel of the Father, and that after He had

lived in a way common to all men, and had become pre-eminently religious, He afterward at His baptism in Jordan received Christ, who came from above and descended upon Him. Therefore miraculous powers did not operate within Him prior to the manifestation of that Spirit which descended and proclaimed Him as the Christ. But some (i.e., among the followers of Theodotus) are disposed to think this man never was God, even at the descent of the Spirit; whereas others maintain that He was made God after the resurrection from the dead.”

- b) **Theodotus** emerged in Rome with one Asclepiodotus to lead a congregation. Hippolytus wrote (*Refutation*, 7. 36): “While, however, different questions have arisen among them, a certain one named Theodotus, by trade a money-changer (to be distinguished from the other Theodotus, who is commonly spoken of as Theodotus, the leather-worker), attempted to establish the doctrine that a certain Melchizedek is the greatest power, and that this one is greater than Christ. And they allege that Christ happens to be according to the likeness of this one. And they themselves, similarly with those who have been previously spoken of as adherents of Theodotus, assert that Jesus is a mere man, and that in conformity with the same account, Christ descended upon Him.”
- c) **Artemas** (or Artemon) of Rome continued monarchian teachings in the city where he gathered a small church. The Artemonites claimed to teach apostolic doctrine which had been perverted by bishops Victor and Zephyrinus. Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History*, 5.28) quotes from an anonymous source, *The Little Labyrinth*:

“The Artemonites say that all early teachers and the Apostles themselves received and taught what they now declare, and that the truth of the preaching (i.e., the Gospel) was preserved until the time of Victor, who was the thirteenth bishop in Rome after Peter, and that since his successor, Zephyrinus, the truth has been corrupted. What they say might be credible if first of all the divine Scriptures did not contradict them. And there are writings of certain brethren which are older than the times of Victor, and which they wrote in behalf of the truth against the heathen and against heresies of their time. I refer to Justin, Miltiades, Tatian, Clement, and others. In all of their works Christ is spoken of as God. For who does not know the works of Irenaeus and of Melito and of others, which teach that Christ is God and man? And how many psalms and hymns, written by the faithful brethren from the beginning, celebrate Christ as the Word of God, speaking of Him as divine? How, then, since the Church’s present opinion has been

preached for so many years, can its preaching have been delayed, as they affirm, until the times of Victor? And how is it that they are not ashamed to speak thus falsely of Victor, knowing well that he cut off from communion Theodotus, the leather-worker, the leader and father of this God-denying apostasy, and the first to declare that Christ is mere man.”

“They have treated the divine Scriptures recklessly and without fear; they have set aside the rule of ancient faith; and Christ they have not known, not endeavoring to learn what the divine Scriptures declare, but striving laboriously after any form of syllogism which may be found to suit their impiety. And if any one brings before them a passage of divine Scripture, they see whether a conjunctive or a disjunctive form of syllogism can be made from it. And as being of the earth and speaking of the earth and as ignorant of Him that cometh from above, they devote themselves to geometry and forsake the holy writings of God. Euclid is at least laboriously measured by some of them; Aristotle and Theophrastus admired; and Galen, perhaps, by some is even worshipped. But that those who use the arts of unbelievers for their heretical opinion and adulterate the simple faith of the divine Scriptures by the craft of the godless are not near the faith, what need is there to say? Therefore, they have laid their hands boldly upon the divine Scriptures, alleging that they have corrected them. That I am not speaking falsely of them in this matter, whoever wishes can learn. For if any one will collect their respective copies and compare them with one another, he will find that they differ greatly.”

- d) **Paul of Samosota**, Metropolitan of Antioch in Syria from *ca.* A.D. 260–72, is the most lucid representative of the adoptionists. Paul differed from the previous monarchians in that he held that Christ, commencing as man, was raised by progressive development to the dignity of the Son of God due to his excellent rank (i.e., Jesus was a real man but indwelt with *Logos* (Christ). **Epiphanes** wrote (*Heresies*, 65.1): “That in God is always his *Logos* and his Spirit, as in the heart of man his own reason; and that the Son of God is not a separate hypostasis (person), but is in God himself . . . But that the *Logos* came and dwelt in Jesus, who was a man; and thus, they say, God is one . . . one God the Father, and his Son in him, as the reason in a man.”

The mode of union between God and Jesus was strictly moral; at birth he was anointed with the Spirit and grew in that relationship.

N.B. Paul was eventually condemned for his views as the **Synod**

of Antioch in A.D. 269 when he would not confess that “the only begotten Son (was) begotten before the foundation of the world.” Artemas was condemned also, but Paul remained in his church until A.D. 272 when he was removed by imperial edict (first such in history!).

C. The Modalistic Monarchians.

The view of Christology, known also as **patripassionism** (the term was coined by Tertullian), was more widely prevalent than Adoptionism. This view was developed in Rome and in Egypt as did also the *homoousian* (the same) doctrine of Athanasius. Hippolytus defined it as follows (*Refutation*, 9.10): “For thus it is proper to state Monarchianism, saying that he who is called Father and Son is one and the same, not one from the other, but he from himself, called by name Father and Son according to the figure of the times, but that this one appearing and born of a virgin remains one . . . confessing to those who behold him that he is a Son . . . and not concealing from those who approach him that is the Father.”

1. **Praxeas** came to Rome from Asia Minor and gained some influence with bishop Victor. Tertullian raised his pen against Praxeas for two reasons: his Christology and his antimontanism. Tertullian describes Praxeas (*Against Praxeas*, 1.2) as follows:

“In various ways has the devil rivaled the truth. Sometimes his aim has been to destroy it by defending it. He maintains that there is only one Lord, the Almighty Creator of the world, that of this doctrine of the unity he may fabricate a heresy. He says that the Father himself came down into the Virgin, was Himself born of her, Himself suffered, indeed, was Himself Jesus Christ . . . He (Praxeas) was the first to import into Rome this sort of perversity, a man of restless disposition in other respects, and above all inflated with the pride of martyrdom (confessorship) simply and solely because of a short annoyance in prison; when, even if he had given his body to be burned, it would have profited him nothing, not having the love of God, whose very gifts he resisted and destroyed. For after the Bishop of Rome had acknowledged the prophetic gifts of Montanus, Priscilla, and Maximilla, and in consequence of the acknowledgment had bestowed his peace on the churches of Asia and Phrygia, Praxeas, by importunately urging false accusations against the prophets themselves and their churches, and insisting on the authority of the bishop's predecessors in the see, compelled him to recall the letter of peace which he had issued, as well as to desist from his purpose of acknowledging the said gifts. Thus Praxeas did two pieces of the devil's work in Rome: he drove out prophecy and he brought in heresy; he put to flight the Paraclete and he crucified the Father....After a time, then, the Father was born, and the Father suffered—God himself, the Almighty, is preached as Jesus

Christ.”

Again he wrote (*Against Praxeas*, 27): “For, confuted on all sides by the distinction between the Father and the Son, which we make while their inseparable union remains as (by the examples) of the sun and the ray, and the fountain and the river—yet by help of their conceit of an indivisible number (with issues) of two and three, they endeavor to interpret this distinction in a way which shall nevertheless agree with their own opinions; so that, all in one person, they distinguish two—Father and Son—understanding the Son to be the flesh, that is the man, that is Jesus; and the Father to be the Spirit, that is, God, that is Christ.”

2. **Noetus** of Smyrna, with **Epigonus** and **Callistus**, found in Rome in the beginning of the third century an influential center for the dissemination of their views. Rome was deeply influenced to such a degree that bishops Callistus and Zephyrinus adopted Noetus’ views bringing division to the church. Hippolytus wrote (*Refutation*, 10.27):

“Noetus, a Smyrnaean by birth, a reckless babbler and trickster, introduced this heresy, which originated with Epigonus, and was adopted by Cleomenes, and has thus continued to this day among his successors. Noetus asserts that there is one Father and God of the universe, and that He who had made all things was, when He wished, invisible to those who existed, and when He wished He became invisible; that He is invisible when He is not seen and visible when He is seen; that the Father is unbegotten when He is not generated, but begotten when He is born of a virgin; that He is not subject to suffering and is immortal when He does not suffer and die, but when His passion came upon Him Noetus admits that the Father suffers and dies. The Noetians think that the Father is called the Son according to events at different times. Callistus supported the heresy of those Noetians, but we have carefully described his life. And Callistus himself likewise produced a heresy, taking his starting-point from these Noetians. And he acknowledges that there is one Father and God, and that He is the Creator of the universe, and that He is called and regarded as Son by name, yet that in substance He is one. For the Spirit as Deity is not, he says, any being different from the Logos, or the Logos from Deity; therefore, this one person is divided by name, but not according to substance. He supposes this one Logos to be God and he says that He became flesh. He is disposed to maintain that He who was seen in the flesh and crucified is Son, but it is the Father who dwells in Him.”

Again (*Refutation*, 9.12): “Now Callistus brought forward Zephyrinus himself and induced him to avow publicly the following opinions: ‘I know that there is one God, Jesus Christ; and that excepting Him I do not know another begotten and capable of suffering.’ When he said, ‘The Father did

not die but the Son,' he would in this way continue to keep up ceaseless disturbance among the people. And we (i.e., Hippolytus), becoming aware of his opinions, did not give place to him, but reprov'd him and withstood him for the truth's sake. He rushed into folly because all consented to his hypocrisy; we, however, did not do so, and he called us worshippers of two gods, disgorging freely the venom lurking within him."

3. **Sabellius of Pentapolis**, whose name is practically synonymous with Modalism, represents the final form of the doctrine. He taught in Rome under Zephyrinus and Callistus. Athanasius defined **Sabellianism** as follows (*Orations*, 4.9), "If, again, the One have two names, this is the expedient of Sabellius, who said that Son and Father were the same and did away with both, the Father when there is a Son, and the Son when there is a Father"

Basil the Great stated (*Epistle*, 210.3): "Sabellianism is Judaism imported into the preaching of the Gospel under the guise of Christianity. For if a man calls Father, Son, and Holy Spirit one, but manifold as to person (*prosopon*), and makes one hypostasis of the three, what else does he do than deny the everlasting pre-existence of the Only begotten. . . . Now Sabellius did not even deprecate the formation of the persons without the hypostasis, saying, as he did, that the same God, being one in substance was metamorphosed as the need of the moment required and spoken of now as Father, now as the Son, and now as Holy Spirit."

N.B. Modalism swept the Roman see from Victor through Callistus with the result that Hippolytus and others were charged with ditheism and exiled. It gained a large foothold in the West but not in the East. Tertullian's scholarly attack on Modalism led to its decline and the triumph of his views through Novation (*On the Trinity*) as early as A.D. 250.

IV. THE DOCTRINE OF GOD AND THE APOLOGISTS.

The Church Fathers, as previously indicated, did not discuss the pre-incarnate relationships of the Godhead. While it is clear that they held to the deity of Christ, they did not broach any doctrinal implications or venture into speculative matters. It fell to the Apologists, who were confronted by monarchianism, to begin the process of formulating the doctrine of the Trinity.

A. Trinitarianism in the Second Century.

1. **Justin Martyr** clearly argues for the pre-incarnate deity of Christ offering three distinct proofs (O.T. theophanies, O.T. quotes like "Let us" in

Genesis 1:26 and the great “wisdom” texts). He wrote to Trypho (*Dialogue*, 62): “But this Offspring, who was truly begotten of the Father, was with the Father and the Father talked with Him before all creation, as the Scripture through Solomon clearly showed us, saying that this Son, who is called Wisdom by Solomon, was begotten both as a beginning before all His works, and as His Offspring.”

Again he argued (*First Apology*, 63): “For, they who claim that the Son is the Father are reproached for knowing neither the Father nor that the Father of all has a Son, who, as the Firstborn Word of God, is also God. He once appeared to Moses and the other prophets in the form of fire and in the guise of an angel, but now in the time of your reign, after He became man by a virgin, as we already state, by the design of God the Father, to effect the salvation of those believing in Him, He permitted Himself to be an object of contempt and to suffer pain, so that by dying and arising from the dead He might conquer death. But what was proclaimed to Moses from the bush: ‘I AM WHO I AM, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of your fathers,’ meant that those who had died were still in existence, and belonged to Christ Himself. For they were the first of all to occupy themselves in searching for God; Abraham being the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, as was written by Moses.”

N.B. This view of Christ was also propounded by Tatian, Martyr’s disciple, as well as Theophilus of Antioch. Christ is both seen as distinct in function from the Father and eternal. See, for example, Theophilus (*To Autolytus*, 2.22).

2. **Athenagoras** is clearer than the aforementioned Apologists who speak of Christ as God’s offspring in the incarnation and as one who never had a beginning. He wrote (*A Plea for Christians*, 10): “That we are not atheists, therefore, seeing that we acknowledge one God, uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, illimitable, who is apprehended by the understanding only and the reason, who is encompassed by light, and beauty, and spirit, and power ineffable, by whom the universe has been created through His Logos, and set in order, and kept in being—I have sufficiently demonstrated. [I say “His Logos”], for we acknowledge also a Son of God. Nor let any one think it ridiculous that God should have a Son. For though the poets, in their fictions, represent the gods as no better than men, our mode of thinking is not the same as theirs, concerning either God the Father or the Son. But the Son of God is the Logos of the Father, in idea and in operation; for after the pattern of Him and by Him were all things made, the Father and the Son being one. And, the Son being in the Father and the Father in the Son, in oneness and power of spirit, the understanding and reason (*nous kai logos*)

of the Father is the Son of God. But if, in your surpassing intelligence, it occurs to you to inquire what is meant by the Son, I will state briefly that He is the first product of the Father, not as having been brought into existence (for from the beginning, God, who is the eternal mind [*nous*], had the Logos in Himself, being from eternity instinct with Logos [*logikos*]); but inasmuch as He came forth to be the idea and energizing power of all material things, which lay like a nature without attributes, and an inactive earth, the grosser particles being mixed up with the lighter.”

3. Irenaeus summed up the thought of the second century church expressing a belief in the Trinity.

N.B. Irenaeus followed Theophilus who postulated a triad in God, His Word, and Wisdom (“Luminaries are types of the trinity”, *To Autolytus*, 2, 25).

The Son is fully divine, “The Father is God, and the Son is God, for whatever is begotten of God is God.”

N.B. The relationship of the persons in the eternal triad was not delineated by Irenaeus or any Apologist of the second century. They do not stress three equal persons, but a single person (the Father) with His mind (*nous*) and Wisdom. They faithfully preserved monotheism but sometimes obscured the Son and the Spirit. The early apologists stressed distinctions in pre-incarnate functions, but unity of pre-incarnate persons!

B. Trinitarianism in the Third Century.

1. **Tertullian** followed Irenaeus in his concept of God’s solitariness (oneness from all eternity). He spoke of the Word or Son as a person; (“a second addition to the Father”) and the Spirit as a distinct person; thus, he was the first to speak of the Godhead as a “*trinitas*.” He wrote (*Against Praxeas*, 2), “We believe in one only God, yet subject to this dispensation, which is our word for economy, that the one only God has also a Son, His Word, Who has issued out of Himself . . . which Son then sent, according to His promise, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, out of the Father.”

Again, (*Against Praxeas*, 12): “Everywhere I hold one substance in three cohering.... All are of one, by unity of substance; while the mystery of the dispensation is still guarded, which distributes the Unity into a Trinity, placing in their order the three, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; three however . . . not in substance but in form, not in power but in appearance; for they are of one substance and one essence and one power, inasmuch as He is one God from Whom these degrees and forms and

aspects are reckoned under the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

He postulated that the three persons share one identical substance (“I and my Father are One”), but are not one in person pointing as it does to identity of substance but multiplicity of persons. He spoke of unity in substance, but distinctions in persons. In conclusion Kelley wrote of the advances of Tertullian (also, Hippolytus of Rome) (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 114): “Hippolytus and Tertullian were at one with Irenaeus in regarding the Three revealed in the economy as manifestations of the plurality which they apprehended, however obscurely, in the immanent life of the Godhead. Where they were in advance of him was (a) in their attempts to make explicit the oneness of the divine power or substance of which the Three were expressions or forms, and (b) in their description of Them (in Hippolytus’s case, of the Father and the Son) as Persons (*prosopa*; *personae*). This latter term, it should be noted, was still reserved for Them as manifested in the order of revelation; only later did it come to be applied to the Word and the Spirit as immanent in God’s eternal being.”

N.B. Tertullian still has room for improvement for a subtle subordinationism existed as noted by Heick (*A History of Christian Thought*, I, 146): “To make his meaning clearer he drew analogies from nature: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are to each other as the root, shrub, and tree; and as the fountain, stream, and river.” This language shows that subordinationism was still in the mind of Tertullian. The Father is the whole substance, while the Son is a derivation who participates in the divine substance to a lesser degree than the Father.

N.N.B.B. The chief exponent of Tertullians’ trinitarian conception in the West was **Novatian** who has given us a separate treatise on the subject. He is clear on the three distinct persons (including the Holy Spirit), but still a latent subordinationism is evident. He wrote (*On the Trinity*, 36):

“There is, then, God the Father, the Founder and Creator of all things, who alone is without origin, invisible, immense, immortal, eternal, the one God. Nothing whatever, I will not say can be preferred, but can even be compared to His greatness, His majesty, and His power. (2) Of Him when He willed, the Word, who is the Son, was born. The Word is to be understood here not as a sound that strikes the air nor the tone of the voice forced from the lungs, but rather is discerned in the substance of a power proceeding from God. Apostle has never ascertained, prophet has not discovered, angel has not fathomed, nor has any creature known the hallowed

secrets of His sacred and divine birth. They are known to the Son alone, who has known the secrets of the Father.”

“Since He is begotten of the Father, He is always in the Father. I say ‘always,’ however, not in such a manner as to prove that He is unborn, but to prove that He is born. Now, He who is before all time must be said to have been always in the Father; for no time can be attributed to Him who is before time. He is always in the Father, lest the Father be not always the Father. On the other hand, the Father also precedes Him; for, as the Father, He must of necessity be prior, because He who knows not origin must of necessity precede Him who has an origin. At the same time the Son must be less than the Father, for He knows that He is in the Father, having an origin, since he is born. Although He has an origin inasmuch as He is born, yet through His Father He is, in a certain manner, like Him by birth, because He is born of that Father, who alone has no origin. (4) He, therefore, when the Father willed, proceeded from the Father; and He who was in the Father, because He was of the Father, was afterwards with the Father since He—namely the divine substance whose name is the Word, through whom ‘all things were made and without whom nothing was made’—proceeded from the Father. (5) For all things are after Him, because they are ‘through Him’; consequently He is before all things (but after the Father), since all things were made through Him. He proceeded from the Father, according to whose will all things were made. God assuredly proceeded from God, constituting as Son the Second Person after the Father, but not taking from the Father that which makes Him one God.”

2. The School of Alexandria

The Alexandrian School was heavily immersed in the philosophy of Philo. They attempted to advance the understanding of the Trinity by a heavy stress on Idealism (Greek). The stress on the universal oneness proved beneficial (Monad).

- a) **Clement of Alexandria** added to the discussion of the Trinity the concept of the “eternal generation of the son” (the Father is not without His Son; for along with being Father, He is Father of the Son [*The Stromata*, 4, 162]). That is, Clement stressed the unity of God and recognized diversity. The stress on unity meant an emphasis on equality.

N.B. Remember that Alexandria championed the homoousia doctrine of Athanasius and, therefore, strongly resisted any hint to subordinationism! He clearly distinguished the

three persons and clearly avoids modalism, while being careful to avoid subordinationism. He seeks no division of the divine nature.

- b) **Origen** brilliantly reinterpreted the traditional triadic rule of faith within the matrix of Platonism. He stressed the one universal Monad (the Father), being alone ingenerate (“the only true God,” John 17:3). The Father begot the Son by an eternal act so that it cannot be said that the Son had a beginning. He argues that the Father, Son and Spirit are three distinct persons (*hypostasis*) from all eternity not simply in function (Irenaeus’ economical explanation, but directly from the idea of eternal generation.

N.B. *Hypostasis* (person) and *ousia* (essence) are separated. The failure to separate persons and essence, he understood, is the error of Modalism. He wrote, “We are not afraid to speak in one sense of two Gods, in another sense one God.”

N.N.B.B. It is noteworthy after all this is said that Christ is still subordinate to the universal monad; he merits a secondary degree of honor since he is derived from the essence of the Father. These notions are a negative product of his Platonic framework. This is seen, also, in Origen’s pupil Dionepeius, bishop of Alexandria, who clashed with Dionysius of Rome in the late 250s (The Alexandrian verged too far in attempting to refute Sabellianism [Modalism]; in stressing the separateness of the persons of the Trinity he seems to have denigrated their unity.). The church (East and West), however, was increasingly coming to grips with the trinitarian dilemma.

V. CONCLUSION.

The purpose of this lesson has been to inaugurate a discussion on the topic of Theology Proper, particularly trinitarianism, in the Fathers and Apologists. The Fathers manifest a high view of Christ, but lack a depth of theological speculation. The Apologists of the second and third century did advance the development of Trinitarianism by virtue of the internal pressure applied by Monarchianism, particularly in Rome where Modalism captured the bishops from A.D. 196–222. The second and third century apologists confronted Praxeas and Sabellius, but could not totally avoid all shades of subordinationism. They did isolate such crucial distinctives as diversity of persons, singularity of essence, and eternal generation. Tertullian in the West coined the term “Trinity” (Athenagoras, “triad”), Clement of Alexandria in the East eternal generation, and Origen in the East seems to have the clearest concept on the Trinity before Nicea in A.D. 325.