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ANGELOMORPHIC CHRISTOLOGY AND THE EXEGESIS OF PSALM 8:5 IN
TERTULLIAN'S *ADVERSUS PRAXEAN*: AN EXAMINATION OF
TERTULLIAN'S RELUCTANCE TO ATTRIBUTE ANGELIC PROPERTIES TO
THE SON OF GOD

BY
EDGAR FOSTER

A Thesis Submitted to the
University of Glasgow
Faculty of Divinity in partial Fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree of M.Th.

THESIS SUPERVISOR: DR. IAN HAZLETT

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Preface

Angelomorphic Christology is a helpful descriptive tool that one can use to outline the doctrine of Christ set forth in the NT. While it is somewhat anachronistic to speak of any “doctrine” appearing in the NT, the language of systematic theology with its various and sundry doctrinal formulations provides a way of structuring the first century apostolic account of Christ. We will therefore use such language in this study.

For historical reasons, the personal story of Tertullian opens this investigation. R. G. Collingwood is renowned for thinking of history as the re-telling of factual accounts. The story we are about to “re-tell” represents one of many narratives recounted by ecclesiastical historians. It does not claim to be the last word on the subject. In fact, after this inquiry, we are convinced that many aspects of Tertullian’s Christological project remain enshrouded in mystery. The modest goal of this study is simply to provide another perspective with regard to the study of Tertullian’s Christology.

We must briefly say a word about the sources used in this thesis. In this study, we follow the numbering system used in Evans’ text and translation of *Adversus Praxean*. When citing *De Anima*, we adhere to Waszink’s numbering schema. The works of E. Evans, J. Waszink, J. Pelikan, J. Daniélou, A. Blaise, W. H. C. Frend, F. E. Peters, C. Gieschen, P. Carrell, E. Fortman, M. Alfs, R. Kearsley, and J. Morgan all served as indispensable works during the research portion of this work as did Tertullian.org. It has been a didactic experience interacting with the scholars mentioned hitherto. This thesis would not have been possible without the previously mentioned resources.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank all those who have supported me or provided helpful critiques of my work. Phil Blosser, Heinz Schmitz, Ralph Patrick, Marjorie Monroe, John Blakey, Solomon Landers, Daniel Beckert, Firpo Carr, and my wife Sylvia were indispensable in helping me get through the writing process. Ian Hazlett was also a peerless supervisor. I would never have been able to complete this work without his help. I am also thankful to the Rotary Foundation for funding my research in Glasgow and showing me immense hospitality while I stayed in the friendly city. Lastly, I would like to dedicate this work to my parents, Ed and Eleanor Foster. They have supported me for all of my life and they continue to do so. The following words express my life's determination: *Probare autem tam aperte debetis ex scripturis (Adv Prax 11)*.

Edgar G. Foster

Abbreviations

NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
Gen	Genesis
Prov	Proverbs
Ps	Psalms
LSJ	Liddell-Scott and Jones Greek-English Lexicon
LXX	Greek Septuagint
Apoc	Revelation of John
<i>Contra Noet</i>	<i>Against Noetus</i> (Hippolytus)
<i>Adv Marc</i>	<i>Against Marcion</i> (Tertullian)
<i>Adv Herm</i>	<i>Against Hermogenes</i>
<i>Adv Haer</i>	<i>Against Heresies</i> (Irenaeus)
<i>Adv Prax</i>	<i>Against Praxeas</i>
<i>Apol</i>	<i>Apology</i> (Tertullian)
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>SP</i>	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistles</i> (Jerome)
<i>NAC</i>	<i>New American Commentary</i>
<i>Refutatio</i>	<i>Refutation of all Heresies</i> (Hippolytus)
<i>De Prin</i>	<i>On First Principles</i> (Origen)
<i>WBC</i>	<i>Word Biblical Commentary</i>
<i>Jn</i>	Gospel of John
<i>Institutes</i>	<i>Divine Institutes</i> (Lactantius)
<i>Oratio</i>	Exhortation to the Greeks (Ilatian)
<i>De Orat</i>	<i>On Prayer</i> (Tertullian)
<i>2 Tim</i>	2 Timothy
<i>De Spec</i>	<i>The Shows</i>
Wisdom of Sol	Wisdom of Solomon
Song of Sol	Song of Solomon
<i>De Exhortatione</i>	<i>On Exhortation to Chastity</i> (Tertullian)
<i>Cor</i>	Corinthians
<i>Vit Mos</i>	<i>Life of Moses</i> (Philo)
<i>Sim</i>	<i>Similitudes</i> (Hermas)
<i>Scorpiace</i>	<i>Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting</i> (Tertullian)
<i>De Res</i>	<i>Concerning the Resurrection of the Flesh</i>
<i>Mt</i>	Gospel Matthew
<i>De Pud</i>	<i>On Modesty</i> (Tertullian)
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> (Migne)
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologia Graece</i>
<i>OLD</i>	<i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i>
<i>Vg</i>	<i>Vulgate</i>
<i>De Virg</i>	<i>On the Veiling of Virgins</i> (Tertullian)
<i>De Prae Haer</i>	<i>On the Prescription for Heretics</i>
<i>De Paen</i>	<i>On Penitence</i>
<i>De Anima</i>	<i>Concerning the Soul</i>
<i>Quaest Hebr In Gen</i>	<i>Hebrew Questions on Genesis</i> (Jerome)
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>

<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>2 Pet</i>	<i>2 Peter</i>
<i>Adv Val</i>	<i>Against the Valentinians</i> (Tertullian)
<i>De Carne</i>	<i>On the Flesh of Christ</i>
<i>Contra Celsum</i>	<i>Against Celsus</i>
<i>VL</i>	<i>Vetus Latina</i>
<i>De Trin</i>	<i>On the Trinity</i> (Augustine)

Vita Tertulliani

Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus (Tertullian) was born ca. 160 CE and died ca. 220 CE.¹ The noted church apologist dwelled in Carthage (North Africa),² a province of Rome.³ Indeed, it was in Carthage that Tertullian initially received a first-rate education,⁴ which may have made it possible for him to become a jurist⁵ before his conversion to Christianity between the years 193-197 CE. Upon becoming a Christian, Tertullian subsequently produced almost thirty significant theological documents that scholars have classified as apologetic, dogmatico-polemic and practico-ascetic.⁶

Adversus Praxean is indisputably a controversial treatise (*liber controversialis*) that Tertullian wrote in approximately 213 CE.⁷ It is therefore no surprise that this ancient document emphatically serves as a sublime example of Tertullian's: "burning eloquence, biting satire, and forcible logic."⁸ *Adversus Praxean* contains 31 sections (*capita*) that Tertullian appears to have structured in a manner

¹ E. Evans suggests that Tertullian died in 240 CE, based on a passage in Jerome that indicates the apologist lived to an advanced age (*ad decrepitam aetatem*). See *Adversus Praxean* (London: SPCK, 1948), 2. However, Bardenhewer thinks Tertullian fell asleep in death ca. 220 CE. See O. Bardenhewer *Patrology: The Lives and Works of the Fathers of the Church*, trans. Thomas J. Shahan (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1908), 179.

² Modern Tunisia.
³ *Vide* appendix V.

⁴ Christine Trevett cites Jerome's dictum (*Ep.* 70.5), "*Quid Tertulliano eruditus, quid acutius*" when relating Tertullian's well-known facility with rhetoric, Latin, and Greek. See *Montanism: Gender, Authority, and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 68.

⁵ At one time, Tertullian's legal background was a historical given. Historians have since called his juristic career into question and now fervently debate the issue. While the "dust" from Timothy Barnes' challenge vis-à-vis Tertullian's legal training has not yet subsided, Roy Kearsley points out that the "apologist's thought" moves and breathes in the "atmosphere of law," *Tertullian's Theology of Divine Power* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Rutherford House by Paternoster Press), 12. Gerald Bray takes issue with Kearsley's thesis, however, thinking there is hardly any indication that Tertullian was a professional jurist. Consult *Holiness and the Will of God: Perspectives on the Theology of Tertullian* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), 33-34. While the question is not yet settled, Kearsley's observation seems to be a perspicacious one.

⁶ O. Bardenhewer, *Patrology*, 179-180. Evans classifies Tertullian's literary works as apologetic, controversial and disciplinary treatises. Cf. *Adversus Praxean*, 3. Johannes Quasten's classifications mirror those of Evans, *Patrology*, 3 vols. (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1962-1964), 255-317.

⁷ Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, trans. J.S. Bowden (London: Mowbray, 1965), 141. W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 345.

analogous to ancient rhetorical speeches composed by either Marcus Fabius Quintilian (35-95 CE) or Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE). The disputatious treatise thus stands as a testimony to Tertullian's rhetorical adroitness and mental acuity.

Sider notes that *Adversus Praxean* commences with a standard literary introduction (*exordium*). We then find Tertullian presenting a customary delineation of preliminary facts (*narratio*)⁹ before he advances his rhetorical case by means of logical arguments (*confirmatio*). Tertullian then proffers counterarguments in order to subvert the theological position of his opponent (*reprehensio*). In doing so, he makes fervent appeals that employ the rhetorical device of *pathos*.¹⁰ Ulteriorly, Tertullian concludes his treatise against Praxeas with the dynamic expansion (*amplificatio*) of his literary declamation. The fruits of *Adversus Praxeas* are accordingly apparent and decisive: "Tertullian knew how a rhetorician convinces his hearers, wins them over to himself and incites them against others."¹¹ The ancient Carthaginian carefully studied his forebears, astutely emulating and reworking their rhetorical styles. Hardly any writer of antiquity possessed Tertullian's ability to manipulate the Latin language in such a dynamic and lively manner.¹²

After noting the similarities between Tertullian's exclamatory methods and those utilized by other noted rhetoricians of antiquity, Sider concludes that Tertullian seems to employ classic literary devices with acute flexibility.¹³ Unsurprisingly, one

⁸ O. Bardenhewer, *Patrology*, 180.

⁹ Sider points out that the *narratio* provides an account of the events that have served as the *raison d'être* of the rhetorical treatise. It also serves to indicate "the speaker's intended manner of treatment." That is, the *narratio* sets forth the primary areas of dispute; though Sider does add that some students of rhetoric attribute this function to the *propositio* or *partitio*. See Robert D. Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 21. Quintilian notes that "most authorities" (*plurimis auctoribus*) think forensic speeches have five parts, namely, the *exordium*, the *narratio*, *confirmatio*, *refutatio*, and the *peroratio* (*Institutio Oratoria* 3.9.1-9).

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Rhet* 1418a.

¹¹ Hans von Campenhausen, *The Fathers of the Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), 10.

¹² *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹³ R. Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, 21-24. For a classical discussion of the need for flexibility in formulating

church historian remarks that it is impossible to suffer *ennui* while perusing the vivid contents of Tertullian's literary corpus.¹⁴ Tertullian avails himself of rhetorical methods that unfailingly sustain the interest of his readers. Especially is this tendency evident in *Adversus Praxean*, where Tertullian displays his entire arsenal of wit, scriptural proof-texts and rhetorical devices to overturn the theological reasoning of his adversary. It is also in *Adversus Praxean* that Tertullian vigorously endeavors to demonstrate that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not three self-identical divine modes of being but three distinct deific *personae*.¹⁵ The skilled *rhetor*, however, highlights the uniqueness of each divine *persona* by characterizing the Father as the whole divine substance (*pater enim tota substantia est*) in contrast to the Son and Spirit of God whom he depicts as respective portions of the one divine substance (*portiones totius*).¹⁶

Despite the aforementioned, Bethune-Baker maintains that such "crudities of thought" do not detract from Tertullian's overall treatment of the three deific persons (*tres personae*) constituting the Godhead.¹⁷ Baker, along with other historians of dogma, considers the pistis¹⁸ defense that *Adversus Praxean* contains to be

speeches, see Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, Book 2.13..5-8.

¹⁴ H. Campenhausen, *Fathers*, 9.

¹⁵ *Adv Prax* 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9. Sydney Mellone echoes the sentiments of Tertullian, writing: "The Father is wholly essential Being (*substantia*): the Son is derived from the Whole as a part thereof (*portio totius*)," in *Leaders of Early Christian Thought* (Lindsey P, 1954), 178. Nevertheless, Mellone cites Souter who thinks that though Tertullian does not affirm the eternal generation doctrine and regards the Son as but a *portio totius*, the Son is still God (according to Tertullian) since "He came from the essence of God Himself, thus being from the essence of the Whole and part of the Whole," *Ibid.* But this notion is problematic for a number of reasons. If the $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$, based on Tertullian's formulation, possesses the entire complex of divine properties and is fully God (*vere deus*), then why is He not an eternal divine *personae*? What is more, Mellone elsewhere writes that the Son is subordinated vis-à-vis his essence and not just per function. How can this be the case if the Son is "the essence of the Whole"?

¹⁷ James Franklin Bethune-Baker, *An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine to the Time of the Council of Chalcedon* (London: Methuen, 1919), 144.

¹⁸ Following the work of Nicolai Hartmann and Abraham Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd posits at least fifteen irreducible modal aspects (spheres of being), which include the pistis sphere. see *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, trans. David H. Freeman and William S. Young, 4 vols. (Ontario, Paideia Press, 1984), 2:298. Dooyeweerd defines $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$ as "the terminal function of human existence in the

prototypical from a doctrinal standpoint and peerless vis-à-vis its rhetorical aspects. It is little wonder that Jurgen Moltmann observes: “The Fathers learnt from Tertullian, even if they did not mention his name. He perceived the problems more clearly than anyone before him, and the brilliance of his language and his skill in definition made new answers possible.”¹⁹ Though he therefore writes (from time to time) in an admittedly macabre fashion,²⁰ Tertullian permanently shaped Latin theology.²¹ He is the apologist *par excellence*.

Certain ecclesiastical historians refer to Tertullian as “The most penetrating exegete of the whole ancient church.”²² Others call him: “The greatest of the early

transcendental direction of time,” Ibid. ΠΙΣΤΙΣ is thus a universal phenomenon that is not restricted to Christian believers. Moreover, the pistis region of being is transcendental (being at the root of human experience), and is thus an “irreducible function in the whole process of knowledge” (Ibid., 2:299). Yet, the pistis sphere, as seen in the case of Tertullian and other Christian apologists, can acquire a soteriological significance when one directs it toward the God who sent Christ and raised Him from the dead. One can also view Christ as the object of faith (ΠΙΣΤΙΣ) since the Son of God explains the Father to humankind (Jn 1:18).

¹⁹ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 137. Although historians of dogma generally consider *Adversus Praxean* to be “a remarkable foreshadowing” of the Council of Nicca, Bardenhewer notes that Tertullian: “does not avoid a certain subordinationism,” *Patrology*, 185. Louis Berkhof similarly thinks that Tertullian’s treatment of the Trinity doctrine is not adequate since it involves “an unwarranted subordination of the Son to the Father.” See Berkhof’s *Systematic Theology* (London: Banner of Truth, 1971), 82. Moltmann also recognizes problematic aspects of Tertullian’s Trinitarian definition. He notes that while Tertullian raised Christian theological discourse to a new level, he also produced more questions. See *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 137. Pelikan observes possible traces of binitarian thinking in Tertullian and other early church fathers in *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, 5 vols. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 1:197. For further information, consult Tertullian’s *De Orat* 1.1-2.

²⁰ Tertullian seems to take a little too much delight in describing God’s eschatological judgment: “How vast a spectacle then bursts upon the eye! What there excites my admiration? What my derision? Which sight gives me joy? Which rouses me to exultation? As I see so many illustrious monarchs, whose reception into the heavens was publicly announced, groaning now in the lowest darkness with great Jove himself, and those, too, who bore witness of their exultation; governors of provinces, too, who persecuted the Christian name, in fires more fierce than those with which in the days of their pride they raged against the followers of Christ” (*De Spec* 30).

²¹ H. Campenhausen, *Fathers of the Church*, 5. Certain writers (e.g. Daniélou) would contest Campenhausen’s claim. To the contrary, these historians would place Minucius Felix at the beginning of the Latin Church. The position taken in this work is that Tertullian is the first noted theological personality in the West: he essentially shaped Western Christianity. James Morgan fittingly observes: “In doctrine and language he is the great pioneer of Western Christianity,” see *The Importance of Tertullian in the Development of Christian Dogma* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1928), ix.

J. Quasten, though thinking certain historical accounts regarding Tertullian are legendary in character, nevertheless concedes: “Except for St. Augustine, Tertullian is the most important and original ecclesiastical author in Latin,” *Patrology*, 247.

²² H. Campenhausen, *Fathers of the Church*, 5

Latin writers.²³ Unfortunately, some Christian scholars are motivated to brand part of the material found in Tertullian's Montanist writings "heretical" since they think Montanism was a form of Christianity that the Church eventually deemed heretical.²⁴ While Tertullian may have converted to Montanism and the church possibly determined that Montanism was a heretical movement, there seems to be little evidence that he ever succumbed to heresy. Cyprian of Carthage who considered Tertullian "the master" may very well establish this point (*De Viris Illustribus* 53).

At any rate, we do not know the exact year that Tertullian became a Montanist, but it appears that he embraced the New Prophecy (*nova prophetia*) no later than 207 CE.²⁵ His theological treatises certainly begin to show pronounced signs of the ecstatic group's influence after this period. In fact, *Adversus Praxean* is one so-called Montanist document that theologians commonly differentiate from the more catholic treatises of Tertullian.²⁶ As stated earlier, the apologist's association with the New

²³ Edmund Fortman, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 107. Gerald O'Collins further writes that Tertullian pioneered the Latin "trinitarian vocabulary," in *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 182. This claim is not necessarily invalid, but it seems more accurate to say that the church appropriated the Latin theological vocabulary that Tertullian employed, though he himself did not apply the term *trinitas* to the Christian deity per se (J. Morgan, *The Importance of Tertullian*, 103). Tertullian's language deals with the divine economy (God's historical arrangement for reconciling humanity to Himself through Christ Jesus) and does not really begin to concern itself with the inner constitution of the Godhead *in se*. While Morgan concludes that Cyprian was the first to use the term *trinitas* as a "name of the Deity" in *On the Lord's Prayer*, it appears that not even Cyprian uses the word in this fashion. See *On the Lord's Prayer* 7.22. Cyprian may, however, come close to attributing the name *trinitas* to God in *Ep. 72* during his exposition of Mt 28:19-20.

²⁴ Scott Butler, Norman Dahlgren and David Hess. *Jesus, Peter and the Keys* (Santa Barbara: Queenship Publishing, 1996), 216-217.

²⁵ C. Trevett thinks that Tertullian became a Montanist no later than 207. His sentiments, however, could have predated this time. Trevett also notes that Tertullian called Montanism, *nova prophetia*, but the Montanists no doubt used the expression self-referentially as well. See Trevett, *Montanism*, 71. David Aune concurs with this assessment in *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 313. Tertullian also endowed Montanism with "an impact on the writing of church history which otherwise it would not have had." Trevett, *Montanism*, 67. The opponents of the *nova prophetia* also gave them the designation, Cataphrygians. Only later did the ecstatic movement come to be known as the Montanists. Consult Ronald E. Heine. *The Montanist Oracles and Testimonia* (Patristic Monograph Series 14. Macon: Mercer University Press, 1989), x.

²⁶ Tertullian's allusions to the Paraclete in *Adversus Praxean* may well have reference to Montanus, who evidently thought he was an inspired instrument of God.

Prophecy occasionally has resulted in some Christian historians minimizing the one who accomplished so much for Christian orthodoxy during his lifetime. Yet, regardless of his personal “demise” in later years, Robert’s analysis of Tertullian’s contribution to Christianity is insightful:

When, with an imagination that is vivid enough to reproduce the situation, the circumstances, and the temperament of the man, and a judgement that is based upon a calm review of his theology in its historical setting, we draw near to Tertullian, we shall recognize in him, despite his failings and limitations, one of the noblest characters and greatest thinkers of the Christian Church.²⁷

While there are a number of prominent figures one could focus on when investigating the Christological outlook of the early Latin Church, the major luminary in this movement is Tertullian. He is the preeminent *dramatis persona* in early Latin

²⁷ Robert Edwin Roberts, *The Theology of Tertullian* (London: Epworth, 1924), 252. Timothy Barnes writes: “Tertullian’s later writings receive abuse and condemnation in subsequent ages. Many of the charges are unmerited.” See *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 83. He concludes that Tertullian was bold enough to sound forth an “unpalatable truth,” namely, that “the church is not a conclave of bishops” but functions as the locus of the Holy Spirit. In other words, where the Spirit of God is, there is the church. See *De Pudi* 21.17: *ecclesia spiritus per spiritalem hominem. non ecclesia numerus episcoporum.*

William Tabbernee believes it is “highly unlikely” that Tertullian “ever separated from the catholic church at all” and he avers that he surely did not found the group known as the Tertullianists, a post-Montanist sect. He documents these points in *Montanist Inscriptions and Testimonia: Epigraphic Sources Illustrating the History of Montanism* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 475-476. While Pope Gelasius supposedly condemned Tertullian’s works in the *Decretum Gelasianum*, patristic scholars note that this document could be the result of a forgery. For a penetrating critique of Barnes’ overall historical project, however, see W. H. C. Frend’s article in the *Classical Review* 24 (1974) pp. 72-76 Timothy David Barnes: *Tertullian, a Historical and Literary Study.*

Christianity. This ancient North African skillfully shaped western theology in a lasting way.

Introduction

This study will seek to answer three questions related to Tertullian's doctrine of Christ. The three queries we will explore in this study are: (1) Did Tertullian eradicate every vestige of angelomorphism from his doctrine of Christ? (2) Does Tertullian think there is a gaping ontological abyss that separates Christ and the holy angels? (3) Why was Tertullian reluctant to identify the Son as an angel?

In order to answer the third question, we will attempt to document and discern how Tertullian and other pre-Nicenes exegete the "minoration"²⁸ saying at Ps 8:5: "You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings [i.e. angels]" (NIV). It is significant that Tertullian only applies this Bible verse to the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Moreover, we think that this investigation will demonstrate how Tertullian not only refers Ps 8:5 to the incarnate Son of God, but further applies it to the preincarnate Christ, who experiences being subordinate to God and the angels before He becomes a man. Chapters 2 and 5 will elucidate these claims and serve as supporting evidence that Tertullian believes the preincarnate Son was made inferior to the angels.

Throughout this study, we will be using terms such as Angelomorphic Christology, angelic Christology and angelophanic Christology. It is necessary to define these terms at the outset, and that is what we will do at this time.

Mentally grasping the nomenclature of Angelomorphic Christology is vital since a number of contemporary studies that explore the doctrine of Christ articulate His unique person and work in terms of angelic or Angelomorphic Christology.²⁹ We

²⁸ The term "minoration" refers to the subordinate position of Christ. In particular, this study uses the term to delineate the result of the Father making the Son less than the angels. The Son becomes inferior to the angels by virtue of the Father's lowering him in status.

²⁹ Some studies include: L.A. Brighton. *The Angel of Revelation: An Angel of God and an Icon of Jesus Christ* (Ph.D. Diss, St Louis University, 1991); Robert Gundry. "Angelomorphic Christology in the Book of Revelation," *SBL Seminar Papers* 33 (1994) 662-78. Loren T. Struckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of*

have not found any recent inquiry, however, that extensively deals with the presence or absence of Angelomorphic themes in the writings of Tertullian. Most works only provide a summary treatment of Tertullian's Angelomorphic Christology, briefly citing one or two of Tertullian's apologetic works in passing.³⁰ Therefore, this inquiry should contribute to future investigations of Christ's relationship with the holy angels of God in an innovative and meaningful way.

Biblical scholars and theologians generally categorize the study of Christ as angel *qua* angel in three primary ways:

(1) Angel Christology is the sort of Christological doctrine posited by Martin Werner. He maintains that Christ is essentially an angel. That is, Christ is a creaturely essence produced in the same fashion as other holy created spirit beings. Alluding to Justin Martyr, Werner notes:

What has provided historians of doctrine for more than a century with an occasion for discussion has been the fact that Justin could conceive in one category the Logos-Son together with the 'host of the other good angels, of like being to him', and that he set this angel-host, together with the Logos-Christ, before the (prophetic) Spirit.³¹

Needless to say, historians of dogma have not embraced Werner's reconstruction of the pre-Nicene doctrine of Christ's person and work. They have adamantly resisted his suggestion that angelic Christology is a primordial way of referring to Jesus, the Son of God. Chapter I will discuss Werner's contribution to the study of Christ as an angel *qua* angel. It will then review the responses to Werner and demonstrate what recent studies have concluded about Werner's work.

John (Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr, 1995). We might add that Stuckenbruck prefers to speak of "angelophanic" as opposed to "angelomorphic Christology" (Ibid., 209ff). This study will consistently refer to Angelomorphic Christology, although we will use the terminology "angelophanic Christology" intermittently and interchangeably.

³⁰ Even the comprehensive work by Charles Gieschen only provides a brief treatment of Tertullian's work. See *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 193-94.

³¹ *The Formation of Christian Dogma: An Historical Study of Its Problem*, trans. S. G. F. Brandon

(2) Angelomorphic Christology refers to the doctrine or complex of doctrines that teach Christ assumes the form (μορφή) of an angel during angelophanies. However, this kind of Christology further contends that Christ is not an angel per substance. Struckenbruck fittingly notes that Christ is sometimes “made to appear among a series of angels” or “as one who incorporates features frequently attributed to angels.”³² Angelomorphic Christology is thus phenomenologically oriented.³³ It is concerned with providing a descriptive account of the Son’s appearances in angelic settings without pronouncing judgment on His being (ὄντως).

(3) Struckenbruck prefers to employ the nomenclature “angelophanic Christology” over against discoursing about Angelomorphic Christology. Rowland and Struckenbruck, who both advocate this terminological usage, seem to argue that Christ only appears to be an angel in certain OT and NT angelophanies. He is not, they aver, really an angel as to His being. Struckenbruck limits the term “Angelomorphic Christology” to Christ either appearing among a series of angels or momentarily incorporating the attributes of created heavenly beings.³⁴ He uses the terminology “angel Christology” to speak of times when the Scriptures either identify Christ as an angel (*ex officio*) or when the sacred writings supposedly highlight His angelic nature. Struckenbruck also argues that it is more accurate to speak in terms of Angelomorphic or angelophanic Christology when referring to the doctrine of Christ delineated in the NT. He appears to use the previously mentioned two terms somewhat synonymously as we will do throughout the course of this study.³⁵

(London: Black, 1957), 135.

³² L. Struckenbruck, *Angel Veneration*, 208.

³³ Darrell D. Hannah, *Michael and Christ: Michael Traditions and Angel Christology in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 13.

³⁴ Struckenbruck, *Angel Veneration*, 208.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

(4) A broader category that aptly describes what we find in the documents of ancient and Second Temple Judaism as well as certain early Christian works is angelomorphism *simpliciter*. Angelomorphism describes the phenomenon wherein exalted divine figures occasionally assume angelic or divine forms. Such appearances are not limited to the angelophanies of Christ.

Before continuing, we must also note that Jean Daniélou employs the nomenclature "Angelomorphic Christology" where other scholars use the terminology "angelic Christology." This investigation argues that Daniélou is possibly culpable of semiotic imprecision or catachresis. The reason we deem this point significant is because of what Daniélou contends regarding Tertullian's view of Angelomorphic Christology. He writes that Tertullian rejects all forms of Angelomorphic Christology. The results that derive from this investigation indicate otherwise. We will therefore initiate this analysis of Tertullian's body of writings with a critique of Daniélou's work regarding Latin Christianity.

Daniélou further maintains that Tertullian is averse to calling Christ an angel since the Latin apologist allegedly believes there is a radical distinction between Christ and the holy angels of God. Not only Daniélou, but also other historians impute this view to Tertullian. However, we will contend that Tertullian's use of *monarchia* allows us to fuse the ontological divide that purportedly separates Christ and the angels. We will also examine this point in Chapter 1 of the present study.

This investigation will suggest that it is the Son as such and not the Word (*Sermo*), whom the Father makes inferior to the angels. In order to be *au fait* with the main argument that we will essay in the following pages, one will need to make a formal distinction between the Word of God and the Son *qua* Son. In this regard, Tertullian's Christology is somewhat challenging and formidable. That is why chapter

4 will attempt to sort out the Christological titles that Tertullian uses to formulate his doctrine of Christ.

Subsequent to our examination of Tertullian's *Adversus Praxean*, we will submit that while Tertullian is reluctant to call the Son an angel, it is not because he thinks there is a radical ontological differentiation between the Son *qua* Son and God's holy angels. To the contrary, Tertullian believes that the preexistent, preincarnate and pretheophanic Son as such is actually lower than the angels are by virtue of His heavenly temporal generation from God's substance, implying that the ontological divide suggested by Daniélou may not be that extensive. The Son's ontological relationship to the angels as well as His relationship with the Father will serve as a theme that we will develop throughout the course of this study. It is now time to analyze Daniélou's treatment of Tertullian's view toward Angelomorphic Christology.

Chapter 1

Daniélou and the Angelomorphic Christology of Tertullian

Two of this investigation's aims are to show that (1) Tertullian's Christology contains Angelomorphic elements; (2) Tertullian does not posit a vast ontological divide (i.e. a radical distinction) between the preexistent Son and the holy angels of God. This chapter will consequently examine Daniélou's two suggestions, namely, that Tertullian both rejects all Angelomorphic Christology and believes that the Son is radically distinct from the angels. We will undertake this critical analysis in order to ascertain the historical viability of Daniélou's argument. First, however, we will briefly review details concerning studies that precipitated the historian's ambitious project vis-à-vis Angelomorphic Christology. Of course, we do not intend for the summary presented in this study to be comprehensive. Its purpose is merely to provide the reader with selected background information on the subject of angelomorphism as it relates to the doctrine of Christ. One can find comprehensive summaries of Angelomorphic research in Gieschen and Carrell.³⁶

A. Recent Christological Studies Involving Angelomorphism

Two types of nomenclature that students of Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity have devoted a considerable amount of attention to in recent years are the linguistic formulae "angelic" and "Angelomorphic" Christology.³⁷ The expression "angelic Christology" usually refers to the doctrine that maintains Christ is an angelic being per nature.³⁸ Angelomorphic Christology³⁹, on the other hand, proposes that the

³⁶ Peter R. Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

³⁷ Christology is the doctrine of Christ. The term thus refers to the theological dogma that systematically focuses on the person and work of the one whom Christians universally consider the elect and divine Messiah of God. One of the most influential Christologies in church history is the doctrine of Christ carefully worked out by Tertullian of Carthage in the third century.

³⁸ We say "usually" since scholars such as Hannah employ the terminology "angel christology" to

Son of God temporarily assumes the form (μορφή) of an angel in divinely inspired visions such as those contained in the NT book of Revelation (Apoc 1:13-16).⁴⁰ Additionally, ancient Hebrew narratives that historically recount the awe-inspiring theophanies of YHWH (the God of Israel) also include data that contributes to the study of Angelomorphic traditions (Genesis 16:7-14).⁴¹

The difference between angelic and Angelomorphic Christology therefore seems to be one of descriptive emphasis: one formula delineates the nature of a certain entity (*x*) while the other type of terminology places stress on a particular function of *x*. Scholars employ both expressions to account for the otherworldly phenomena recorded in the holy writings of Judaism and Christianity. However, the nomenclature “Angelomorphic Christology” has taken on greater prominence since a very controversial study authored in the 1940s. We will now review details relating to this much talked about work.

The terminology “angel Christology” particularly came to the fore when Martin Werner authored the book, *Die Entstehung des Dogmas*, in 1941.⁴² Admittedly, scholars produced learned delineations of early angelic Christology prior to Werner’s

describe all Christologies that have been markedly influenced “by angelological ideas.” See Hannah, *Michael and Christ*, 12-13, wherein Hannah notes that angelic Christology particularly “defines Christ as an angelic being,” however.

³⁹ While relating that Daniélou is evidently the first writer to use the terminology, “Angelomorphic Christology,” D. Hannah also informs his readers that this type of Christology is “phenomenological.” That is, “It refers only to visual portrayals of Christ in the form of an angel.” See *Michael and Christ*, 13. The emphasis here is on Christ being depicted in terms of His angelic μορφή. He therefore possesses the external appearance of an angel although he may not be an angel in an ontological sense. For more information on how the early church fathers use μορφή, *vide* Lampe. One will find an extended definition of Angelomorphic Christology in C. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 28-29.

⁴⁰ L. Stuckenbruck provides evidence for Angelomorphic elements in Apoc 1:13-16. Refer to Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration*, 211-213.

⁴¹ It is difficult to improve on Carrell’s precise definition of angels. He describes them as “heavenly beings distinct from God and human beings, who exist to serve Deity as messengers, as the heavenly congregation in worship, and as agents of the divine will fulfilling a variety of other functions,” in *Jesus and the Angels*, 14. Angelology thus involves propositional declarations concerning angels and it systematically treats the heavenly spirit creatures that dutifully minister to Almighty God.

⁴² *The Formation of Christian Dogma: An Historical Study of Its Problem*, trans. S. G. F. Brandon (London: Black, 1957).

formative study.⁴³ Nevertheless, Werner's opus garnered especial attention by virtue of the negative scholarly response it received *in toto*. More importantly, Wilhelm Michaelis (*inter alios*) immediately criticized Werner's controversial monograph, doing so authoritatively and decisively in 1942.⁴⁴ Consequently, *Die Entstehung des Dogma*, a publication that outlines a highly disputed form of Primitive (*urchristlich*) Christology—never recovered from the learned theological offensive that the influential German scholar Michaelis initiated. The scholastic world never accepted Werner's general thesis and the majority of patristic, ecclesiastical, and NT scholars continue to reject it today.⁴⁵

While most ecclesiastical historians presently believe that Michaelis and those who followed in his path soundly overturned Werner's argument concerning angel Christology, we do well to remember that other historians of dogma have expressed scholastic praise for his historical presentation of Judaeo-Christian evidence ostensibly demonstrating the existence of Primitive angelic Christology. Admittedly, these scholars usually deny Werner's primary overarching thesis.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, in recent times, Charles Gieschen's magisterial study has highlighted distinctive elements of Angelomorphic Christology from early Jewish and Christian witnesses that no doubt shaped and influenced Primitive and post-apostolic Christianity.

⁴³ G. H. Dix wrote two articles contending that Primitive Christology originated from Judaism's notion of the *malak YHWH* and Son of Man concepts. These articles were respectively published in 1925 and 1927. The details are contained in D. Hannah, *Michael and Christ*, 3.

⁴⁴ Hannah recounts how scholars replied to Werner's study in a "swift and decisive" fashion. For instance, Joseph Barbel presented a critique of Werner's thesis in 1941. Then came Michaelis' *Zur Englechristologie im Urchristentum: Abbau der Konstruktion Martin Werners*. Barbel lauded the evidence that Werner marshaled, although he did not think that the Primitive community of faith possessed an authentic angel Christology. See D. Hannah, *Michael and Christ*, 4-5.

Werner himself seems to consider Barbel's study more significant than Michaelis'. He certainly spends more time replying to the former than to the latter in his second edition of *Formation*. Interestingly, Barbel thought that the pre-Nicenes held to a form of angel Christology but he did not find evidence for its existence in the Primitive congregation. See Hannah, *Michael and Christ*, 4ff.

⁴⁵ P. Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 3.

⁴⁶ D. Hannah, *Michael and Christ*, 5.

Gieschen's painstaking examination of the issues appertaining to angelic or Angelomorphic Christology suggests that Werner's problem may have been primarily methodological and not factual per se. That is, the historian may have simply exceeded the bounds of the evidence that he presented.⁴⁷

Gieschen brackets ontological issues when he examines the antecedents of ancient Angelomorphic traditions to avoid difficulties that have plagued past studies. How well Gieschen succeeds in this endeavor, though, is somewhat debatable.⁴⁸ In any case, Gieschen's research in connection with Angelomorphic Christology is groundbreaking. Ergo, we deem it proper to evaluate the data he has compiled in his analysis of Angelomorphic texts. It is also imperative to examine other contemporary works that deal with the theological areas of angelology and Christology. Although we primarily will appeal to Gieschen's study in this chapter so that we may systematically analyze Tertullian's doctrine of Christ's person and work, we will also review Daniélou's treatment concerning the absence or presence of Angelomorphic Christology in Tertullian's literary corpus.

⁴⁷ C. Gieschen judges Werner's documentation for the existence of first century angelic Christology (the doctrine that Christ is a created angel) "meager" in *Angelomorphic Christology*, 13. Martin Hengel offers a similar analysis: "At any rate, in his great work *The Formation of Christian Dogma*, Martin Werner much exaggerated the role of 'angel Christology' in early Christianity (*Martin Werner hat auf jeden Fall in seinem grossen Werk 'Die Entstehung des christlichen Dogmas' die Rolle der 'Engelchristologie' für das frühe Christentum weit überschätzt*). See *Der Sohn Gottes: Die Entstehung der Christologie und die jüdisch-hellenistische Religionsgeschichte*. (Tübingen: JCB Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1975), 131; *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1976), 85.

⁴⁸ C. Gieschen thinks that ontological concerns (questions concerning the being of Christ) have "inhibited" Angelomorphic studies undertaken in the past. He proposes that we should now ask another question in place of the ontological ones, namely, "Where and how did early Christians use the variegated angelomorphic traditions from the OT and other sources to express their Christology?" Consult Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 349. Gieschen's new formulation of the Angelomorphic question is designed to show that Angelomorphic traditions significantly influenced early Christology *qua* high Christology. Gieschen further maintains that traditions portraying Christ as the visible manifestation of God (the *malak YHWH*) actually paved the way for later Christological affirmations such as "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor 12:3) or *YHWH*. See *ibid.*, 350. While he tries to downplay questions concerning the being of Christ in his study, it is evident that Gieschen espouses a high Christology, linking the Son in his role as angel with a visible manifestation of *YHWH*.

B. The Question of Angelomorphic Christology in Tertullian's Writings

Daniélou maintains that Tertullian assumes an antagonistic stance vis-à-vis "Judaeo-Christian angelology." For instance, he observes that the seminal Carthaginian thinker firmly rejects a noted Jewish teaching that postulates angels sharing in the creation of the first two human beings (*Adv Prax* 12.2). Daniélou further argues that Tertullian repudiates the alleged Judaeo-Christian concept of *potestates ianitrices*, that is, the notion that there are angels who purportedly judge the souls of humans, who having died, subsequently appear before the divine judgment seat in heaven.⁴⁹ With characteristic irony, Tertullian writes:

Doubtless, when the souls have departed from their bodies, and begun to be put upon trial in the several stories of the heavens, with reference to the engagement (under which they have come to Jesus), and to be questioned about those hidden mysteries of the heretics, they must then confess before the real powers and the real men, the Teleti, to wit, and the Abascanti, and the Acineti of Valentinus!⁵⁰

It seems certain that Tertullian does not put faith in the notion of angels judging human souls. Does this mean that he rejects Angelomorphic Christology or Judaic angelology as a whole, however?

In view of the foregoing citation from Tertullian's work, we have no problem believing that the Christian rhetorician from North Africa is antipathetic towards any gnoseological elements contained in so-called Judaeo-Christian angelology. Nevertheless, it is also clear from a careful reading of Tertullian's writings that he does not repudiate Jewish angelology *in toto*. For example, when one consults Tertullian's inimitable discourse concerning the soul, he or she finds him affirming the existence of a natality angel⁵¹ (a putative Second Temple Judaic notion) in

⁴⁹ Tertullian might have based his animus for this doctrine on what we read in Hermas, *Visions* 1.1; 3.2; 4.1 and *Sim* 9.2 (written ca. 145).

⁵⁰ *Scorpiace* 10.6-7

⁵¹ *De Anima* 37.1-2 reads: "Now the entire process of sowing, forming, and completing the human

addition to accommodating the theory of a heavenly spirit being that dutifully escorts the soul “on its journey” after death occurs:

Undoubtedly, when the soul, by the power of death, is released from its concretion with the flesh, it is by the very release cleansed and purified: It is, moreover, certain that it escapes from the veil of the flesh into open space, to its clear, and pure, and intrinsic light; and then finds itself enjoying its enfranchisement from matter, and by virtue of its liberty it recovers its divinity, as one who awakes out of sleep passes from images to verities. Then it tells out what it sees; then it exults or it fears, according as it finds what lodging is prepared for it, as soon as it sees the very angel's face, that arraigner of souls, the Mercury of the poets.⁵²

It is evident from the passage quoted above, that Tertullian does not eschew all forms of Jewish angelology. Nonetheless, Daniélou does not simply think that Tertullian evinces antipathy towards Judaeo-Christianity by casting off certain vestiges of Jewish angelology: He makes the stronger contention that “Tertullian rejects all Angelomorphic Christology.”⁵³ While Daniélou’s work is certainly first-rate and quite innovative in many respects, we believe that it also contains certain problematic features with reference to Tertullian’s concept of Angelomorphic Christology. We will now discuss these seeming problemata.

embryo in the womb is no doubt regulated by some power, which ministers herein to the will of God, whatever may be the method which it is appointed to employ. Even the superstition of Rome, by carefully attending to these points, imagined the goddess Alemona to nourish the foetus in the womb; as well as (the goddesses) Nona and Decima, called after the most critical months of gestation; and Partula, to manage and direct parturition; and Lucina, to bring the child to the birth and light of day. We, on our part, believe the angels to officiate herein for God. The embryo therefore becomes a human being in the womb from the moment that its form is completed" (*Omnem autem hominis in utero serendi struendi fingendi paraturam / aliqua utique potestas divinae voluntatis ministra modulatur, quamcumque illam rationem agitare sortita. Haec aestimando etiam superstitione Romana deam finxit Alemonam alendi in utero fetus et Nonam et Decimam a sollicitioribus mensibus et Partulam, quae partum gubernet, et Lucinam, quae producat in lucem. Nos officia divina angelos credimus. Ex eo igitur fetus in utero homo, a quo forma completa est*). Jan H. Waszink, *De Anima* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1947).

⁵² J. Waszink, *De Anima* 53.6. *Procul dubio cum vi mortis exprimitur de concretionem carnis et ipsa expressione colatur, certe de oppanso corporis erumpit in apertum ad merum et puram et suam lucem, statim semetipsam in expeditione substantiae recognoscit et in divinitatem ipsa libertate respiscit, ut de somnio emergens ubi imaginibus ad veritates. Tunc et enuntiat et videt, tunc exultat aut trepidat, prout paraturam devorsorii sui sentit, de ipsius statim angeli facie, evocatoris animarum, Mercurii poetarum.* Compare Lk 16:22.

⁵³ J. Daniélou, *Origins of Latin Christianity*, trans. David Smith and John Austin Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 149.

C. Problemata Associated with Daniélou's Historical Method

There is one methodical problem that directly affects the phenomenological (i.e. descriptive) efficacy of Daniélou's retelling (ἱστορία) of Latin dogmatic history (*Dogmengeschichte*). First, it is doubtful whether Judaeo-Christianity, as delineated by Daniélou, ever truly existed: "Jewish Christianity in the early centuries was a remarkably diversified phenomenon."⁵⁴ Therefore, one cannot facilely compartmentalize early Christianity into categories such as the dogmatic historian employs (Jewish, Latin and Hellenistic) and expect justly treat the forms of Christianity that actually obtained in antiquity. The three putative types of Christianity actually overlap one another and contain homogeneous features that in some ways render the previously mentioned distinctions superfluous from an ontological (structural) standpoint. John A. Baker (editor and translator of Daniélou's *magnum opus*) recognizes the difficulty with the late historian's paradigm, while appropriately affirming the overall value of his historical account.

Additional methodological problemata still linger. After all, what phenomena qualify as Jewish Christianity? What is the chronological *ab initio* that should one take into consideration when he or she embarks on an examination of Jewish Christian religious phenomena? Gieschen, while lauding Daniélou's general contributions to the field of Angelomorphic Christology, also thinks there is a slight methodological difficulty with his work. He believes that Daniélou may need to revise his model of Judaeo-Christianity in view of the way that he assigns certain forms of Christianity to

⁵⁴ Bart Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 50-51.

this category.⁵⁵ However, there are other aspects of Daniélou's approach that we need to address. We will continue to examine his historical paradigm in the next paragraph.

Bray discusses a number of relevant problematics that are associated with Daniélou's thesis.⁵⁶ He concludes that Daniélou's historical reconstruction of early Christianity is not wholly convincing since the late historian appears to arbitrarily argue that Tertullian's work *Scorpiace* is dependent on *Adversus Judaeos* even though there is evidently no substantial evidence to support this proposal. Moreover, Daniélou considers the *Passio Perpetuae* a second century document. This suggestion is highly unlikely, however, in view of the martyrology that this literary work contains. Lastly, Daniélou also defines early Jewish Christianity in extremely broad terms, mistakenly equating much of it with Gnosticism.⁵⁷ But this approach overlooks the cross-fertilization that Martin Hengel so thoroughly demonstrates obtained between Second Temple Judaism and Hellenism.⁵⁸

The textual evidence appears to show that Tertullian does not expunge every vestige of angelomorphism from his doctrine of Christ, one witnesses the "burning man" (*vir ardens*)⁵⁹ himself depicting the pre-incarnate Son as the Angel of the Lord (*malak YHWH*) in *Adv Prax* 16. The Son is rightly called an angel, "For he it always was who came down to converse with men, from Adam even to the patriarchs and prophets, always from the beginning preparing beforehand in dream and in a mirror

⁵⁵ C. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 15.

⁵⁶ G. Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God*, 131-132.

⁵⁷ Ibid. J. Daniélou also appears to make a *faux pas* when he argues that Tertullian assumes a perpetual *prise de position* against Judaism. Tertullian actually rails against certain forms of Judaism or particular gnosological Judaic practices, not against Judaism *simpliciter*. Daniélou's problematic reading of Tertullian no doubt plays a part in his construal of Tertullian's Christology. Despite the criticisms leveled here, however, we concur with Kearsley who acknowledges the impressive array of data that Daniélou amasses to highlight specific characteristics of Jewish Christianity. See R. Kearsley, *Tertullian's Theology*, 4.

⁵⁸ Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, 2 vols. (London: SCM Press, 1974).

⁵⁹ Jerome, *Ep.* 84.2.

and in an enigma that course which he was going to follow to the end.”⁶⁰ Tertullian shows that he accepts Angelomorphic Christology in two primary ways.

One apparatus that Tertullian utilizes is the Biblical *malak YHWH* motifs. According to the Latin writer, God’s pre-existent Son is an angel in the sense that he functions as the Angel of the Lord (*malak YHWH*).⁶¹ He is therefore the same spiritual being who appeared “in an enigma” (*in aenigmate*) to Adam, the patriarchs and the Hebrew prophets (*ab Adam usque ad patriarchas et prophetas*). Indeed, Tertullian believes that the one whom Genesis portrays deambulating in the Garden of Eden about the time of evening (*Et cum audissent vocem Domini Dei deambulantis in paradiso ad ueram post meridiem*) is none other than the pre-incarnate and pre-theophanic Son of God.⁶² Tertullian lucidly affirms that from the very inception of human history, God’s only-begotten Son faithfully functioned in the capacity of the angel or messenger (*nuntius*) of YHWH⁶³, ever communicating the divine will of deity while simultaneously learning how to be a man by means of His intermittent discourse with humans (*Adv Prax* 16). It is apropos, therefore, that Tertullian again employs the *malak YHWH* motif in *Adv Marc* 2.27: “Now we believe that Christ did ever act in the name of God the Father; that He actually from the beginning held intercourse with (men); actually communed with patriarchs and prophets; was the Son of the Creator; was His Word.”

⁶⁰ *Adv Prax* 16.28-32. *Ipsae enim et ad humana semper colloquia descendit, ab Adam usque ad patriarchas et prophetas, in visione in somnio in speculo in aenigmate ordinem suum praestruens ab initio semper quem erat persecuturus in finem*

⁶¹ Margaret Barker proposes that first century Palestinian Jews clung to a putative OT worldview (*Weltanschauung*) that conceived the *malak YHWH* in terms of a son of God who has the potential to temporarily embody himself in human form. She writes concerning Christ: “It was as a manifestation of Yahweh, the Son of God, that Jesus was acknowledged as Son of God, Messiah and Lord.” See *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 3. Jewish monotheism, as Barker understands it, did not prevent YHWH from having a number of angelic sons, one of whom served as a visible manifestation of the Deity Himself.

⁶² Gen 3:8 (Vg).

⁶³ *De Carne* 14.5.

Contra Daniélou, there then appears to be ample evidence that Tertullian identifies the Angel of the Lord (*malak YHWH*) with the theophanic Son of God. The motifs that he utilizes in his anti-heretical treatises demonstrate that one can find Angelomorphic themes throughout his literary corpus. The pre-Nicene consistently maintains that Christ assumes the form of an angel when the will of God deems it necessary. When making such observations, however, we do not mean to minimize the fact that Tertullian clearly ascribes the moniker “angel” to Christ. In fact, we will now review a text wherein Tertullian explicitly attributes the appellative “angel” (*angelus*) to the Son.

A second way that Tertullian exhibits his acceptance of Angelomorphic Christology is by directly calling the Son an angel. Tertullian applies the term “angel” to Christ in *De Carne* 14.17-20: “Certainly he is described as the angel of great counsel, ‘angel’ meaning ‘messenger’, by a term of office, not of nature: for he was to announce to the world the Father’s great project, concerned with the restitution of man.”⁶⁴

When reading *De Carne* and other treatises of Tertullian, one has to concede that the apologist is extremely reluctant to call Christ an angel. He goes to great lengths in order to stress that the Son is not an angel in the same way that Michael and Gabriel are angels. Furthermore, he explicitly states that Christ is only an angel per function and not according to his substance.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, these concessions do not vitiate Tertullian’s portrayal of the Son as an angel. There are manifest Angelomorphic elements contained in his writings whether he explicitly calls the Son “angel” or incorporates *malak YHWH* motifs. It thus does not seem quite accurate to

⁶⁴ *Dictus est quidem magni consilii angelus, id est nuntius, officii non naturae vocabulo: magnum enim cogitatum patris, super hominis scilicet restitutionem, adnuntiaturus saeculo erat.*

maintain that Tertullian rejects all Angelomorphic Christology. Maybe there is one issue relating to this subject matter that we should consider before concluding, however.

It is quite possible that Daniélou is working with a rather narrow definition of Angelomorphic Christology. If by “Angelomorphic Christology” Daniélou means a doctrine of Christ that teaches the Son is an angel as to substance (ουσια), then he is correct to contend that Tertullian rejects “all Angelomorphic Christology,” for the ancient Carthaginian does not believe that Christ possesses the entire complex of angelic properties.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, it does not seem that the nomenclature “Angelomorphic Christology” adequately expresses the concept that Tertullian repudiates. In fact, there is ample evidence that both Angelomorphic themes and language are contained in his works. Hence, it would be much more preferable to say that he does not affirm angelic Christology, that is, the theological doctrine posited by Werner which teaches that Christ has an angelic nature or possesses the entire composite of properties that putatively constitute an angelic being. In this case, Daniélou’s shortcoming would most likely be the result of semiotic imprecision or catachresis and not misrepresentative historiography per se.

Based on the foregoing, however, it seems safe to conclude that one must nuance Daniélou’s observations regarding Tertullian’s Angelomorphic Christology in

⁶⁵ C. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 193.

⁶⁶ The historian may be using the nomenclature in this way since he contends that “strictly Jewish Christian conceptions of Angelomorphic Christology” depict the Son as an angel according to nature and not simply as an *angelus* per his divine mission (J. Daniélou, *Jewish Christianity*, 146). The Jewish Christian delineation of Angelomorphic Christology is said to be accomplished by means of angelic imagery since it evidently depicts the Son as an angel in substance or in his very eternal being.

The present writer’s comment about angelic properties assumes that there are truly mind-independent spiritual entities that possess certain objective (mind-independent) properties (qualities, characteristics and attributes) that allow such spiritual entities in relation to collectively belong to the class of being that some call angels. An extensive discussion of properties *simpliciter* is outside the bounds of this study. Suffice it to say that a sophisticated account of a priori contingent (*per accidens*) properties and a posteriori necessary (essential) properties appears in Saul Kripke’s *Naming and*

order to delineate adequately his doctrine of Christ's person and work.⁶⁷ We have good reason to believe that Tertullian does not reject "all Angelomorphic Christology." Even when he is reluctant to call Christ an angel, we think that the overall argument presented in this study accounts for such times of reticence. Consequently, we contend that there are discernible traces of Angelomorphic Christology in the writings of Tertullian. Gieschen concurs with this assessment because he writes:

The idea that all visible manifestations of God are the Son had a pervasive influence on many of the church's leading exegetes. Tertullian, whose writings date from ca. 193-220 CE, is also guided by this principle. He, too, assigns all judgment and revelatory activity, including that carried out by the Angel of the Lord, to the Son.⁶⁸

It thus seems that the following conclusions are tentatively warranted. The pioneer of Latin Christianity explicitly writes that Christ is not an angel *per substantiam* but only as to function (*De Carne* 14.17-20). Such passages, however, do not undermine the fact that vestiges of Angelomorphic Christology appear in the writings of Tertullian. Therefore, while the noted pre-Nicene's doctrine of Christ is admittedly complicated and resists reductionistic explanations, it is sufficient to note that Daniélou's argument regarding the absence of Angelomorphic Christology in Tertullian's work simply will

Necessity (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972, 1980), 106-34.

⁶⁷ P. Carrell is a little more cautious in his wording. He notes that Tertullian "was suspicious of angel Christology" although he calls Christ "the Angel of Great Counsel" (*Jesus and the Angels*, 101).

⁶⁸ Despite his remarks concerning Angelomorphic Christology being contained in Tertullian's writings, we must note that Gieschen is quick to point out Tertullian's terminology does not imply that the apologist believes Christ possesses an angelic nature. Nevertheless, Justin Martyr (*Apology* 1 6.1-2) evidently does think that Christ is an angel *per substantiam*. Gieschen explains the famed Justinian passage that we find in *Apology* 1 as follows: "What is striking about this text is both Justin's acknowledgement that angels are made like Christ (i.e., of the same nature) and the inclusion of angels as receiving 'worship and adoration' (σεβόμεθα και προσκυνούμεν) in a sequence after the Father and the Son and before the (prophetic) Spirit" (*Angelomorphic Christology*, 193-194). Gieschen further suggests that Tertullian may be reacting to Justin's angelomorphic Christology when he stresses Christ's function as an angel over against Christ actually being an angel, though there may be reason to believe that there are other factors governing his emphasis of Christ's function (his *ex officio* status) as an angel over against his possessing an angelic nature. Note Talbert's discussion concerning the incorporation of the *malak YHWH* concept in Tertullian and his "distaste" for the "docetic implications"

not hold up under scrutiny. It is better to say that Tertullian does not believe the Son is an angel in the manner of Gabriel and Michael than to maintain that he rejects Angelomorphic Christology *in toto*.⁶⁹ Accordingly, let us now discuss a second related claim of Daniélou that appertains to our study. This contention involves the ontological relationship between Christ and the angels.

D. The Ontological Chasm and Tertullian's Angelomorphic Aversion

Although it seems that the difficulty with Daniélou's reading of Tertullian is primarily semiotic, we will continue using the terminology "Angelomorphic Christology" in this section to describe the doctrine that Daniélou thinks Tertullian repudiates. Having established that the pre-Nicene is not averse to all Angelomorphic Christology, however, we will now explore whether Tertullian's rejection of what is, in reality, angelic Christology stems from his elevated ontological notions concerning the Son of God.

When perusing the sundry theological works of Tertullian, one observes that he does not prefer to identify Christ as an angel. Furthermore, he explicitly declares that the Son is only an angel in the sense that Christ is a messenger (*nuntius*) for the Father: He is not an angel as nature (*ut natura*). Nevertheless, we do well to ask why the Latin apologist *par excellence* apparently does not attribute angelic properties to the preeminent Son of God. Why is he so hesitant to impute angelhood to Christ? In the attempt to obtain an answer to such queries, we will review Daniélou's discussion of *Adv Prax* 3.4-10 and analyze the ontological divide that he posits between Christ and the angels.

of angelomorphic Christology. See C.H. Talbert, "The Myth of the Descending-Ascending Redeemer in Mediterranean Antiquity," *NTS* 22 (1976): 418-40.

⁶⁹ P. Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 101.

E. Critiquing Daniélou's Analysis of *Adversus Praxean* 3

Tertullian allegedly rejects all Angelomorphic Christology since he supposedly believes there is a “radical distinction” between the ministering angels of God (*igitur si et monarchia divina per tot legiones et exercitus angelorum administratur sicut scriptum est*)⁷⁰ and the three persons of the Trinitarian Godhead that Tertullian teaches share one divine substance (*tres personae una substantia*).⁷¹ The pre-Nicene purportedly makes this distinction for two primary reasons.

Daniélou first appeals to *Adv Prax* 3.4-10 so that he may demonstrate the marked distinction that he thinks Tertullian makes between the innumerable holy angels of deity and the three divine persons of the Trinity (*tres personae trinitatis*). *Adv Prax* 3.4-10 states that the angels administer God's single rule (*monarchia*) but do not thereby destroy it.⁷² Furthermore, it may indicate that the angels are not consubstantial (*consubstantialis*) with the Father. In fact, Daniélou believes are possibly alienated from His very substance:

Therefore if also the divine monarchy is administered by the agency of so many legions and hosts of angels (as it is written, Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him and thousand thousands ministered unto him), yet has not ceased to belong to one, so as to cease to be a monarchy because it has for its provincial governors so many thousand authorities, how should God be thought, in the Son and

⁷⁰ *Adv Prax* 3.35ff: “Therefore if also the divine monarchy is administered by the agency of so many legions and host of angels, as it is written.”

⁷¹ J. Daniélou, *The Origins of Latin Christianity*, 149-150. Tertullian himself (*Adv Prax* 2.3-7) writes that the *personae trinitatis* are three as regards sequence, aspect, and manifestation of power, yet one with respect to quality, power and substance. The three sequences, aspects and manifestations of power are “reckoned out in the name of three persons” (*tres autem non statu sed gradu, nec substantia sed forma, nec potestate sed specie, unius autem substantiae et unius status et unius potestatis, quia unus deus ex quo et gradus isti et formae et species in nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti deputantur*).

⁷² J. Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 130-134 contains pertinent information concerning the history of the term *monarchia*. Moltmann points out that this “curious hellenistic word-formation” is a Greek compound of *μοναρχ* and *μια αρχη*. Moltmann consequently states that this term originates with Pythagorean terminology used in Alexandria. He observes that we also witness the concept of God's *monarchia* in Philo, Justin, and Tatian where it respectively refers to God's lordship (Justin), the “monarchical constitution” of the cosmos (Tatian) or God's universal sovereignty (Philo). Tertullian appears to employ the signifier in order to reference God's supreme empire or rule (130-131). Moltmann notes that the pre-Nicenes thus replace the biblical concept of βασιλεια with what he calls, “an uncommonly seductive religious-political ideology” (131).

in the Holy Spirit occupying second and third place, while they are to such a degree conjoint of the Father's substance, to experience a division and a dispersion such as he does not experience in the plurality of all those angels, alien as they are from the Father's substance.⁷³

The rhetorical period (*περίοδος*) constructed in the previously quoted passage is somewhat protracted and relatively intricate. Nevertheless, the general thesis communicated by this text is for the most part unambiguous. Although the divine monarchy (*monarchia*) is the sole government (single empire) of God, the Almighty Sovereign permits His heavenly subordinates to administer the cosmic Kingdom in His behalf without the said rule of Deity suffering any monarchical diminution whatsoever. Tertullian portrays God's absolute decision in the following terms: "The divine monarchy is administered by the agency of so many legions and hosts of angels (as it is written, Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him and thousand thousands ministered unto him), yet has not ceased to belong to one."

The comments of the apologist further reveal why Jesus of Nazareth could speak of summoning twelve legions of angels (a multitude of holy spirit creatures) who possess the God-given puissance to deliver the incarnate Son from the life-threatening thralls of His *prima facie* formidable opponents. There are myriads of angels that attend the Father's heavenly throne. Consequently, the Son: "ordains for his disciples a kingdom even as he declares that one has been ordained for him by his Father: and he has power to ask his Father for legions of angels to help him, if he wished."⁷⁴ These angels, Jesus of Nazareth was fully aware, compose the heavenly

⁷³ *Adv Prax* 3. *Igitur si et monarchia divina per toto legiones et exercitus angelorum administratur sicut scriptum est, Milies centies centena milia adsistebant ei, nec ideo unius esse desiit, ut desinat monarchia esse quia per tanta milia virtutum procuratur. Quale est ut deus divisionem et dispersionem pati videatur in filio et in spiritu sancto secundum et tertium sortitis locum, tam consortibus substantiae patris, quas non patitur in tot angelorum numero et quidem tam alienorum a substantia patris.*

⁷⁴ *Adv Prax* 26.11-14. *Disponens regnum discipulis quomodo et sibi dispositum dicit a patre. habens potestatem legiones angelorum postulandi ad auxilium a patre si vellet.*

army of *YHWH* often referred to in the Hebrew Scriptures by means of the formula *YHWH Sabaoth* (Ps 68:17).⁷⁵ They are akin to mighty winds (πνευματα) or flaming fires (πυρος φλογα), figuratively speaking (Heb 1:7, 14). Such ones fittingly wield the divine power of God's *monarchia*.

Despite administering the divine Kingdom dilligently, the innumerable legions of supernal beings, whom both Jesus and Tertullian allude to, never cause any dissolution to the suzerainty of God. They are concomitantly God's servants (*exercitus angelorum administretur*) and spiritual sons.⁷⁶ Therefore, God the Father has graciously allowed his "family connections" (*pignora*)⁷⁷ to administer His supreme monarchical arrangement in the capacity of submissive heavenly officials (*officiales*).⁷⁸ This arrangement in nowise impugns or diminishes His divine unicity, As Tertullian so avidly insists.

Tertullian recalls the words of the prophet Daniel: "As it is written, Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him and thousand thousands ministered unto him." Daniel, in the manner of John's NT Apocalypse (Apoc 7:11-12), vividly depicts myriads upon myriads of angels surrounding the awe-inspiring throne of The Most High (*altissimus*) in a resplendent deific vision (Dan 7:10).⁷⁹ Yet the thousands and thousands of angels that John or Daniel describe do not threaten the sole cosmic

⁷⁵ The NT Epistle of James also appears to employ this expression in 5:4 of that work. For details of James' use of the Hebraic formula, see Martin Dibelius, *James: A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, rev. Heinrich Greenven, ed. Helmut Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976).

⁷⁶ *Adv Marc* 5.18.14. Tertullian identifies the "sons of God" in Gen 6 as angels (*De Idolatria* 9). Reference *De Virg* 7.2; 11.2. Athenagoras also believes the angels are "ministers" treated in Christian *theologia* along with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (*Leg pro* 10). This functional identification evidently follows that utilized elsewhere in the NT (Heb 1:14; Rev 22:9) and Philo. Crehan however stresses that Athenagoras did not necessarily copy Philo in this regard in *Presbeia peri Christianon*, trans. and annot. Joseph Hugh Crehan, Westminster: Newman Press and London: Longmans and Green, 1956), 134.

⁷⁷ E. Evans writes that *pignora* are sons of the Emperor. This is another point indicating that the angels possibly share the substance of the Father and are actually part of His monarchy.

⁷⁸ *Adv Prax* 3.4.

⁷⁹ See S.M. Olyun, *A Thousands Thousands Served Him: Exegesis and the Naming of Angels in Ancient*

rule of Almighty God. Tertullian thus forcefully reminds Praxeas: “Do you account provinces and family connections and officials and the very forces and the whole trappings of empire to be the overthrow of it? You are wrong if you do” (*membra et pignora et instrumenta et ipsam vim ac totum censum monarchiae eversionem deputas eius? Non recte*).⁸⁰ *A fortiori* the angels (Tertullian reasons) uphold God’s sole rule as loyal servants and sons (“family connections”). Their task is simply to administer the supreme monarchy as God wills without imperiling His sovereignty or ontological unicity.

Basing our thoughts on the language used in *Adv Prax* 3.4-10, it seems appropriate to conclude that the countless subordinate divine beings (i.e. the angels) existing in the heavens of God’s presence are actually part of the divine monarchy: they serve as eminent administrators of the the Father’s Kingdom. Daniélou, nonetheless, argues that Tertullian radically distinguishes these angelic ministers of God from the only begotten Son of the Most High Deity and the Holy Spirit, who (according to Tertullian) respectively occupy second and third place in the Godhead (*videatur in filio et in spiritu sancto secundum et tertium sortitis locum*).⁸¹ What are we to make of his suggestion in view of the present discussion concerning *Adv Prax* 3.4-10? What are Daniélou’s reasons for epistemically excluding the angels from God’s *monarchia*?

Judaism (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1993).

⁸⁰ *Adv Prax* 3.4. Clement of Rome comments on Daniel 7:10 as follows: “Let our glorying and our confidence be in him; let us submit ourselves to his will; let us consider the whole multitude of his angels, how they stand by and serve his will. For the scripture says, Ten thousand times ten thousand stood beside him, and thousands of thousands served him; and they cried, Holy, holy, holy Lord of Sabaoth! All creation is full of his glory” (I Clement 34.5-6).

⁸¹ *Adv Prax* 3.6.

While the latter *personae* (according to Tertullian) share the Father's *substantia* (being extensions thereof),⁸² Daniélou observes that the former (the angels) are aliens of the Father's substance (*alienorum a substantia patris*).⁸³ Consequently, he thinks we have one line of evidence that indicates Tertullian makes a marked distinction of being (i.e. an ontological differentiation) between the angels and the pre-eminent Son of God. These arguments do not convince the present writer, however, for the following three reasons.

(1) As we have implied above, *Adv Prax* 3.4-10 suggests that the angels are actually part of God's monarchy in a manner analogous to God's Son and His Spirit of holiness being part of the monarchy. Tertullian indicates that the angels serve as eminent dignitaries ("provincial governors") of the divine Kingdom. The supreme empire, "has for its provincial governors so many thousand authorities" (*quia per tant milia virtutum procuratur*) since the angels share in its benevolent sphere of influence.⁸⁴ In this exalted capacity, they faithfully oversee the single rule (*monarchia*) of the supreme Monarch, being an integral part of God's peerless empire. Tertullian in fact attributes a highly exalted position to the angels in relation to Deity, for he thinks that the "angels rank next to God."⁸⁵

⁸² *Adv Prax* 8. George C. Stead, in his magisterial study concerning the notion of divine substance, points out that Tertullian has no problem applying *substantia* to God. He notes that Tertullian uses *substantia* in *Adv Prax* 9 to refer to uncreated *spiritus*, which is differentiated from created finite *spiritus* by its inherent "purity, subtlety and power, which was at first concentrated in the Father, then distributed to the Son and Spirit," see *Divine Substance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 161.

⁸³ *Adv Prax* 3.8-9. R. Kearsley concurs with Daniélou's reading of this text. He writes that Tertullian believes: "The Son and Holy Spirit (*Adv Prax* 3) enjoy the status of equal possessors (*consortes*) in the substance of the Father (*substantiae patris*) and not mere sharers (*participes*). By contrast, Tertullian supposedly pegs the angels as alien to the Father's substance (*alienorum a substantia patris*)," see *Tertullian's Theology*, 124. E. Osborn offers a similar analysis of Tertullian's Christology with these vivid statements: "God delegates authority to the angels; but each member of the trinity possesses *without limit* the family property. The father communicates all that he has to Son and Spirit, so that they too are omnipotent (*Prax*. 7.3)," see *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 131.

⁸⁴ *Adv Prax* 3.4-5.

⁸⁵ *De Res* 5.2; CCSL 2:926. *Angelos post deum novimus*. Translation found in J. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 1:197.

(2) The reading, *alienorum a substantia patris*, is possibly a corrupt one.⁸⁶

Evans himself only essays it as a possible reconstructed lection. Consequently, we do not think that Daniélou's contention is absolutely probative. Tertullian may or may not think the angels are consubstantial (*consubstantialis*) with the Father. However, it does not seem that one can rigidly appeal to *Adv Prax* 3.4-10 in order to establish this view. The reading *alienorum a substantia patris* may very well be inauthentic since later in Tertullian's treatise, he insists that God has created humans from His very substance. Man is thus the *imago Dei*.⁸⁷ Why then, cannot the angels who apparently surpass humans in power and strength (2 Pet 2:11) also share in or originate from God's substance? Nevertheless there is yet another reason why we take issue with Daniélou's construal of the textual evidence in this case.

(3) A careful evaluation of Tertullian's literary corpus demonstrates that he not only applied Ps 8:5 to the incarnate Son of God, but he also assigns this text to the minoration of the Son within the Godhead.⁸⁸ That is, Tertullian believes that the pre-incarnate and pre-theophanic Son of God by virtue of His temporal generation in heaven (*nativitas perfecta*) was actually lower than the angels before He became a man or manifested Himself to the prophets and patriarchs via visions and enigmata. We put forth this proposition as one of the main reasons that Tertullian does not prefer to identify Christ as an angel *ut natura*. We submit that he actually believes the Son *qua* Son was lower than God's holy angels previous to His enfleshment. Now that we

⁸⁶ Aemilii Kroymann records the following textual information for *Adv Prax* 3.4ff: "*et quidem tam <alienorum> Gel: et quidem tam PMF, et quid? Demta Eng, ecquid nata. Oehlerus. See Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum Editum Consilio Et Impensis. Tertullian's Opera Ex Recensione*, vol. 47 (Vienna, 1906).

⁸⁷ *Adv Prax* 5.

⁸⁸ After a brief overview of how Tertullian interprets Ps 8:5 in other passages, Evans concludes: "The present passage [*Adv Prax* 9] therefore stands alone in regarding the minoration as the subordination of the Son to the Father within the Godhead" (E. Evans, *Adversus Praxean*, 248).

have evaluated Daniélou's view, however, thus setting the stage for our treatment of Tertullian's work, we will now examine how the pre-Nicenes employ Ps 8:5.

Chapter 2

The Exegesis of Psalm 8:5 in the Pre-Nicenes

This chapter will concern itself with the pre-Nicene exegesis of Ps 8:5. However, the interpretation of the text did not occur *in vacuo*. Accordingly, Colish's observation regarding Tertullian applies to each ante-Nicene theologian: "His thought must thus be understood in its particular historical, cultural, and existential setting."⁸⁹

With Colish's words in mind, we will not simply review the way that the pre-Nicene writers (including Tertullian) exegeted Ps 8:5. This study will also take the life situation (*Sitz im Leben*) of select pre-Nicenes into consideration as it investigates how writers preceding 325 CE understood the saying concerning the Son of Man becoming lower than the angels. This approach will necessitate a brief overview of Gnosticism since the influential amalgam of philosophico-religious ideas often served as the backdrop for scriptural explanations put forth by Tertullian to counter heresy. Furthermore, it is imperative to review the orthodox response that anti-Gnostic writers produced in defense of the historical Christian faith. Only after presenting this material and providing a much need existential and cultural context for Tertullian's interpretation of Ps 8:5 will this investigation then demonstrate how the pre-Nicenes understood the pivotal hymnodic text.

A. Overview of Gnosticism

The nomenclature "Gnosticism" refers to an assortment of "religious systems and ideas" that evidently thrived from the first century CE onward⁹⁰ with some forms of

⁸⁹ Maria L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 2:12.

⁹⁰ Pokorny is no doubt correct when he observes that the evidence for a first century form of Gnosticism is not "unequivocally attested." But we can surmise that an incipient form of Gnosticism obtained in the first century in view of the data contained in John's Gospel and the Pauline Epistles. See Petr Pokorny, *Colossians: A Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 117.

the movement actually surviving until the medieval period.⁹¹ These variegated systems and concepts⁹² were “both highly syncretistic and contemplative” in that they extracted speculative elements from diverse Jewish and pagan religio-philosophical sources⁹³ while promoting the notion that humankind, though provisionally subsisting in a state of spiritual darkness, is still capable of attaining psychic liberation through the personal acquisition of *γνῶσις*.⁹⁴

One distinctive teaching of Gnosticism is the notion of divine aeons that emanate from the ungenerated silence (i.e., God). For some Gnostics, God as Silence *qua* Silence signifies the ineffable and incomprehensible “perfect, preexistent aeon, dwelling in the invisible and unnamable elevations.”⁹⁵ Therefore, Silence is the “prebeginning and forefather and depth” or “deep solitude for infinite aeons.”⁹⁶ Conversely, other Gnostic thinkers such as Valentinus think that “depth” is a deific attribute as opposed to a separate hypostatic entity, and they maintain that the aeons are prolations “immanent with God.”⁹⁷

Additionally, dualistic and anti-worldly tendencies characterize Gnosticism.

⁹¹ See Stanley M. Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1984), 35; Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 33. Kelly is reluctant to call Gnosticism a movement. He considers the term “misleading” when applied to the Gnostic religion. The terminology implies, Kelly thinks, that Gnosticism was a “Concrete organization or church.” Even he has to concede, however, that the systems or schools labeled Gnosticism have enough in common to be categorized in some form or fashion. This study thus takes the position that the syncretistic religio-philosophical phenomenon known as Gnosticism qualifies as a movement in a sociological sense. See John N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), 25.

⁹² Olson also prefers the terminology “schools” or “movements.” He recounts that Irenaeus studied twenty of the Gnostic schools and set out their similarities and differences in detail. *Vide* Roger Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 37ff.

⁹³ P. Pokorny, *Colossians*, 117.

⁹⁴ S. Burgess, *Holy Spirit*, 35.

⁹⁵ J. Pelikan, *Christian Tradition*, 1:85

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* Richard Melick also cites Lohse who contends that Valentinian Gnosticism teaches that God does not belong to the πληρωμα in *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture, NAC* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 223. This statement is not necessarily dissonant with Pelikan’s observations. It is logically possible that the aeons are immanent in the Deity without the Deity being one of the aeons.

One reason for the Gnostic's anti-worldly demeanor was the plenitude of evil that the Gnostics, like modern theoreticians, observed in the cosmos. We will now discuss the manner in which these speculative systems attempted to solve the logical problem of evil. In so doing, we will focus on Valentinian ontology and Christology. This inquiry will also review the background of the noted Gnostic from Egypt.

B. Valentinian Ontology and Christology

Valentinus (ca. 140) was originally a renowned member of the catholic community located in Rome.⁹⁸ Epiphanius reports that he arrived from Egypt, having been schooled in Alexandria; the celebrated Gnostic supposedly later broke with the church because he was not appointed to the office of bishop. Unfortunately, we only have fragments of his literary corpus and this situation requires that one piece together his ontology (theory of being), Christology and the account of Valentinus' alleged ecclesiastical defection.⁹⁹ Elaine Pagels casts doubt on the latter point, arguing that his defection is essentially a fiction of zealous heresiologists like Tertullian.¹⁰⁰

Despite the fragmentary status of the textual evidence, however, we may justly infer that Valentinus believed God created Adam in accordance with a "heavenly model of the angels."¹⁰¹ He also taught that Jesus only appeared to be human and did not really assimilate the food or drink that he reportedly ingested or imbibed during the period of His enfleshment on earth. According to Irenaeus, Valentinus also posited the notion of a *πληρωμα* composed of thirty supernal acons ordered in fifteen pairs called syzygies,¹⁰² including a maternal figure that supposedly brought forth Christ and the Creator (*δημιουργος*) of the material order since the Gnostic Christ and Demiurge apparently existed outside of the pre-cosmic *πληρωμα*.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Valentinus was considered an intelligent and well-spoken individual. He claimed that he received a secret Christian tradition from Theudas, one of the apostle Paul's disciples. Consult E. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1978), 36. Paul putatively only taught such wisdom to a select few (*Ibid.*, 37).

⁹⁹ See *De Carne* 24 for a list of Christological heresies. This particular *caput* outlines the aeons of Valentinus.

¹⁰⁰ Tertullian reports that Valentinus became disgruntled when he was not appointed as bishop of Rome. Historians usually discount his story, however, for two reasons: (1) The characteristic rhetorical nature of polemic writings; (2) Historically, the orthodox seem to have parted ways with the Gnostics rather than the other way around (E. Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels*, 39). However, Tertullian's story does shed light on the nature of the orthodox response during his time.

¹⁰¹ See Riemer Roukema, *Gnosis and Faith in Early Christianity* (London, SCM Press, 1999), 129.

¹⁰² Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 81.

¹⁰³ R. Roukema, *Gnosis and Faith*, 130.

Frend observes that the following characterizes Valentinian Gnosticism: God is one, transcendent, incomprehensible and originates from the Depth (*βυθος*) or Primal Cause.¹⁰⁴ Depth (the absolute Father) subsequently brings forth Silence (*σιγητα*) and these two metaphysical principles (one masculine and the other feminine) prolate Understanding (*νους*) and Truth (*αληθεια*). Altogether, thirty aeons proceed, with some pleromatic entities being masculine and others being feminine in nature. These prolations (i.e. emanations) collectively constitute the hidden *πληρωμα* (fullness of divine powers) of Gnosticism. The ultimate aeon is Sophia who lapses “into the darkness of despair,” giving birth to a “malformed infant” named Ialdabaoth (“Child of Chaos”).¹⁰⁵ The material cosmos then derives its existence from this chaotic fallen deity otherwise known as the Demiurge.

An intra-pleromatic conflict (*αγων*) ultimately occurs between Sophia and Ialdabaoth. Valentinus thinks that this *αγων* is the aetiological basis for the concomitant existence of good and evil.¹⁰⁶ In view of the cosmic evil pervading the cosmos, however, the Gnostics argue that Sophia sent a Savior (Jesus) to redeem those who come to know themselves (*γνωσις σεαυτου*) through the medium of *γνωσις θεου*. *Γνωσις θεου* (knowledge of God) is mystical and intuitive awareness: a “direct beholding of the divine reality” functioning as “an earnest of the consummation to come.”¹⁰⁷ Such self-knowledge is the vehicle of salvation for the Gnostic. Knowledge of the god within liberates the initiate’s soul from the defective

¹⁰⁴ See W. H. C. Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 207; R. Olson, *Story of Theology*, 37.

¹⁰⁵ Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 207.

¹⁰⁶ Homer’s *Iliad* contains myths that parallel the Gnostic explanation for the logical problem of evil. See Mark P. O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, *Classical Mythology* (New York: Longman, 1999), 370-371.

¹⁰⁷ Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Bacon Press, 1963), 285. Gilbert Murray adds that *γνωσις θεου*: “is not a mere intellectual knowledge. It is a complete union, a merging of beings,” see *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955), 154.

body that is composed of evil matter.

Before concluding this study's synopsis of Gnosticism and Valentinian thought, we must further treat the ontology and Christology of Valentinus. In particular, it is vital to highlight the dualism and conflict that constitutes the substratum of the *πληρωμα*.

Sophia is temporarily expelled from the locus of divine plenitude to a lower material realm, which actualizes as a consequence of Sophia's propensities for change and flux. The Valentinian *πληρωμα* is thus dialectical in that there is both a potential and actual tension that characterizes its constitutional makeup. The Divine (according to the Valentinian *Weltanschauung*) is both feminine and masculine; there are two principles of the *πληρωμα* (the fullness of divinity). One metaphysical substrate (the Father) experiences divine plenitude in an absolute sense. The other deific source of divinity (σοφία) is marginal and prone to sin. Valentinus' notion of divine plenitude is therefore structurally dualistic, yet differs from Plato's transcendent realm of Ideas since the eternal and immutable world of Valentinianism assumes or sublates (*aufheben*) the temporal and inferior realm of becoming. The result is that the world and the Creator (δημιουργος) of the cosmos are both inherently malignant. Additionally, evil originates with the Godhead instead of having its beginnings with humankind. Hence, one must ask how successful the Gnostic theodicy is, since it links evil with both intra and extra-pleromatic divine entities.

In conclusion, we can safely state that the Valentinian Christology resembles the Gospel of Truth (*Evangelium Veritatis*) in some respects. For instance, Valentinus posits a *καταβασις* for Christ the Redeemer who descends from on high and unites with Jesus, an entity who appears to be human, but is really spiritual: "Thus for these Gnostics Jesus only seemed to be human. His entire earthly existence was a charade in

which he pretended to be flesh and blood for his disciple's sake."¹⁰⁸ When Jesus of Nazareth dies on the *crux*, the Gnostic Christ raises His mortal body and carries it to the spiritual realms above. In this manner, he prepares the way for others to enter the divine *πληρωμα*, thereby functioning as a forerunner (*προδρομος*) in behalf of the "elect."¹⁰⁹ This type of Christology manifestly devalues the flesh, however. It is no wonder that certain phenomenologists of religion have described it as "exilic" or anti-worldly.¹¹⁰ The pessimistic tendencies and heresiarchal nature of the Gnostic schools undeniably accounted for the orthodox rejoinder to the syncretistic movement.

C. The Orthodox Response

Gnosticism posed a formidable challenge to the Christian faith. It was an acute religious threat that could have distorted, beyond recognition, the unique character of historical Christianity. Paul Tillich accordingly expresses the view of many ecclesiastical historians when he observes: "If Christian theology had succumbed to this [Gnostic] temptation, the particular character of Christianity would have been lost. Its unique basis in the person of Jesus would have become meaningless."¹¹¹ However, orthodox Christian theologians offered a successful riposte to the Gnostic challenge. These anti-Gnostic polemicists "fought against gnosticism [sic] and expelled it from the church."¹¹²

The three great anti-Gnostic theologians are Irenaeus, Tertullian, and

¹⁰⁸ R. Olson, *The Story of Theology*, 38.

¹⁰⁹ Robert M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Christianity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 136ff. B. Metzger (*The Canon of the NT*, 81) relates that the Gnostics categorized human beings into three groups, the ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΙΚΟΙ (genuine Gnostics), ΨΥΧΙΚΟΙ (ordinary and unenlightened Christians), and the ὙΛΙΚΟΙ (those exclusively composed of matter and destined for eternal condemnation).

¹¹⁰ Merold Westphal, *God, Guilt and Death: An Existential Phenomenology of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 173-175.

¹¹¹ P. Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*, 36.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 37.

Hippolytus.¹¹³ Irenaeus (130-200 CE) stands out as the preeminent Christian polemicist, who opposed the Gnostic schools. He was a Greek speaker from Asia Minor, became bishop of Lyons, learned about Christianity from Polycarp of Smyrna (a student of the apostle John)¹¹⁴ and possessed an in-depth knowledge of Scripture, having the ability “to systematize ideas and sum up an argument in a few pungent sentences.”¹¹⁵ Moreover, he was the greatest anti-Gnostic theologian since he seemingly understood the significance of Pauline theology in relation to the church.¹¹⁶ Most notable among Irenaeus’ achievements, however, is his inimitable and significant work, *Adversus Haereses (The Unmasking and Refutation of Falsely So-Called Gnosis)*. He penned this book in approximately 185 CE.¹¹⁷ It is both a constructive and deconstructive treatise that elucidates and simultaneously dismantles Gnostic theosophy.

Irenaeus’ significant theological composition consists of five books that answer the Gnostic philosophico-religious claims by placing stress on episcopal, traditional, and canonical data.¹¹⁸ Opposing the Gnostics, Irenaeus resists speculative notions regarding the inner life of the Godhead.¹¹⁹ His work also vigorously counters the inherent Docetism and manifest ontological dualism of the Gnostic movement.¹²⁰

¹¹³ Two other early theologians who offered powerful rejoinders to the contentions of Gnosticism are Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* 3.4.30) and Origen (*Commentary on John*). Clement describes the Gnostics thus: *Talia etiam statuunt Prodicti quoque asseclae, qui seipsos falso nomine vocant Gnosticos.*

¹¹⁴ Harold O. J. Brown, *Heresies: Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), 78.

¹¹⁵ W. H. C. Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 244.

¹¹⁶ P. Tillich, *Christian Thought*, 37.

¹¹⁷ Howard F. Vos, *Exploring Church History* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 17.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ H. Brown, *Heresies*, 80.

¹²⁰ Gnosticism influenced the dualistic metaphysics of Docetism. See Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of an Ancient Religion*, trans. Robert M. Wilson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1983), 372. Countering Docetism, Irenaeus writes: “Fasting forty days, like Moses and Elias, He afterwards hungered, first, in order that we may perceive that He was a real and substantial man -- for it belongs to a man to suffer hunger when fasting; and secondly, that His opponent might have an opportunity of attacking Him” (*Adv Haer* 5.21.2).

Yet, Irenaeus not only deconstructs the Gnostic system.¹²¹ In addition, he spends time clarifying Christian *dogmata*, clearly setting out pragmatic theological principles that function as established control beliefs of orthodoxy.¹²² Accordingly, Brunner sums up the theological contributions of Irenaeus as follows: “So the enterprise of theological dogmatics begins with a work which, in its very title, suggests its polemic and apologetic aim, the *Elenchus* of Irenaeus. The first great work of Christian theology is a controversial work against Gnosticism.”¹²³ Another anti-Gnostic, one who also manifested schismatic tendencies, namely, Hippolytus, faithfully sustained the eristic project of Irenaeus.

1. Hippolytus

Hippolytus (ca. 160-236 CE) wrote a document entitled *Refutatio omnium haeresium* (*Refutation of All Heresies*). Scholars have also given it the appellative *φιλοσοφούμενα* (*Philosophical Teachings*) based on the content of the first book contained in the work.¹²⁴ Hippolytus’ *φιλοσοφούμενα* actually contains two parts: books (*capita*) one and four as well as a subsequent section detailing various and sundry aspects of the Gnostic system.

Hippolytus borrows concepts from Irenaeus’ *Adversus Haereses* but expands upon the arguments presented therein.¹²⁵ For instance, he believes that the *λογος* fully becomes Son when he assumes humanity. The polemicist writes: “Now what

¹²¹ Irenaeus castigates the numerological tendencies of the Gnostics, observing: “Moreover, they possess no proof of their system, which has but recently been invented by them, sometimes resting upon certain numbers, sometimes on syllables, and sometimes, again, on names; and there are occasions, too, when, by means of those letters which are contained in letters, by parables not properly interpreted, or by certain [baseless] conjectures, they strive to establish that fabulous account which they have devised” (Ibid. 2.28.8).

¹²² H. Vos calls Irenaeus the “Father of Church Dogmatics” because of his constructive tendency vis-à-vis Christian theology (*Exploring*, 17).

¹²³ Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, vol. I of *Dogmatics*, trans. Olive Wyon (London: Lutterworth, 1949), 94. The term *Elenchus* denotes a refutation or cross-examination.

¹²⁴ K. Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 13.

¹²⁵ H. Vos, *Exploring*, 17

Son of his own has God sent down through the flesh if not the Word, whom he addressed as Son in view of the fact that he was going to become such in future?"¹²⁶ Hippolytus thus incorporates *λογος* theology to demonstrate the manifest errors of Gnosticism and other putative heresies. Furthermore, Hippolytus exposes the problematic nature of Docetism while simultaneously affirming the authentic humanity of the *λογος* enfleshed. The Docetae, he avers, perpetuate both error and heresy when they teach the virtual humanity of Jesus Christ.¹²⁷ Hippolytus argues that humans actually saw the Christ of history (the *λογος* become flesh). They touched, felt and heard the man that God made lower than the angels.¹²⁸ Understandably, Hippolytus is determined to uphold this basic tenet of orthodox Christianity. But the full expression of the anti-Gnostic theologian's *λογος* theory is ultimately actualized in Tertullian's treatises. We now turn our attention to this heresiologist.

2. Tertullian

Since we will evaluate Tertullian's exegesis of Ps 8:5 below and discuss his anti-Gnostic activities in the same section, we will only briefly summarize his avid opposition to Gnosticism highlighted in *Adversus Valentianos* (*Against the Valentinians*).

Tertullian portrays the Valentinian Gnostics as distorters of truth and mythmakers. They officiously guard their doctrine, he maintains, in order to betray their own objective guilt before God and men.¹²⁹ In the manner of the Eleusinian mysteries, the Valentinians make silence, secrecy and esotericism, cardinal virtues.

¹²⁶ *Contra Noet* 15.6.

¹²⁷ *Refutatio* 8:1-4.

¹²⁸ The apostle John affirms the genuine humanity of Christ. He testifies in the opening passage of his First Epistle (RSV): "We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life."

¹²⁹ *Adv Val* 1.

Tertullian thus writes that the Valentinian Gnostics are intractable elitists who preserve their sacred mysteries at all costs:

If you intimate to them that you understand their opinions, they insist on knowing nothing themselves. If you come to a close engagement with them they destroy your own fond hope of a victory over them by a self-immolation. Not even to their own disciples do they commit a secret before they have made sure of them. They have the knack of persuading men before instructing them; although truth persuades by teaching, but does not teach by first persuading.¹³⁰

Nonetheless, one of the most objectionable aspects of Valentinian philosophy is the Christological Docetism it espouses. The Gnostics teach that Christ was not fully human: he only appeared to be a man so that other men might see and touch him and witness his seeming death. Ergo, Tertullian's aversion to Valentinianism probably explains his dislike of Angelomorphic Christology.¹³¹ Even so, as we have contended throughout this study, there are Angelomorphic elements contained in his writings. Having provided a historical context for Tertullian's Christology and his exegesis of Ps 8:5, we will now examine how the pre-Nicenes interpret this key passage in order to illuminate Tertullian's exegesis of the eighth psalm in *Adversus Praxean*. First, we will introduce the problemata associated with interpreting this verse. Subsequent to a look at the common problematic aspects related to this passage, we will review the pre-Nicene exegesis of Ps 8:5.

D. Problemata Associated with Psalm 8:5

One scriptural text that plays a significant role in Tertullian's delineation of the preexistent and incarnate Son of God is Ps 8:5. We encounter this verse in *Adversus Praxean* 9 when Tertullian writes, "he was made a little less on this side of the

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ See Talbert, "Redeemer" 434; P. Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 101.

angels.”¹³² There are many other occurrences of the passage in Tertullian’s literary corpus that we will review in this chapter. There are also certain difficulties associated with the text, however. Those interpretational difficulties need not detain us for long. For while Ps 8:5 is somewhat obscure and has occasioned no little controversy among OT scholars, its meaning is transparent enough in Tertullian’s treatises.¹³³ Nevertheless, certain preliminary matters need to be treated at this point of the investigation.

One method that this study will utilize to support the contentions put forth herein is appealing to the ante-Nicene exegesis of the eighth psalm. We have looked up, read and reflected on every early church usage (before 325 CE) of Ps 8:5 listed in *Biblia Patristica* and considered each patristic interpretation of the text. There seems to be an interesting phenomenon in writers such as Tatian and Clement of Alexandria. Neither theologian believes that Christ is the referential subject of the psalmist’s song of praise to God. Tertullian, however, consistently applies Ps 8:5 to Christ, but he refers it to him in three different ways. We will deal with these instances below as we analyze the pre-Nicene exegesis of Ps 8:5.

1. Tatian

Tatian (120-173 CE)¹³⁴ exegetes Ps 8:5 in his hortatory treatise addressed to the Greeks thus¹³⁵:

¹³² Vg (Ps 8:6) reads: *Minuisti eum paulo minus ab angelis, gloria et honore coronasti eum*. The writer of Hebrews, evidently quoting from the LXX, renders the psalm thus: “τον δε βραχου τι παρ’ αγγελους ηλαττωμενον.

¹³³ P. Craigie contends that the translation “God” for the Hebrew *elohim* in Ps 8:5 “is almost certainly correct” and probably alludes to the image of God in humankind, see *Psalms* 1-50, WBC (Waco: Word, 1983), 108. However, it is important to note that the LXX, the Syriac OT, the Vg and the Targumim all understand *elohim* in Ps 8:5 to mean “angels” (Ibid). The early church fathers also prefer the formula “angels” over against the translation “God” for Ps 8:5.

¹³⁴ Tatian was born in Assyria and became a student of Justin. The *Oratio* is his best and most useful work, according to Eusebius, according to *Oratio ad Graecos and Fragments*, trans. Molly Whittaker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), x. He converted to Christianity by carefully perusing the “barbaric writings” (i.e. the Scriptures) of Judaism and Christianity. See *Oratio* 30. Later, he supposedly became

“Of their own free will they [the demons] have handed down the laws of death to men, but after their loss of immortality men have overcome death by death in faith, and through repentance they have been given a calling, according to the saying: ‘since they were made for a little while lower than the angels’. It is possible for everyone defeated to win another time, if he rejects the constitution making for death; what this is can easily be seen by those who wish for immortality.”¹³⁶

The rhetorical Assyrian explains that the angels who ceased glorifying God and subsequently became agents of the Devil possess free will. Nevertheless, these unholy spirits have utilized their God-given freedom to hand down morbidity-inducing statutes that severely enslave or restrict humankind. Although humanity has lost the divine gift of immortality, however, Tatian does not believe that humans are hopelessly condemned to lives of progressive mortification. The apologist declares that men “have overcome death by death in faith” even though they have been “made for a little while lower than the angels.” To whom is Tatian applying Ps 8:5? How did God temporarily make men lower than the angels are?

Tatian believes that man forfeited the potential for deathlessness in the Edenic Fall. But Tatian also thinks that humans can regain “ultimate immortality” through the salvific activity of the Logos.¹³⁷ Hence, he rejects the inherent immortality of the soul doctrine espoused by Greek philosophers such as Plato and Socrates. Moreover, the Stoic doctrine of immortality does not seem to fare any better in Tatian’s address to

an ascetic heretic. We cannot conclusively substantiate the heretical nature of Tatian’s teachings (Little, *Apologists*, 179-180). Whittaker also thinks that it is hard to determine Tatian’s orthodoxy or heretical status on the basis of the *Oratio* alone (*Oratio*, xvi). Tatian, while emphasizing γνῶσις, does not mention intermediary agents (aeons) who are part of some divine πληρωμα nor does he juxtapose the Most High (*altissimus*) with a mere demiurgical creator, see *ibid.*, xvii. Tatian also received trained as a rhetor like Tertullian. He eventually settled in Rome.

¹³⁵ *Oratio* 15.4-10.

¹³⁶ οἱ δὲ ἄνθρωποι μετὰ τὴν τῆς ἀθανασίας ἀποβολὴν θανάτῳ τῷ διὰ πίστεως τὸν θάνατον νενικηκασιν καὶ διὰ μετανοίας κλησὶς αὐτοῖς δεδωρηταὶ κατὰ τὸν εἰπόντα λόγον ἐπειδὴ βραχὺ τι παρ’ ἀγγέλους ἠλαττώθησαν δυνατὸν δὲ παντὶ τῷ νενικημένῳ πάλιν νικᾶν τοῦ θανάτου τὴν συστάσιν παραιτούμενον τὶς δὲ ἐστὶν αὕτη εὐσυνόπτου ἐστὶ τοῖς βουλομένοις ἀνθρώποις τὸ ἀθάνατον.

¹³⁷ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Shape of Death: Life, Death, and Immortality in the Early Fathers* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 18.

the Greeks. There is no such thing as cyclic time, according to the apologetic Assyrian. Greek thinkers are therefore in error. Life, for Tatian, ultimately forms an “arc” of existence.¹³⁸

The arc (a geometrical metaphor invoked by Pelikan) represents the boundaries and limits of human existence.¹³⁹ A finite existent does not possess a rational or immortal soul, contra the Stoics, but differs from the beasts in that he or she is made in God’s image:

Man is not, as the croakers teach, a rational being capable of intelligence and understanding (for according to them even the irrational creatures will be proved capable of intelligence and understanding), but man alone is “the image and the likeness of God.” I mean by man not one who behaves like the animals, but one who has advanced far beyond his humanity towards God himself.¹⁴⁰

Tatian does not link the image of God with the immortal or rational soul.¹⁴¹ One evidences the image of God in humans when a particular finite existent advances: “far beyond his humanity toward God himself.” Immortality is consequently worthless if one lives an immortal life separated from God. Humans overcome death by submitting to death in faith, that is, by offering themselves to God as martyrs.¹⁴² Most importantly, Christ submitted to a death in faith so that other men and women might be set free from enslavement to mortality. We can then see that Tatian applies Ps 8:5 to redeemed humans and does not interpret it as a reference to Christ. He is not alone in this regard.

2. Clement of Alexandria

Clement of Alexandria (d. 215) also believes that Ps 8:5 is a prophecy foretelling the pistic activity of learned or advanced Christians: the ones whom Clement labels “true

¹³⁸ Ibid., 19.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁴⁰ *Oratio* 15.10-16.

¹⁴¹ J. Pelikan, *The Shape of Death*, 22.

Gnostics." He declares:

And what, I ask, is it in which man differs from beasts, and the angels of God, on the other hand, are wiser than he? "Thou madest him a little lower than the angels." For some do not interpret this Scripture of the Lord, although He also bore flesh, but of the perfect man and the gnostic, inferior in comparison with the angels in time, and by reason of the vesture [of the body]. I call then wisdom nothing but science, since life differs not from life.¹⁴³

Clement suggests that humankind is set apart from the beasts and angels in that God elevated humanity above the animals when He created man and woman but made them "lower than the angels." Clement's application is more precise, however. In particular, he reports that certain unidentified Christians of his time do not apply Ps 8:5 to the Messiah, although they believe that he became flesh and resided with humans for a time. Instead, they propose that "this Scripture" refers to "the perfect man and the Gnostic." The Gnostic Christian, Clement explains, is inferior (lower) than the angels are vis-à-vis "[the] angels in time, and by reason of the vesture [of the body]." Hence, Clement appears to say that some of his Christian contemporaries thought that although believers are lower than the angels now, they will not be inferior to the angels when they divest themselves of the imperfect body that poignantly weighs them down in this age. Clement's further comments in this section of his work *Stromata* bear out this understanding of the Clementine text:

Accordingly it is said, "God talked with Moses as a friend with a friend." That, then, which is true being clear to God, forthwith generates truth. And the gnostic loves the truth. "Go," it is said, "to the ant, thou sluggard, and be the disciple of the bee;" thus speaks Solomon. For if there is one function belonging to the peculiar nature of each creature, alike of the ox, and horse, and dog, what shall we say is the peculiar function of man? He is like, it appears to me, the Centaur, a Thessalian figment, compounded of a rational and irrational part, of soul and body. Well, the body tills the ground, and hastes to it; but the soul is raised to God: trained in the true philosophy, it speeds to

¹⁴² Ibid., 27

¹⁴³ *Stromata* 4.8.7

its kindred above, turning away from the lusts of the body, and besides these, from toil and fear, although we have shown that patience and fear belong to the good man.¹⁴⁴

True to his neoPlatonic orientation, Clement conceives the true Gnostic in dualistic terms. The alethic Gnostic is a compound of rationality and irrationality, of soul and body, of spirit and flesh. The body is inferior to the soul. It is a requisite temporal medium permitting Christians to exist in the here-and-now. Nonetheless, the temporal corpus hurries to the ground, eventually returning to the dust. Nevertheless, Clement argues that God raises the soul trained in “true philosophy.” The soul of the authentic Gnostic consequently hastens to its eternal and actual home, finally free from worldly lust, toil and fear. The advanced believer, in imitation of God (as Clement and the pre-Nicenes envisage Him), accordingly masters the divine quality of *απαθεια*. The *avant-garde* Christian is only lower than the angels are while he or she subsists in the flesh. However, God eventually crowns the advanced believer with eternal honor and glory, exalting such Gnostics above the angels.

E. Tertullian’s Exegetical Approach to Psalm 8:5

Tertullian may have been familiar with how Clement of Alexandria and Tatian exegeted Ps 8:5. He certainly knew that not all believers interpreted the text as a prophecy regarding the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, Tertullian consistently applies the biblical passage messianically, in three diverse ways. We will now examine Tertullian’s construals of Ps 8:5 in order to set the stage for how he uses the text in *Adversus Praxean*.

First, one finds that Tertullian associates the saying in Ps 8:5 concerning the minoration of the Son with the preexistent intermediate agent through whom the Father produced the cosmos. He writes:

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*

“For we claim also that Christ has always acted in God the Father’s name, has himself ever since the beginning associated with, and conversed with, patriarchs and prophets. He is the Son of the Creator, his Word whom by bringing him forth from himself he caused to be his Son. From then onwards he put him in authority over his whole design and purpose, reducing him a little below the angels, as it is written in David. By this reduction he was brought by the Father to these <acts and experiences> which you disapprove of as human: for he was learning even from the beginning, by so early assuming manhood, to be that which he was going to be at the end.”¹⁴⁵

Tertullian, reminiscent of Lactantius, believes that Christ¹⁴⁶ has functioned as the Father’s representative (*in dei patris nomine*) since the beginning of God’s creation.¹⁴⁷

As the expressed Logos (λογος προφορικός) begotten before and for the purpose of creation, the preincarnate being who became flesh in the first century of our common era discoursed with the ancient Hebrew “patriarchs and prophets” and in this capacity fulfilled His exalted role as *Sermo* or *Ratio dei*. Tertullian repeats a familiar theme in a passage culled from his treatise against Marcion. He reiterates the fact that God caused His own Word “to be his Son.” There was consequently a time when God did not have a Son as such (*Adv Herm* 3.18).

Before his temporal generation, the Son was the Wisdom, Word and *Ratio Dei*. That is, He was probably an impersonal divine attribute or at least, not fully personal with regard to his being. Subsequent to the “complete nativity of Discourse” (*nativitas perfecta sermonis*),¹⁴⁸ however, God placed the entity that became the Son

¹⁴⁵ *Adv Marc* 2.27. *Nam et profiteamur Christum semper egisse in dei patris nomine, ipsum ab initio conversatum, ipsum congressum cum patriarchis et prophetis, filium creatoris, sermonem eius, quem ex semetipso proferendo filium fecit, et exinde omni dispositioni suae voluntatique praefecti, diminuens illum modico citra angelos, sicut apud David scriptum est; qua diminutione in haec quoque dispositus est a patre quae ut humana reprehenditis, ediscens iam inde a primordio, iam inde hominem <indutus, id esse> quod erat futurus in fine.*

¹⁴⁶ Tertullian believes that the title Christ is a name given to the Son during God’s reconciliatory dispensation or economy: “The name of Christ, however, does not arise from nature, but from dispensation; and so becomes the proper name of Him to whom it accrues in consequence of the dispensation” (*Adv Marc* 3.15).

¹⁴⁷ See *Institutes* 4.14. Origen also calls the preexistent Christ God’s “minister” in the preface of *De Prin.*

¹⁴⁸ *Adv Prax* 7.3.

“in authority over his whole design and purpose” (*exinde omni dispositioni suae voluntatique praecepit*). The Father appointed Him as the protological mediator of creation. Nonetheless, by coming forth as the Son of God, the $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ became lower than angels are so that he might both govern creation and appear to the patriarchs and prophets in order to provide a foregleam of the enfleshment that would function as the divine basis for reconciling humankind to God. This minoration of the Son, his becoming lower than the angels as the preexistent Son *qua* Son, further made it possible for him to learn through intercourse with men, how to be a man.

1. Tertullian's Exegesis of Psalm 8:5 and the Angelophanic Son

Tertullian not only assigns Ps 8:5 to the pre-existent Son of God; he further applies this verse to the angelophanic Son. Specifically, Tertullian believes that another way in which the Son became lower than the angels was by entering into discourse with men via visions, dreams, and other forms of divine manifestation. Tertullian explains this form of filial minoration in *Adv Prax* 16. We will offer an extended analysis of this *caput* in the study's final chapter. For now, we note that Tertullian identifies the one who talked to Adam, the patriarchs and prophets with the Son as he appears in various divine media. By appearing as an angel to the patriarchs and prophets, Christ was made lower than the angels.

2. Tertullian's Exegesis of Psalm 8:5 in Relation to the Incarnate Son

Tertullian's third application of Ps 8:5 pertains to the incarnate Son of God. In fact, he predominantly refers the passage to the enfleshed Logos, who for a time became lower than the angels. We will now consider how Tertullian utilizes this passage when discussing the incarnate Christ.

We have already observed that Tertullian concedes the Son is an angel "by a term of office" and not per nature as are the angels Michael and Gabriel (*dictus est quidem magni consilii angelus, id est nuntius, officii non naturae vocabulo*). He is an angel in that "he was to announce to the world the Father's great project, that [plan] concerned with the restitution of man" (*magnum enim cogitatem patris, super hominis scilicet restitutionem, adnuntiaturus saeculo erat*).¹⁴⁹ Conversely, Tertullian reasons that the Son must not ontologically be reckoned with the angels simply because he functions as an angel in God's economy (*dispositio*). Nevertheless, he employs the designation *angelus* vis-à-vis the Son to refute the doctrine of Ebion: It is at this point

that he again invokes Ps 8:5, applying it to the human Son of God:

So I shall find it easier to say, if I have to, that the son himself was the angel (that is, the messenger) of the Father, than that there was an angel in the Son. But seeing that the Son himself is the subject of the pronouncement, Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, how shall he be thought to have clothed himself with an angel when he is made lower than the angels by being made man (as being flesh and soul) and the Son of Man? For as the Spirit of God, and the Power of the Most High, he cannot be held to be lower than the angels, seeing he is God, and the Son of God. So then, even as he is made less than the angels while clothed with manhood, even so he is not less if clothed with an angel.¹⁵⁰

The Ebionites contend that an angel took the place of Christ's human soul when He became flesh. To combat this concept, Tertullian maintains that "as Spirit of God, and the Power of the Most High," Christ is not lower than the angels are.¹⁵¹ This perplexing statement implies that Tertullian, at this stage in his career and even possibly later, adhered to a form of binitarianism and was not a Trinitarian as such. Indeed, we agree that as Spirit and Power of God, the person who became the Son was not initially lower than the angels are. But Tertullian's statement becomes even more perplexing when we detect him paralleling Spirit of God and Power of the Most High with God and Son of God.¹⁵²

Tertullian is evidently less than precise here since he elsewhere makes marked distinctions between the Son *qua* Son and the λογος as God's *Ratio*. Furthermore, he explicitly declares that the Son as such has been lower than the angels ever since He

¹⁴⁹ *De Carne* 14.17.

¹⁵⁰ *De Carne* 14.17-32. *magnum enim cogitatem patris, super hominis scilicet restitutionem, admuntiaturus saeculo erat. Non ideo tamen sic angelus intellegendus ut aliqui Gabriel aut Michael. Nam et filius a domino vineae mittitur ad vinitores, sicut et fumuli, de fructibus petitur: sed non propterea unus ex famulis deputabitur filius quia famulorum successit officio. facilius ergo dicam, si forte, ipsum filium angelum (id est nuntium) patris, quam angelum in filio. sed cum de [filio] ipso sit pronuntiatum, Minuisti eum modicum quid citra angelos deminutus dum homo fit, qua caro et anima, et filius hominis? Qua autem spiritus dei et virtus altissimi non potest infra angelos haberi, deus scilicet et dei filius. Quanto ergo, dum hominem gestat, minor angelis factus est, tanto non, dum angelum gestat.*

¹⁵¹ *De Carne* 14.29-30

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

became God's filial consort. Hence, he can hardly mean here that the Son of God in His capacity as Son is not inferior to the angels. The passage in *De Carne* 14 evidently focuses on His incarnate state. Other treatises written by Tertullian seem to support this suggestion.

Finally, Tertullian also cites Ps 8:5 when attempting to refute the Valentinians and Jews. The next quotation illustrates how he utilizes this Biblical passage apologetically:

They find it written, Thou hast made him a little less than the angels, yet they deny the inferior substance of Christ, though he declares himself not even a man but a worm, though he had no form nor comeliness, but his aspect was ignoble, worn out more than all men, and he was a man under chastisement, and knowing how to bear weaknesses. They acknowledge a man, mingled with God, yet deny the manhood: they believe he died, yet that which died they claim was born of incorruption—as though corruption were anything else but death . . . Have patience. Christ has not yet put down all his enemies, so as to triumph over his enemies, with his friends to share his victory.¹⁵³

In total contradistinction to the Valentinians, Tertullian affirms the humanity of Jesus Christ, what he describes as the Lord's "inferior substance" (*inferiorem substantiam*). The Psalms proclaim that the Messiah was not even a man but a worm. He was made lower than the angels for a time that God might subsequently crown him with glory and honor. The fact that the Psalmist indicates the Christ would be lower than the angels serves as evidence of His genuine manhood and provides a rejoinder to the Docetists.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 15.29-38. *Legunt denique, Minorasti eum modico citra angelos, et negant inferiorem substantiam Christi nec hominem se sed verum pronuntiantis, qui nec formam habuit nec speciem, sed forma eius ignobilis, defecta citra omnes homines, homo in plaga et sciens ferre imbecillitatem. Agnoscunt hominem deo mixtum, et negant hominem: mortuum credunt, et quod est mortuum ex incorruptela natum esse contendunt, quasi corruptela aliud sit a morte. 'Sed et nostra caro statim resurgere debebat.' Expecta: nondum inimicos suos Christus oppressit, ut cum amicis de inimicis triumphet.*

In conclusion, this analysis of the pre-Nicene exegesis of Ps 8:5 demonstrates that while not all Christians thought the passage referred to the descent (καταβασις) of the Messiah, Tertullian consistently employed the text to refute what he considered unorthodox Christological formulations. He further invoked the verse to establish the true humanity of Jesus Christ. Additionally, Tertullian spoke of the Son becoming lower than the angels are when He as the *malak YHWH* appeared to the ancient Hebrew patriarchs and prophets such as Abraham and Jacob. Most important for our purposes, however, Tertullian shows that he believes the preincarnate Son was made lower than the angels by virtue of His becoming Son when God uttered, *fiat lux* (*Adv Marc 2:27*). We will return to this point in chapter 5 of this study.

Excursus: Ebionites

Ebion (ca. 175 CE) allegedly believed that Jesus was an ordinary man (*nudum hominem*) born in King David's family line. According to this distinctive form of Jewish Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of David. He was not, however, "the Son of God" (*et tantum ex semine David, id est non et dei filium*).¹⁵⁴ The Ebionites were adoptionists, affirming neither the preexistence nor the Virgin birth of the Son.¹⁵⁵ Jesus was simply a "normal human" (ψιλὸς ἀνθρώπος) whose generation was unnatural or unspectacular: He was a creature exalted by God when a heavenly angelic being united with Him at his baptism.¹⁵⁶ His righteousness is what set him apart from other humans as well as his God-given vocation.¹⁵⁷

On the other hand, at least one form of Ebionitism taught that Christ is more exalted than the Old Testament prophets, because an angel speaks through Him.

¹⁵⁴ *De Carne* 14.32-33.

¹⁵⁵ B. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption*, 51; P. Carvell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 102.

¹⁵⁶ A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 92.

¹⁵⁷ B. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, 51. For information on the *Epistula Apostolorum* (a second century CE document possibly of Egyptian provenance) which "envisages Christ appearing as

Nevertheless, Tertullian offers the following retort to this type of adoptionist Christology: “For he was himself the Lord, declaring openly and on his own authority, But I say unto you” (*ipse enim erat dominus, coram et ex sua auctoritate pronuntians, Ego autem dico vobis*).¹⁵⁸ There was no need for Christ to speak through an angel. He is God’s messenger (*angelus*) sent to effect reconciliation between God and humankind and can therefore speak based on His own authority. There is also a sense, Tertullian writes, in which the Son is God. Whether Tertullian believes Christ is fully God remains to be seen.

In any case, the Ebionites received their designation from those who opposed the Jewish movement. The appellation given to the group may denote “those who are poor,” although we cannot be indubitably certain of the etymology behind the descriptive title.¹⁵⁹ These Jewish Christians, however, were not monolithic but heterogeneous in nature.¹⁶⁰ Tertullian countered their Christological claims by appealing to Ps 8:5.

Gabriel,” see P. Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 103.

¹⁵⁸ *De Carne* 14.38-39.

¹⁵⁹ Grillmeier lists four reasons for certain Jewish-Christian adoptionists being called Ebionites. He attributes it to their purportedly scant intelligence, to the destitute state of the law they followed, their poor opinions of Christ, and their poor comprehension, hope and works (*Christ in the Christian Tradition*, 90). But even Grillmeier recognizes that the opponents’ claim concerning the Ebionite Christology of Christ *qua* ψιλός ανθρωπος (“a mere man”) is mistaken since the Ebionite doctrine of Christ had a transcendent dimension to it (ibid., 91). Daniélou writes that the Ebionite tag did not derive from the man named Ebion (contra Epiphanius) but actually originated from the Hebrew word *ebyon* meaning “poor” (ibid., 55-56). Both Irenaeus (*Adv Haer* 1.26.2) and Origen (*Contra Celsum* 2.1) also mention this so-called heretical group.

¹⁶⁰ B. Ehrman thus disputes Daniélou’s account since the latter depicts the Ebionites as a clearly demarcated movement in Primitive Christianity, see *The Orthodox Corruption*, 56.

Chapter 3

Formal Introduction to *Adversus Praxean*

The identity of the purported heretic, Praxeas, has often proved to be elusive for historians of Christian dogma. Exactly who was the religious figure that managed to provoke Tertullian's ire? What did he teach? Why did the Latin writer from Carthage fervently oppose Praxeas' particular form of Christian teaching (*διδασχῆ*)? We will now address these three questions while formally examining *capita* 1 and 2 of *Adversus Praxean*.

A. The Identity of Praxeas

The only ancient heresiologists to mention Praxeas are pseudo-Tertullian,¹⁶¹ Augustine and Gennadius.¹⁶² Some scholars consequently think that Tertullian invented the name *Praxeas* to protect the identity of bishop Zephyrinus (199-217) or his mysterious successor Callistus (217-22).¹⁶³ One problem with this identification, however, is that none of the extant data suggests that either cleric came from Asia, as Tertullian seems to say about his rival.¹⁶⁴ On the other hand, the fact that neither bishop hailed from Asia may not be an impediment to viewing one of these men as the real Praxeas since Tertullian does not actually state that his antagonist personally came from Asia. It was only Praxeas' unorthodox Christological doctrine that emanated from that place.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ *Adversus Omnes Haereses* 8.4 by Pseudo-Tertullian. *Sed post hos omnes etiam Praxeas quidam haeresim introduxit, quam Victorinus corroborare curavit. Hic deum patrem omnipotentem Iesum Christum esse dicit, hunc crucifixum passumque contendit et mortuum, praeterea se ipsum sibi sedere ad dexteram suam, cum prophana et sacrilega temeritate proponit.*

¹⁶² E. Evans, *Adversus Praxean*, 184.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁶⁴ *Adv Prax* 1.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.21-22. *Nam iste primus ex Asia hoc genus perversitatis intulit Romam.* Daniélou thinks that the type of Monarchianism espoused by Tertullian's antagonist, Praxeas, evidently originated in "Judaean-Christian circles" moving about in the proximity of Asia Minor (*Latin Christianity*, 157).

While the exact referential significance of Praxeas remains indeterminate,¹⁶⁶ we can contend with some degree of certainty that Praxeas apparently taught that the Father and Son are hypostatically identical (*duos unum volunt esse, ut idem pater et filius habeatur*).¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, Praxeas and his companions simultaneously propagated the notion that the Father co-suffered with the Son since the second Person of the Trinity (according to the Praxeas) was the man Jesus of Nazareth. Praxeas identified Christ (the divine in Jesus) with the Father.¹⁶⁸ In other words, the mysterious antagonist of Tertullian taught a form of Modalistic Monarchianism: the belief that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are self-identical divine modes of being.¹⁶⁹ Does the historical record indicate that Zephyrinus was a modalist, however?

Frend cites Hippolytus who describes Zephyrinus as “an uneducated simpleton.”¹⁷⁰ The “unsophisticated” bishop supposedly believed that God and Jesus Christ constitute an undifferentiated metaphysical unity. Although he did not think that God is able to suffer and die, Zephyrinus nonetheless had difficulty distinguishing the *tres personae* of the Trinity. Frend considers the works of Hippolytus and Pseudo-Tertullian independent testimony supporting the notion that bishop Victor, Zephyrinus or maybe even Callistus inclined toward the theological views of Praxeas. Moreover, he reports that Modalism remained “deeply ingrained” in Roman Trinitarian thought well after the time of Tertullian.¹⁷¹ It was most certainly the belief of the *simplices*, who constituted the majority of believers in Rome. Nevertheless, having made such

¹⁶⁶ Barnes recounts that though one can find a number of coincidences between Callistus' theology and personality and Tertullian's Praxeas, when it comes to the exact identity of Tertullian's adversary, “Certainty is unattainable” (*Tertullian*, 279). Barnes thinks that the moniker “Praxeas” looks like a Greek *nom de plume* meaning “busybody.”

¹⁶⁷ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, 121.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.* Additionally, see *Adv Prax* 21.

¹⁶⁹ The first writer to state this belief in formal terms was Noetus of Smyrna (J. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, 120).

¹⁷⁰ W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 344.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* Frend's independent testimony consist of Pseudo-Tertullian 8.4 and Hippolytus' polemical

observations, we must admit that the identity of Praxeas remains unknown. It is now time to examine why Praxean theology provoked Tertullian's indignation. We will cover this issue in the next section.

B. Tertullian's Opposition to Praxean Christology

Tertullian essentially portrays Praxeas as an unwitting pawn of the Devil: a demon-inspired instrument who manifestly (albeit unknowingly) opposes Christian truth in a variety of ways (*varie diabolus aemulatus est veritatem*).¹⁷² One method that the Devil employs to oppose Christianity, writes Tertullian, is the *modus operandi* of pretending to defend Christian verity (*Varie diabolus aemulatus est veritatem. adfectavit illam aliquando defendendo concutere*) in order that he might subvert it.¹⁷³ The chief adversary of God (*ha Satan*) occasionally plays the part of a genuine theistic apologist. He then concomitantly obfuscates passages in sacred Scripture, especially those Biblical verses, which specifically delineate the divine intentional unity¹⁷⁴ that obtains between the Father and the Son. Conversely, Tertullian formulates the divine unity in terms of intentionality and functionality: "By means of the works [performed by the Son], then, the Father will be in the Son and the Son in the Father, and thus by means of the works we understand that the Father and the Son are one" (*Adv Prax* 22.26-8). Utterly disregarding the intentional unity of the Father and the Son, Satan attempts to overthrow God's truth by utilizing unwitting pawns in the vein of Praxeas to accomplish his ignoble ends. Hence, Tertullian is determined to expose the invidious

treatises.

¹⁷² *Adv Prax* 1.1

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Early church fathers such as Tertullian, Novatian and Hippolytus explain Jn 10:30 in terms of intentional or functional concord (i.e. unity as to purpose or intent): "We become one virtually, by our disposition towards singleness of mind. Well, in the same way the Son, sent and not recognized by those who are in the world, maintained that he is in the Father—virtually, as a disposition. For the Son is in the Father's 'single Mind,'" see *Contra Noet* 7.3. However, it must be admitted that Tertullian also affirms the "unity of substance" between the Father and Son (*Adv Prax* 25). What he means by this phrase, we will discuss below.

demonic machinations actualized in the person of the Adversary's human agent, Praxeas.

As we have hitherto observed, Tertullian informs his readers that Praxeas makes illegitimate appeals to the apostle John's Gospel account concerning the Father and Son's oneness so that he may establish his unique form of Modalistic Monarchianism (Jn 10:30). Praxeas evidently conscripts Jn 10:30, *inter alia*, to buttress the notion that Jesus is hypostatically identical to the Father and consequently the Omnipotent Father incarnate. Yet, the implications of this daring theologumenon are quite stark since Praxeas' teaching implies that the Father "himself came down into the virgin [Mary], himself was born of her, himself suffered, in short himself is Jesus Christ" (*ipsum dicit patrem descendisse in virginem, ipsum ex ea natum, ipsum passum, denique ipsum esse Iesum Christum*).¹⁷⁵

In contrast, Tertullian thinks this concept is both logically absurd and scripturally untenable. It also militates against the antiquitous "rule of faith" (*regula fidei*)¹⁷⁶ that the apostles handed down (*tradere*) to the congregation of God.¹⁷⁷ The majority of post-Nicenes concur with his theological assessment. These theologians later employed elements of Tertullian's pistic defense so that they might further develop orthodox Christology in the face of similar heresiarchal challenges.¹⁷⁸ But Tertullian's theological refutation (*refutatio*) against Praxeas has just begun. Maurice

¹⁷⁵ *Adv Prax* 1.7-8. Hippolytus (*Contra Noet* 3.2) relates that Theodotus the shoemaker (ΘΕΟΥΤΟΣ) "quite shamelessly" (ΑΝΑΙΣΧΥΝΤΟΣ) stated: "The Father himself is Christ; he is himself the Son; he himself was born, he himself suffered, he himself raised himself up" (ΑΥΤΟΣ ΕΣΤΙ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ὁ πατήρ αὐτός υἱός αὐτός ἐγεννήθη αὐτός ἐπαθεν αὐτός ἑαυτὸν ἠγειρεν).

¹⁷⁶ Appealing to the primary sources, Bray demonstrates that Tertullian uses the Latin *regula* to signify a summarization that Christ's followers can avail themselves of to understand and interpret Scripture (*Holiness and the Will of God*, 102-104).

¹⁷⁷ See Rebecca Lyman's compact but insightful comments on the role of tradition and traditions in Christianity in *Early Christian Traditions* (Cambridge: Cowley, 1999), 3-8.

¹⁷⁸ Pelikan develops this theme in *The Christian Tradition*, 1:172-277.

Wiles aptly sums up the powerful effect that section (*caput*) one of *Adversus Praxean* commonly has on its readers when he writes: “The heart of his attack upon Praxeas is summed up in the jibe that his theology involved the blasphemous concept that the Father was crucified. This was the shaft that went home more surely than any other.”¹⁷⁹ Indeed the charge of Patripassianism is enough to render the heresy of Praxeas essentially inoperative. Nonetheless, Tertullian does not desist with the powerful imputation that Praxean Christology implies that finite mortals put the transcendent and unapproachable Father to death.¹⁸⁰ To the contrary, Tertullian continues to build his case against the one whom he believes is the Devil’s minion, in the following manner.

C. Tertullian’s Extended Case against Praxeas

Tertullian, still focusing on the tested wiles of the Devil as well as his propensity to subvert Christian truth by dissimulating a defense in its behalf, insists that if the Adversary really thinks the Father is also the Son, he possesses a faulty memory in light of the extant historical narratives of Jesus’ life. The two Synoptic Gospels of Matthew and Luke¹⁸¹ both record the Devil openly acknowledging the filial status of the Lord Jesus Christ¹⁸² during the time that he temporarily dwelled among humanity:

The serpent has forgotten himself: for when he tempted Jesus Christ after the baptism of John it was as Son of God that he attacked him, being assured that God has a Son at least from those very scriptures out

¹⁷⁹ Maurice Wiles, *The Making of Christian Doctrine: A Study in the Principles of Early Doctrinal Development* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 215.

¹⁸⁰ Bethune-Baker thinks Tertullian’s inference from the Praxean self-identical divine modes of Being is “unfair” and he points out that the so-called Patripassians themselves manifestly did not accept Tertullian’s inference, even if they did think Jesus Christ was identical with God (*Early History*, 103-104). There are, however, legitimate logical conundrums that attend Modalism. Bethune-Baker himself relates how difficult it is to account for the Modalistic thesis that says the Son’s suffers, although God is impassible.

¹⁸¹ Mt 4 and Lk 4.

¹⁸² Matthew’s Synoptic account (4:5-6), according to the Vg reads: *Tunc assumit eum Diabolus in sanctam civitatem et statuit eum supra pinnaculum templi et dicit ei: ‘Si Filius Dei es, mitte te deorsum. Scriptum est enim: Angelis suis mandabit de te, et in manibus tollent te, ne forte offendas ad lapidem pedem tuum.’* ”

of which he was then constructing the temptation.¹⁸³

Tertullian then quotes Ps 91:11-12, the verse that the Devil utilized when attempting to deceive Jesus of Nazareth. The apologist consequently reasons that the Devil either misspoke when he called Jesus God's Son or the Synoptic Gospels that Matthew and Luke wrote are guilty of unfairly vilifying the Devil—a thought that Tertullian is utterly unwilling to countenance for one moment. Not surprisingly, the apologist retorts by accusing both the Devil and Praxeas of inalethicity. Moreover, he resolutely contends that both deceptive entities are exceedingly culpable since the Devil has inspired Praxeas to simultaneously: “drive out prophecy and crucify the Father (*ita duo negotia diaboli Praxeas Romae procuravit, prophetiam expulit et haeresim intulit, paraclerum fugavit et patrem crucifixit*).¹⁸⁴ Therefore, while *Adversus Praxean* seems primarily concerned with the Praxean teaching of Patripassianism (the doctrine that the God the Father became his own Son and subsequently suffered and died at Calvary in the first century of our common era), we need to say a brief word here about the purported heresiarch's efforts to expel prophecy from Rome.

It may be significant that Tertullian mentions the expulsion of prophecy before the crucifixion of the Father. He relates that Praxcas “drove out prophecy” in that he “put to flight the Paraclete” (*prophetiam expulit et haeresim intulit, paraclerum fugavit*).¹⁸⁵ In what sense did he drive out prophecy and chase away the Paraclete? We will discuss this matter in the following paragraphs.

¹⁸³ *Adv Prax* 1.9-11. *Excidit sibi coluber, quia Iesum Christum post baptismum Ioannis temptans ut filium dei adgressus est, certus filium deum habere vel ex ipsis scripturis de quibus tunc temptationem struebat.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.31-33.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

D. The Praxeian Attempt to Expel Prophecy from Rome

Earlier in the *Adv Prax* 1, Tertullian relates that the bishop of Rome was on the verge of acknowledging the charismatic prophecies that Montanus (fl. 170 CE), Prisca and Maximilla articulated until Praxeas promulgated fictitious reports concerning the Montanist spokespersons and their respective churches.¹⁸⁶ Montanus¹⁸⁷ appears to have believed that the Johannine promises concerning the Paraclete sent from the Father through the Son were uniquely fulfilled in him (Jn 14:16; 15:26; 16:7-13). But he did not think that he himself was hypostatically or ontologically identical with the divine Paraclete.¹⁸⁸ All the same, Montanus was eschatologically oriented, being purportedly “gifted with visions and special revelations” that influenced his doctrine of the last things.¹⁸⁹ Tertullian testifies to the charismatic nature of the Cataphrygians, as opponents also called the Montanists, writing:

¹⁸⁶ Felicity and Perpetua were no doubt Montanists. See E. Evans, *Adversus Praxeian*, 188. The Roman church has never discredited these matyrs. In this connection, Barnes also observes that Montanus embarked upon his prophetic career in 170 CE. Subsequent to this period, the New Prophecy spread rapidly and almost gained favorable recognition from the church. Barnes concludes: “There is no reason entirely to disbelieve the explicit statement of Tertullian that the bishop of Rome recognized the prophecies of Montanus, Prisca and Maximilla as genuine utterances of the Holy Spirit, and was on the point of communicating his acceptance to the churches of Asia and Phrygia,” see *Tertullian*, 82. Barnes additionally confirms that the reports purportedly propagated by Praxeas concerning the Montanists were indeed fictitious. Nevertheless, the New Prophecy actually remained “acceptable” even after the year 203 CE. Yet, evidently because of the Roman bishop’s disapprobation toward Montanism, believers in in Carthage began to defect from the ecstatic movement (*Tertullian*, 83).

¹⁸⁷ Olson reports that Montanus was a “pagan priest” in Asia Minor (Phrygia) before he became a Christian in the middle part of the second-century. See *Story of Christian Theology*, 31. Montanus’ turning point vis-à-vis his relationship with the church seems to have been his insistence that the bishops do not have divinely ordained “special authority,” see *ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Pelikan thinks that the concept of the Johannine Paraclete actually played an insignificant part in early Montanism. He also notes that Montanus did not believe that he was the Paraclete per se, but that God’s ΠΑΡΑΚΛΗΤΟΣ worked through him in the sense that it divinely influenced Montanus. Pelikan’s position is clearly contra Epiphanius’ as stated in *Panarion* 48.11. Lastly, it is difficult to determine when Tertullian uses the word Paraclete to denote Montanus and when he is using it to refer to the Holy Spirit, see Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 1:102-104. Cf. Eusebius’ H.E. 5.16.17.

Tabbernee relates, however, that the term Paraclete used with reference to the Holy Spirit, was not exclusively confined to the Montanists. An inscription that is supposed to be Montanist in nature which employs the term Paraclete may well be Donatist in origin according to *Montanist Inscriptions*, 543-544. For more evidence suggesting Montanus did not think he was a human manifestation of the Paraclete. see *ibid.*, 32-33. Cf. Aune, *Prophecy*, 314-315.

¹⁸⁹ Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 1:102-104.

Likewise the holy prophetess Prisca preaches that the holy minister should know how to administer purity of life. "For purification produces harmony," she says, "and they see visions, and when they turn their faces downward they also hear salutary voices, as clear as they are secret."¹⁹⁰

The divine spirit manifested in visions, oracles and Scripture ostensibly inspired the Montanists to believe that the New Jerusalem foretold in John's Apocalypse would descend from heaven to Pepuza during their very time period: "In view of this, Christians should dissolve the bonds of wedlock, fast strictly and assemble in Pepuza to await the descent of the New Jerusalem."¹⁹¹ The Montanists were also ecstatic, hearing "salutary voices" (*etiam voces audiunt salutatares*) esoteric in nature but clear in tone. In view of the group's stress on holiness and divine inspiration then, we are justified in asking what Praxean accusations irreparably tarnished the eschatological movement's image in the eyes of Rome's bishop?

As indicated above, the most intimate disciples of Montanus were women, and these feminine adherents filled prominent prophetic roles in the Montanist camp.¹⁹² Montanus' willingness to use females in his group, however, undoubtedly contributed to rumors that suggested the prominent leader broke up marriages and wrongly appointed women to ecclesiastical offices.¹⁹³ Enemies further accused Montanus of "handling large sums of money" and paying his fellow charismatics hefty stipends.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ *De exhortatione* 10.5. Cited in Heine, *Montanist Oracles*, 4-5.

Item per sanctam prophetidem Priscam ita evangelizatur, quod sanctus minister sanctimoniam noverit ministrare. Purificantia enim concordat, ait, et visiones vident, et ponentes faciem deorsum etiam voces audiunt salutares, tam manifestas quam et occultas.

¹⁹¹ Reinhold Seeberg, *Textbook of the History of Doctrines*, trans. Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1966), 105; Aune, *Prophecy*, 313. Pepuza, a town located in Phrygia, was the place where Montanus and the two principal female spokespersons of the New Prophecy constructed their "commune." See Olson, *Story of Theology*, 31. Therefore, it was only fitting that the New Jerusalem would descend there.

¹⁹² E. Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels*, 60. Tertullian also provides evidence of Montanus' willingness to use women in *De Anima* 9. There, he speaks about the charismatic experiences of one female Cataphrygian.

¹⁹³ H. Brown reports that Montanus thought marriages should be dissolved and future marriages should be postponed since the end of the age was imminent. When the New Jerusalem did not descend as expected, Montanus and his disciples "broadened" the concept of the Last Day into "a concept of Last Days, during which Montanus called upon his followers to live a life of strict discipline and self-denial"

While certain accusations directed at the Montanists probably had merit, “Some of the orthodox smears on him are manifest inventions.”¹⁹⁵ Johnson concludes that the Montanists were likely genuine, holy, meek and self-restrained people that certain members of the orthodoxy simply misunderstood.¹⁹⁶ Such “manifest inventions,” however, appear to have been employed with some frequency against seeming heretical groups in the early church.¹⁹⁷ The Montanists belonged to a group of persons that moderns collectively classify as the Other,¹⁹⁸ a detail that Tertullian thoroughly outlines in the opening chapter of *Adversus Praxean*. The Praxean reports conveyed to the then ruling bishop of Rome were unmistakably scurrilous and completely lacking in alethic content. They too were “manifest inventions” designed to subject the Montanists to ill-treatment and marginalization, among other things.¹⁹⁹

The bishop of Rome, having heard such scandalous rumors about Montanus and the Cataphrygians, promptly recalled the pacific missives that he had earlier dispatched and immediately expressed his disapprobation of the “heretical” charismatic group. Consequently, harmful “false assertions” (*falsa de ipsis prophetis et ecclesiis eorum ad severando et praecessorum eius auctoritates defendendo coegit*)²⁰⁰ concerning the New Prophecy (*nova prophetia*) earned Praxeas merited condemnation from the person of Tertullian. Moreover, Tertullian argued that the

(Brown, *Heresies*, 67). Orthodoxy also had to adjust its eschatology in view of the seeming delay of the Messiah’s ΠΑΡΟΥΣΙΑ.

¹⁹⁴ Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity* (New York and London: Simon Schuster, 1976), 49.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁹⁷ For similar cases, consult Elaine Pagels’ *Gnostic Gospels*.

¹⁹⁸ Insightfully, Terry Eagleton describes the Other as not just a “theoretical concept” but an actual category delineating movements or peoples “written out of history, subjected to slavery, insult, mystification, genocide” in his work *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 205.

¹⁹⁹ Olson’s account of the Montanists is not quite as sympathetic as Johnson’s. He locates the root of the Montanists’ troubles in their open defiance of bishops throughout the Roman Empire. Furthermore, Montanus claimed to be the instrument through which the Holy Spirit spoke, an assertion that placed Catholic claims in jeopardy. This is the proposal of Olson, *Story of Theology*, 32. Nonetheless, there

Praxean willingness to malign sincere, abstemious, and disciplined visionaries served as further evidence that he unknowingly accomplished “two pieces of the devil’s business” in Rome (*ita duo negotia diaboli Praxeas Romae procuravit*).²⁰¹ Thence while the crucifixion of the Father may function as the focal point of Tertullian’s assault, his concern over the coerced flight of the Paraclete is also evident in subsequent sections of *Adversus Praxean*. Indeed, it is a prominent issue in this work. With an overview of *caput* 1, however, we will now recapitulate Tertullian’s argument contra Praxeas before we examine his particular brand of Christology.

Findings

(1) Tertullian takes issue with Praxean theology for the following three reasons. First, Praxeas’ doctrine of God and Christ inadvertently results in the crucifixion of the Father (Patripassianism).²⁰² Bart Ehrman highlights what Tertullian found objectionable about Praxean Christology: “Christ was divine, and as such his activities could be attributed to God; but he was not himself God the Father. The fine line [between Patripassianism and Adoptionism] can be detected in a careful thinker like Tertullian, who in one context refers to God as crucified (*De Carne* 5) but in another ridicules Praxeas for crucifying the Father (*Adv. Prax.* 1).”²⁰³

(2) Tertullian believes that orthodoxy’s account of God and the Son accords with the rule of faith handed down since the inception of Christianity.²⁰⁴ The ardent African’s formulation of the *regula fidei* may differ from other versions of the so-called rule of faith. However, Morgan points out that the *prima facie* disparateness of

appears to be little substance to the “inventions” that Johnson and Olson recount.

²⁰⁰ *Adv Prax* 1.28-30.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 1.32.

²⁰² *Apology* 1.127.

²⁰³ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 87.

²⁰⁴ Metzger explains that the *regula fidei* signifies that which has been orally transmitted by the apostles and received or handed down by the church. The rule of faith is: “the immemorial belief of Christians,

Tertullian's articulation of the *regula fidei* lies in the fact that the pre-Nicenes do not stress verbatim symbolic (*symbolum*) phrases; they place more emphasis on the concepts contained in early creedal formulae.²⁰⁵ Even the famed Symbol of Nicea was "loosely quoted in later years."²⁰⁶ Basing his dicta on the antiquity of apostolic belief, Tertullian thus reasons that "whatever is earliest is true and whatever is later is counterfeit."²⁰⁷ He exalts the apostolic Christological proclamation (κερυγμα) in his work against Praxeas.²⁰⁸

(3) Finally, Praxeas erroneously rejects the divine economy (*oikonomia*). Offering a riposte to his opponent, Tertullian retorts that although God is one vis-à-vis His substance, He "disposes the unity into trinity" for the purpose of redeeming humankind.²⁰⁹ But the plurality manifested in salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*) does not admit division with respect to God's unitive substance since family connections (*pignora*) do not dissolve God's solitary rule (*monarchia*) anymore than a King's regal officials undermine his sovereign sphere of influence, Tertullian reasons.

Tertullian's opening argument against his formidable adversary seems to drive a lethal shaft in the Monarchian Christology of Praxeas. Nevertheless, the apologist deems it necessary to marshal further evidence against his influential adversary. We will witness his rational demonstrations (αποδείξεις) for the sake of Christianity as we

derived from the Scriptures" and that content set forth in the Apostles' Creed (Metzger, *Canon*, 158).

²⁰⁵ Kelly also observes that the "rule of faith" (*regula fidei*) is "the intrinsic shape and pattern" of God's revelation to the apostles. The *regula* provides the basis for an accurate interpretation of the holy writings, see Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, 40.

²⁰⁶ Morgan, *The Importance of Tertullian*, 49. See appendix I.

²⁰⁷ *Adv Prax* 2. Robert Wilken, *The Myth of Christian Beginnings* (London: SCM Press, 1979) 47-51 illustrates how the claim "truth is older than error" was not restricted to Christianity since the entire Greco-Roman world stressed the importance of tradition and antiquity. The Romans even emphasized the importance of ancestral custom (*mos maiorum*) as part of a proper education. At any rate, "Tradition," writes Wilken, "needed no justification; it authenticated itself simply by being old. Antiquity itself was a sign of truth, for what is older is better." Obviously, such a view was not meant to serve as a strict logical form of argumentation but Tertullian was wisely appealing to a notion that permeated the spirit of the times (*Zeitgeist*).

²⁰⁸ Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 140.

now progress to a discussion of sections (*capita*) 5-7 of *Adversus Praxean*. The primary reason for examining these particular *capita* will be to elucidate the *differentiae* between the eternal λογος-σοφια and the temporal Son *qua* Son. Making this epistemological distinction will prove to be vital when we review Tertullian's exegesis of Ps 8:5. Additionally, understanding the differentiation between the Son *qua* Son and the Logos will elucidate Tertullian's motivation for believing that the pre-existent and pre-angelophanic Son is lower than the angels.

²⁰⁹ *Adv Prax* 2.

Chapter 4

The Distinction between the *Sermo Dei* and Son *qua* Son

In order to understand the basis for Tertullian's belief that the preexistent Son *qua* Son was lower than the angels, one must initially make some important distinctions between the *Ratio (Sermo) dei* and the *Filius dei*. A failure to discern such differentiations explains why certain commentators insist that Tertullian posits an eternal *generatio* for the pre-eminent Son of God. In other words, several scholars have argued that Tertullian thinks the *Ratio dei* is an eternal *res et persona*.²¹⁰ However, the evidence appears to suggest otherwise.

Tertullian presents an extended description of the *Ratio, Sermo et Filius dei* in *capita 5-8* of *Adversus Praxean*. We will first identify how he applies these terms to the Son before we proceed with a discussion of Tertullian's *Logos* theology set forth in his treatise opposing Praxean Christology.

A. *Ratio*

Lewis and Short provide one of the most useful definitions for *ratio* as Tertullian employs the term in his polemic contra Praxeas. According to this lexical source, *ratio* can refer to "that faculty of the mind which forms the basis of computation and calculation, and hence of mental action in general, i. e. judgment, understanding, reason." This lexical delineation of the Latin signifier appropriately describes how Tertullian uses the word *ratio* vis-à-vis God.

The Greek equivalent of *ratio* is *λογος*. Hellenistic philosophers sometimes utilize this term to delineate an "aspect" of God, that is, a divine emanation or effluence that is simultaneously an individuated deific hypostasis.²¹¹ In the Stoic

²¹⁰ Evans, *Adversus Praxean*, 224-225.

²¹¹ Edward V. Arnold, *Roman Stoicism: Being Lectures on the History of the Stoic Philosophy with*

system of Zeno, for example, *λογος* is the “divine word.”²¹² Regardless of how Greek theoreticians understood the term, however, “The Romans were unable to translate *logos* with one term. They therefore embraced the phrase *ratio et ratio* (reason and speech) to delineate the signification of *logos*.”²¹³ Thought, rationality, and speech are thus associated with the concept of *ratio*.²¹⁴ Nevertheless, humans are not the only beings that possess the faculty of reason. Almighty God is the supreme locus of rationality: “The God of biblical revelation is the God of reason, not Ultimate Irrationality; all he does is rational.”²¹⁵ Tertullian also indicates that God is not “Ultimate Irrationality.” Hence, if reason is a divine property, it seems that one can justly infer that the Most High determined and created everything by means of His own *Ratio* (*λογος*). Tertullian possesses just such a view of the created cosmos:

*Reason, in fact, is a thing [property] of God, inasmuch as there is nothing which God the Maker of all has not provided, disposed, ordained by reason-nothing which He has not willed should be handled and understood by reason.*²¹⁶

Furthermore, Tertullian refers to the *ratio Dei* as a divine attribute or property in *Adversus Praxean*. *Ratio* is an eternal quality of God. There was a time, however, when the Son of God did not exist as such (*Adv Herm* 3.18). Through His own reason (*ratio*), the Most High produced the cosmos and all that is therein. It would seem that one must therefore make a distinction between the *Ratio* and *Filius dei*.

Special Reference to Its Development within the Roman Empire (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1911), 12.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 17.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 37.

²¹⁴ See Philo, *Vit Mos* 2.129.

²¹⁵ Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 4 vols. (Waco: Word, 1976), 1:232. See James E. White, *What is Truth?: A Comparative Study of the Positions of Cornelius Van Til, Francis Schaeffer, Carl F. H. Henry, Donald Bloesch, Millard Erickson* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 103.

²¹⁶ *De Paen* 1. *Ceterum a ratione eius tantum absunt quantum ab ipso rationis auctore. Quippe res dei ratio quia deus omnium conditor nihil non ratione providit disposuit ordinavit nihilque non ratione tractari intellegique voluit.*

B. Sermo

Tertullian uses *Sermo* to translate the Greek λογος. Evans renders *Sermo* as “Discourse.” It is indeed significant that the noted church apologist opts for the Latin *Sermo* (Discourse) instead of *verbum*, implying that God mentally discourses with Himself and does not simply articulate a mere word in the protological setting of creation. Tertullian thus emphasizes divine cognition *qua* interior discourse when he employs *Sermo* throughout his writings. At any rate, we should not strictly correlate *Sermo* with *Filius* as these terms apply to Jesus Christ. The importance of observing this distinction will emerge later in the present investigation.

C. Sophia

In *Adv Prax* 6 Tertullian reminds his opponent that the function and ordinance of God’s consciousness is “in the Scriptures also displayed under the name of Wisdom” (*Haec vis et haec divini sensus dispositio apud scripturas etiam in sophiae nomine ostenditur*). As the Latin portion of this citation makes clear, Tertullian uses the Greek equivalent *Sophia* to depict Wisdom personified. The ancient writings of Judaism may also heavily influence Tertullian’s utilization of Wisdom motifs apparently culled from canonical, deuterocanonical, and pseudepigraphical works.

Regardless of where Tertullian’s *Sophia* concept traces her origins, *Adv Prax* 6 reveals that Tertullian is primarily interested in harmonizing his Christological teachings with Scripture. He desires to meet his antagonist on the common ground of Holy Writ. Moreover, Tertullian employs Prov 8:22-31 to prove that the Logos became a Son to God *in tempo*, referring to God’s λογος as “Discourse, who became Son of God when by proceeding from him [the Father] he was begotten” (*qui filius*

factus est dei, de quo prodeundo generatus est).²¹⁷ This “perfect nativity of Discourse” (*nativitas perfecta sermonis*) was in fact the beginning of the Son’s minoration. The Father, at that momentous point, brought forth the Son *in tempo*.

Note that the previously mentioned passage highlights both the differentiation and minoration of the Son in relation to the Father. Tertullian there invokes the term *σοφία* to refer to that inward form of Discourse (*λογος ενδιαθετος*) that God begets, so that it becomes God’s expressed Word (*λογος προφορικος*) for the sake of creation: ‘The *Sermo* becomes person in so far as he makes known the Father and he is distinct from the Father by virtue of his temporal generation.’²¹⁸ It is necessary to comprehend the theological distinction between *Ratio* and *Filius*.

D. Distinguishing the Eternal *Ratio* from the Temporal *Filius*

Tertullian seeks to establish that the Son and Father are hypostatically differentiable by turning to the holy scriptures of Judaism and Christianity. He is eager to establish his case forensically: “by the advocacy of the scriptures and the interpretations of them” (*et ita res ipsa formam suam scripturis et interpretationibus earum patrocinantibus vindicabit*).²¹⁹ In *Adv Prax* 11, he places a similar challenge before his formidable opponent, declaring: “But it will be your duty to prove it [Monarchianism] as openly from the scriptures as we prove that he made his own Word his Son” (*Probare autem tam aperte debetis ex scripturis quam nos probamus illum sibi filium fecisse sermonem suum*). The apologist is accordingly intent on substantiating his belief from Scripture (both the OT and the NT). Tertullian shrewdly turns the tables on his antagonist, who supposedly appeals to the sacred writings in order to support his opposing case. But *ex hypothesi* Tertullian has already shown that

²¹⁷ *Adv Prax* 7.1.

²¹⁸ Daniélou, *Latin Christianity*, 364.

Praxeas does not rightly explicate God's Word of truth (2 Tim 2:15). The heresiarch is an unwitting satanic pawn actually trying to undermine Christian truth by putting on a pretense of defending it. Tertullian subsequently appeals to the Scriptures while at the same time invoking the *regula fidei* in order to prove his case.

The first text that the skilled Christian rhetorician considers is Gen 1:1: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (*In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram*). He then discloses that "certain people" think the Hebrew account of Moses' first pentateuchal book reads: "In the beginning God made for himself a Son" (*aiunt quidam et Genesim in Hebraico ita incipere in principio deus fecit sibi filium*).²²⁰ However, Evans suggests that Tertullian has "misunderstood his informant" since this imaginative reading does not seem to reoccur in other Patristic writings.²²¹ Bernard Lonergan, on the other hand, defends Tertullian's account citing Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* 6.7.58; 6.39.2), Jerome (*Quaest Hebr In Gen 1:1*),²²² and Irenaeus.²²³

In any event, Tertullian (for sound theological and textual reasons) rightly rejects such a reading of Gen 1:1 and concludes that God subsisted in a solitary but self-sufficient condition before the creation of the cosmos: "until the generation of the Son" (*fuit ante mundi constitutionem us usque filii generationem*).²²⁴ This last sentence indicates that there was a time when God the Father was all alone, before the generation of the Son. However, Evans thinks that this concept—God the Father

²¹⁹ *Adv Prax* 5.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.9-11.

²²¹ E. Evans, *Adversus Praxeum*, 209.

²²² Marcel Simon also provides evidence for the reading cited by Tertullian in *The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity*, trans. Paul M. Blowers (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 62.

²²³ See Lonergan, *The Way to Nicea: The Dialectical Development of Trinitarian Theology*, trans. Conn O'Donovan (London: Dartman, Longman, and Todd, 1976), 23-4. *VL* reads: *In principio fecit deus caelum et terram*. The Latin *Vg* says: *In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram*.

²²⁴ *Adv Prax* 5.12-13.

subsisting without His Son (*filius*)—is utterly unthinkable. Nonetheless, it is important to ask what the evidence from *Adversus Praxean* suggests.

Evans states that Tertullian immediately corrects any possibility of misunderstanding what he writes concerning God's eternal precosmic solitariness when he immediately qualifies his theological dicta by declaring: "Yet not even then was he alone" (*ceterum ne tunc quidem solus*).²²⁵ Parting exegetical ways with the eminent translator, we maintain that Tertullian believes the transcendent God (who becomes the Father) was initially alone in a hypostatic sense, personally subsisting as a self-sufficient world to His own self. Both Minucius Felix and Athenagoras of Antioch also posit a solitary hypostatic deity who is alone before He generates the Logos.²²⁶ There is thus ample historical evidence pointing to an early Christian belief that God was all alone (hypostatically) until He brought forth Discourse (*Sermo*).²²⁷

Granted, Tertullian explicitly writes that God was alone since "there was nothing external beside him" (*solus autem quia nihil aliud extrinsecus praeter illum*), implying that there was an entity internal beside Him, namely, His own eternal Reason (*ratio*).²²⁸ Hence, one could justly conclude that Tertullian affirmed that an eternal divine hypostasis existed internally next to God the Father before the creation of all things in the capacity of an opposed subsistent relation. The context of *Adv Prax* 5,

²²⁵ Ibid. 5.15

²²⁶ Tertullian writes: For before all things God was alone, he was a world and place and all things" (*ante omnia enim deus erat solus, ipse sibi et mundus et locus et omnia*). In *Octavius* 18.7, Minucius expresses the following viewpoints: "Before the world, he was a world to himself" (*ante mundum fuerit sibi ipse pro mundo*) and "By his word he orders all things that exist, by means of his reason he arranges them and by his perfect goodness he perfects them" (*Verbo iubet, ratione dispensat, virtute consummat*). See Daniélou, *Latin Christianity*, 190. Similarly, Athenagoras writes: "You sovereigns, indeed, rear and adorn your palaces for yourselves; but the world was not created because God needed it; for God is Himself everything to Himself, light unapproachable, a perfect world, spirit, power, reason." (*Leg pro* 16). The context suggests that the God Athenagoras has in mind is the one who, according to Tertullian, becomes a Father to the ΛΟΓΟΣ. Minucius Felix seems to have the same referent in mind.

²²⁷ Cyril C. Richardson, *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (New York: Abingdon, 1958), 57.

²²⁸ *Adv Prax* 5.14-17.

however, suggests a different understanding of matters.²²⁹ We will now assess the evidence that indicates Tertullian does not think the *Ratio dei* is an eternal *res et persona*.

Tertullian maintains that God the Father was not alone before He created the world since he had his own Reason (*ratio*) within Him. Nevertheless, the ancient Carthaginian's main point here seems to be that in a manner analogous to humans participating in the act of reasoning or discoursing inwardly, consequently making themselves objects of contemplation for and to themselves, God from all eternity past, deliberated or ratiocinated interiorly. In this manner, the deity made Himself the supreme object of contemplation for Himself.²³⁰ Tertullian insists that such inward, rational discourse befits the Most High God (*Summus Deus*): "For God is rational, and reason is primarily in him, and thus from him are all things: and that Reason is his consciousness" (*rationalis enim deus, et ratio in ipso prius, et ita ab ipso omnia: quae ratio sensus ipsius est*).²³¹ Yet the *Ratio* internal beside God ante creation was not yet a *res et persona* (a particular object and presentation)²³² as Tertullian goes on to illustrate.²³³

²²⁹ Tatian provides a similar account of the pre-cosmic *Sitz-im-Leben* of the Father and Son: "The Lord of all things who was himself the foundation of the whole was alone in relation to the creation which had not yet come into being" (ὁ γὰρ δεσποτῆς τῶν ὅλων αὐτὸς ἡυπαρχῶν τοῦ παντός ἢ ὑποστάσις κατὰ μὲν τὴν μηδέπω γεγεννημένην ποιησὶν μόνος ἦν). See *Oratio* 5.16-21. Nevertheless, Tatian makes it clear that the pre-generated *λογος* is not a *persona* but refers to God's rational power.

²³⁰ Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan, 7 vols. (New York: Dover, 1961), 2:259. In order to help us somewhat grasp the workings of the divine precosmic rationating activity, Tertullian, anticipating the later Augustine (*De Trin* VIII-XV), asks us to reflect on the inner discourse (i.e. discursive activities) that take place in the human mind.

²³¹ *Adv Prax* 5.17-18.

²³² George L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1969), 221.

²³³ We find a similar *Logos* theory posited in Hippolytus. According to the apologetic writer based in Rome, God once existed alone, having nothing contemporaneous with himself (*Contra Noet* 10.1-2). Hippolytus, however, declares that "alone though he was" God was "manifold" (αὐτὸς δὲ μόνος ὢν πολὺς ἦν) in that "he was not Word-less (οὐτε ἄλογος) nor Wisdom-less (οὐτε ἄσοπιος) nor Power-less (οὐτε ἄδυνατος) nor Mind-less (οὐτε ἄβουλεύτος). But everything was in him, and he was himself the All." The previously mentioned delineation outlined by

Tertullian reasons that since humans are made in God's image (*imago dei*) and are rational beings²³⁴ fashioned out of God's own substance²³⁵ into living souls,²³⁶ the activity that occurs when human cognizers through the act of contemplation "by reason argue silently"²³⁷ resembles the pre-generational act of God whereby He "made another beside himself by activity within himself." That is, God made Reason (*Ratio*) Discourse (*Sermo*) and subsequently it became His own Son.²³⁸ The partner that one encounters in mental discourse, however, is neither a reality nor a person. One's inward discourse partner is only quasi-personal, not being a hypostatic entity in relation. When one reflects *ad intra*, there is not another distinct *persona* within him or her. He or she only possesses a figurative interlocutor at such contemplative periods. Tertullian reinforces this point by penning the following words: "So in a sort of a way you have in you as a second <person> discourse by means of which you speak by thinking and by means of which you think by speaking: discourse itself is another <than you>."²³⁹

Hippolytus suggests that the $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ residing in God from all eternity was not a *res* or distinct *persona*. Furthermore, God wills the Logos into existence (*Contra Noet* 10.3). This aspect of Hippolytus' theory is problematic since it implies that the Son is not an essential divine hypostasis, see E. Fortman, *Triune God*, 118. If Hippolytus is correct, then the Logos is a creature temporarily and arbitrarily deified for a time, see W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 344-345. Fortman carefully delineates both the impersonal and subsequent personal stages of the Logos in *The Triune God*, 118.

²³⁴ The tradition of man subsisting as a rational being finds a place in the Stoic and Aristotelian traditions. Clement of Alexandria also thinks that man is the image of God in that he is rational ($\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\kappa\omicron\varsigma$): "Hence, man is God's image by virtue of his mind ($\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$), his reasoning faculty, not because of any sensible, to say nothing of anatomical, resemblance," see William E. G. Floyd, *Clement of Alexandria's Treatment of the Problem of Evil* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 20.

²³⁵ Evans tries to downplay Tertullian's language here by noting that the apologist uses *ex* when referring to the Son's generation from God's substance and *de* when talking about humanity. However, we are not so sure that Tertullian has such prepositional distinctions in mind. For he employs *ex* and *de* interchangeably with reference to the Son's *derivatio* from the *substantia* of the Father.

²³⁶ *Adv Prax* 5.32-34. *Tu in timetipso rationem qui es animal rationale, a rationali scilicet artifice non tantum factus sed etiam ex substantia ipsius animatus.*

²³⁷ *Ibid.* 5.34-35

²³⁸ *Ibid.* 5.12-13.

²³⁹ *ita secundus quomodo in te est sermo per quem loqueris cogitando et per quem cogitas loquendo: ipse sermo alius est.*

Based on the foregoing information, we seem warranted in concluding that Tertullian believes that God the Father subsisted alone previous to the founding of the universe, with no other *personae* internal or external beside Him. He simply possessed *Ratio* (i.e. His own faculty of reason) or *Sermo* (Discourse) that was eternally in the *Ratio dei*, acting as (*quasi*) another person beside Him. Hence, the Latin apologist from North Africa notes that while God eternally had the potential for plurality or differentiation *in se*, He did not fully actualize this potential until the complete nativity of the Word (*nativitas perfecta sermonis*).²⁴⁰ This is why Tertullian could proclaim in yet another document: “There was, however, a time when neither sin existed with him, nor the Son” (*fuit autem tempus, cum et delictum et filius non fuit*)²⁴¹; or as Harnack expresses matters: “The *Logos* came into existence as a real being, before the world and for the sake of the world.”²⁴² God became Father to the *Logos* when He externally expressed Discourse qua *λογος προφορικός*.

Concerning Tertullian’s fuller statement of God’s existence antecedent to the generation of His Son, Harnack perspicuously observes that although the *Ratio et Sermo dei* eternally resided within God since “he thought and spoke inwardly,” God

²⁴⁰ One can read about the perfect nativity of the Son in *Adv Prax* 7.34-35. It is also important to remember that Tertullian’s God is not the God of Thomas Aquinas. He is not strictly pure act (*actus purus*), since it is possible for Him to have unactualized potential. Nor is Tertullian’s God fully impassible, since He is ontologically mutable. For instance, He becomes a Father and expresses emotions the Thomist deity seems incapable of showing. See John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 143.

²⁴¹ *Adv Herm* 3.18.

²⁴² Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 2.259. Tatian’s *λογος* theology is based on similar notions. Tatian’s doctrine of the *Logos* corresponds with Justin Martyr’s, for the most part. He loves to speak of the Word in terms of “Logos-Potency” (*λογου δυναμιν*) or *potentia*. This Word of God is first immanent in the Omnipotent deity but in time becomes the agent of creation as well as God’s agent of revelation. *λογος* is depicted in Tatian as “the Divine Reason considered as potentially capable of acting in conditions wherein the Transcendent Father does not move, viz: in the phenomenal world which the *Logos* originates as the Father’s intermediary,” see Spence Little, *The Christology of the Apologists: Doctrinal* (London: Duckworth, 1934), 181-182. The *Logos*, as the rational potentiality of the Father, contains creation within himself ideally. The Word springs forth as reason does from the human mind (*ibid.*, 183-184). The *λογος* in Tatian is an abstract conception of divine rationality that assumes hypostaticity prior to and for the purpose of creation. The criticisms of Irenaeus and Hippolytus may therefore be justified in *Adv Haer* 1, 28 and *Philosophoumena* 8.16.

the Father was still “the only person” before the Son’s begetting.²⁴³ Edmund Fortman also reasons that the Son of God “was generated, not from eternity but before and for creation, and then became a second person.”²⁴⁴ Preceding His *generatio*, however, Discourse (according to Tertullian) was not “clearly and fully personalized.”²⁴⁵

Stead further discerns that Tertullian depicts God as a Mind (*nous*) containing Word in the sense of “plan” or “thought” within it.²⁴⁶ Moreover, he further states: “This latter is sufficiently distinct to be addressed as a ‘partner in dialogue.’”²⁴⁷ Yet this *Sermo* does not become Son until God utters the words, “Let there be light” (*fiat lux*) as recorded in Gen 1:3. Stead writes that it is only at this point that one can speak of Discourse (*Sermo*) as Son in the fullest sense.²⁴⁸ It might, therefore, be inaccurate to argue that Tertullian thinks the Son is a timeless *res et persona* internal beside God.

Findings

Earlier, in *Adv Prax* 11, we read that God made His own word a Son (*sibi filium fecisse sermonem suum*). The famous passage in *Adv Herm* 3.18 also affirms: “there was, however, a time when neither sin existed with him, nor the Son” (*fuit autem tempus, cum et delictum et filius non fuit*). These texts illustrate that there is a marked distinction between the Reason or Word of God and the Son *qua* Son. Whereas *Ratio et Sermo* are applied to the everlasting divine ratiocinating activity as immanent or expressed, Tertullian unequivocally reveals that there was not an eternal or timeless *res et persona* internal beside God anterior to the Most High making His own Word a

²⁴³ Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 2:259.

²⁴⁴ *The Triune God*, 111.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *Divine Substance*, 228. Sydney Mellone writes: “Tertullian holds that the term *Logos* is a legitimate metaphor involving a vital truth, because the Greek term *Logos* and the Latin *Sermo* (used as its equivalent) imply both a necessary distinction and a necessary relation between the thought or reason and its expression,” see *Leaders*, 122).

²⁴⁷ G. C. Stead, *Divine Substance*, 228.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Son to Him. Ergo, Tertullian uses the word “Son” (*filius*) to describe the Reason or Discourse of God (*Ratio sive Sermo dei*) expressed as a personalized and temporal *res*. Nevertheless antecedent to the “Complete nativity of Discourse (*nativitas perfecta sermonis*), the Logos, in the manner of ancient Judaism’s *hokhmah* was simply a personification of a divine attribute or faculty.²⁴⁹ Worded another way, the *Sermo dei* is not an eternal hypostasis, a timeless *res et persona*.

²⁴⁹ Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels*, 53-54 discusses the Gnostic characterization of the divine mother in the πληρωμα as σοφια. Pagels then recounts how early Gnostic interpreters wondered if God creating the world in wisdom (Proverbs 3 and 8) meant that God “conceived” creation using a feminine cosmic principle. Valentinus also employs the σοφια motif to explain in what way lady wisdom became the “Mother of all living” sans a masculine principle. In this way, she marred creation and had to bring forth a demiurge.

Chapter 5

Tertullian's Exegesis of Ps 8:5 in *Adversus Praxean*

In a previous chapter, we evaluated every pre-Nicene occurrence of Ps 8:5. We then learned that Tertullian only applies the hymnodic doxology in the eighth psalm to the Messiah. However, he believes that there are three distinct ways in which the Son became lower than angels. *Sermo* became inferior to the angels when it became God's Son.²⁵⁰ That is, when God exclaimed, "*fiat lux*," He made the impersonal *Ratio Dei* His Son.²⁵¹ Furthermore, when the Son of God appears in OT and NT angelophanies, He condescends or humbles Himself.²⁵² Lastly, the Father makes the Son lower than the angels are when Discourse assumes flesh, thus becoming a man with a human body and a rational soul.²⁵³ This study has evaluated the foregoing exegetical construals of Tertullian in a general manner. We will now consider how Tertullian explains the relevance of Ps 8:5 in his momentous theological treatise, *Adversus Praxean*.

A. The Preexistent Son and *Adversus Praxean* 9

Praxeas maintains that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are hypostatically identical. In other words, the deific subsistencies of the Trinity are three successive modes of the same divine person. Theologians generally label this view—Monarchianistic Modalism. Tertullian deems this theological notion heretical, and the church ultimately agreed with him. To combat Praxeas' Modalistic Christology, he avers:

For look now, I say that the Father is one, and the Son another, and the Spirit another (every unlearned or self-willed person takes this statement in bad part, as though it proclaimed diversity and because of diversity threatened a separation of Father and Son and Spirit: but I am bound to make it, so long as they maintain that Father and Son and

²⁵⁰ *Adv Marc* 2:27

²⁵¹ *Adv Prax* 5-11

²⁵² *De Carne* 14

²⁵³ *Adv Judaeos* 14

Spirit are identical, favouring the monarchy at the expense of the economy), not however that the Son is other than the Father by diversity, but by distribution, not by division but by distinction, because the Father is not identical with the Son, they even being numerically one and another.²⁵⁴

Kelly remarks that even in Justin's day, there were reports of certain Christian believers objecting to the teaching that the *λογος* is "something numerically other" (*arithmwi heteron ti*) than the Father (*Dial* 128.3).²⁵⁵ Tertullian also writes that the "simple people" (*simplices*) of his time, whom he insists always constitute the majority of God's worshipers, normally do not grasp that they must both believe God is one and that He is three according to the dispensation of the economy.²⁵⁶ Tertullian maintains that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct, diverse, and differentiated Persons. But the *personae* do not experience abscission per the divine substance. Tertullian thereby simultaneously tries to uphold the divine monarchy and economy. Conversely, he declares that the "unlearned" (*simplices*) believers unwarrantedly reject the economy in favor of the monarchy. They do not comprehend, Tertullian asseverates, in what manner the Father is identical to the Son and differentiable from Him.

The Son is other than the Father by "distribution" (*distributione*) and "distinction" (*distinctio*). *Distributio* "appears to mean an assignment, or allocation, of functions (and so forth) among persons fundamentally alike."²⁵⁷ The Latin word is basically an overlapping relation of *dispensatio*. *Distinctio* suggests that there are

²⁵⁴ *Adv Prax* 9. *Hanc me regulam professum, qua inseparatos ab alterutro patrem et filium et spiritum testor, tene ubique, et ita quid quomodo dicatur agnosces. ecce enim dico alium esse patrem et alium filium et alium spiritum (male accepit idiotas quisque aut perversus hoc dictum, quasi diversitatem sonet et ex diversitate separationem protendat patris et filii et spiritus: necessitate autem hoc dico cum eundem patrem et filium et spiritum contendunt, adversus oeconomiam monarchiae adulantes) non tamen diversitate alium filium a patre sed distributione, nec divisione alium sed distinctio, quia non sit idem pater et filius, vel modulo alius ab alio.*

²⁵⁵ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, 119.

²⁵⁶ *Adv Prax* 3.

²⁵⁷ Evans, *Adversus Praxean*, 244.

discernable disparities between two entities in relation that consequently form the basis for otherness (i.e. differentiation). Tertullian consequently means that the Son is another Person than the Father, being numerically other than the paternal figure of the Godhead, but He is not another God than the Father. Not only is he numerically anterior to the Father, however, He is also subordinate to Him. Tertullian demonstrates the point by exegeting Ps 8:5 and applying it to the preincarnate heavenly Logos:

For the Father is the whole substance, while the Son is an outflow and assignment of the whole, as he himself professes, *Because my Father is greater than I: and by him, it is sung in the psalm, he has also been made less, a little on this side of the angels.* So also the Father is other than the Son as being greater than the Son, as he who begets is other than he who is begotten, as he who sends is other than he who is sent, as he who makes is other than he through whom a thing is made.²⁵⁸

Tertullian writes that the Father is the entire divine substance, the Son but an “outflow and assignment of the whole” substance.²⁵⁹ The Son is a “portion” or “derivation” of the full divine reality. While Tertullian frequently employs the term “substance” (*substantia*) in his writings, what he means by the word is still a source of disagreement among Tertullian scholars.²⁶⁰ This study will not attempt to solve the conundrum introduced by the famed Carthaginian.²⁶¹ Nevertheless, it is fitting to

²⁵⁸ *Adv Prax* 9. *pater enim tota substantia est, filius vero, derivatio totius et portio, sicut ipse profitetur, Quia pater maior me est: a quo et minoratus canitur in psalmo, Modicum quid citra angelos. sic et pater alias a filio, dum filio maior, dum alias qui generat alius qui generatur, dum alius qui mittit alius qui mittitur, dum alius qui facit alius per quem fit.*

²⁵⁹ “It must, certainly, be admitted that Tertullian cannot escape the charge of subordinationism. He bluntly calls the Father the whole divine substance, and the Son a part of it” (Morgan, *The Importance of Tertullian*, 264-265). Morgan notes that Tertullian illustrates the relationship between the Father and the Son by appealing to the sun, the “parent mass” which has beams of light functioning as extensions. A beam, Morgan observes, is obviously part of the sun, these two substances being two “distinct things (*species*).” His subordinationism is thus evident, see *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ Osborn (*Tertullian*, 131) continues: “Unity was a matter of substance. God’s substance might mean God himself, his mode of existence, his rank or character, his divinity or eternity. Another meaning suggests ‘the unique stuff which is, or composes, the divine corpus, and which Tertullian denotes *spiritus*.’” See G.C. Stead “Divine Substance in Tertullian,” *JTS* NS 14 (1963) 46-66. For further study, consult Tertullian’s *Adv Prax* 31.1; *Adv Herm* 3; *Apol* 21. Tertullian posits a notion of non-material matter (*stoffloses Stoff*), according to Osborn, *Tertullian*, 132.

²⁶¹ “Yet Tertullian, like many others, never succeeds in defining his concept of being. A first reading of *Against Praxeas* suggests that Tertullian has not avoided a division of the divine substance, and more

examine Tertullian's use of *substantia* in relation to the *tres personae trinitatis*.

According to Tertullian, humans are rational souls wrought out of God's substance in that a rational Creator has produced humanity in His image (*Adv Prax* 5). Tertullian also employs *substantia* to illustrate the relationship between the Father and the Son: "For though I make two suns, yet the sun and its beam I shall count as two objects, and two manifestations of one undivided substance, in the same sense as <I count> God and his Word, the Father and the Son" (*Adv Prax* 13). In another famous passage concerning the incarnate Christ, Tertullian contends that Jesus is "in one Person God and Man."²⁶² That is, Christ is one Person subsisting in two substances, man and God "because neither is the Word anything else but God nor the flesh anything else but man."²⁶³ It seems that one needs to construe these statements about *substantia* against the backdrop of Stoicism. Concerning *substantia*, Osborn reports: "While Tertullian may use the term for a particular thing, his more exact use points to the constitutive material of a thing. This Stoic definition is always behind the concept of God's substance and is not purely material in the commonly accepted sense of today."²⁶⁴ With Osborn, we too think that knowledge of Stoic metaphysics elucidates Tertullian's utilization of *substantia*.²⁶⁵ This fact means that Tertullian's usage differs somewhat from the later ecclesiastical employment of *substantia* or *essentia*.

Substantia does not mean "nature" in Tertullian: it signifies discrete particulars. The Carthaginian exemplifies this usage in *De Anima* 32. Tertullian there reasons that substance differs from nature since "a substance is one thing, and the

exact scrutiny indicates that he may not have given the Son and Spirit a totality of divine substance" (Osborn, *Tertullian*, 132).

²⁶² *Adv Prax* 27.

²⁶³ Ibid. The Son is an effluence of the divine substance, see Tertullian's *Apology* 21.

²⁶⁴ E. Osborn, *Tertullian*, 131.

²⁶⁵ The four Stoic categories are substance, quality, disposition and relative disposition (Osborn, *Tertullian*, 125-126). Stoic metaphysics deals with "individually qualified entities." See appendix IV.

nature of that substance is another thing; inasmuch as the substance is the special property of one given thing, whereas the nature thereof may possibly belong to many things.” He then provides two practical examples in order to highlight the dissimilarity between substance and nature.

For instance, the stoically influenced apologist observes that a piece of stone or a piece of iron are two distinct substances; nevertheless, the quality of hardness inhering in both differentiable substances constitutes the common nature of both *substantiae*. While hardness unites the particulars, however, the substances themselves (stone and rock) provide a basis for regarding the two concreta as diverse metaphysical entities. The same principle applies to wool, feathers, and the quality of softness. Wool and feathers are substances. Softness is the nature that obtains between the two particulars.

Tertullian himself supplies an example of how he employs *substantia* to delineate particulars, when he contends that the Father and the Son are comparable to the sun and its beam.²⁶⁶ From one perspective, the sun and its beam are synonymous. When one considers a ray of light in isolation from the sun, he or she may call the ray “the sun.”²⁶⁷ Mentally, however, most humans pre-theoretically distinguish the sun from its rays. This is especially the case when one considers the sun as one undivided substance. We usually recognize that the sun is not its beam and a beam is not the sun *simpliciter*. Nevertheless, there is another sense in which the sun and its beam are one: a ray of light emanating from the sun is an extension of the sun’s *substantia*. Tertullian applies this same principle to God and His Son.²⁶⁸

The Father is comparable to the sun and Christ is akin to a ray of light

²⁶⁶ *Adv Prax* 13

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

emanating from the sun. As such, Christ is an extension, prolation, and manifestation of deity. He shares in the “one undivided substance” of the Father, who is the fullness of divinity. But since we can view the sun as one entity or two entities (one sun or two suns), Tertullian can likewise speak of one God or two gods without contradicting himself. When Tertullian therefore writes that the Father is the entire divine substance, he evidently means that in the strictest sense, the Father is God. Other divine beings such as the Son only possess a relative type of divinity in a derivative and inferior sense: “The Father is the whole substance, while the Son is only a derivation who participates in the divine substance in a lesser degree than the Father.”²⁶⁹ The Father is thus greater than the Son is—both in the economy and immanently.

There are two salient points that we can learn from Tertullian’s exegesis of Ps 8:5 in *Adv Prax* 9. First, Tertullian makes it clear that the Father is the whole substance of the Godhead, the Son but a derivation and portion of the whole. These words apply to the preincarnate $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ who becomes a Son to God before and for the purpose of creation.²⁷⁰ *Adv Prax* 9 indicates that the preincarnate Christ is the subject of discussion, and not Discourse (*Sermo*) enfleshed. Tertullian reasons: “So also the Father is other than the Son as being greater than the Son, as he who sends is other than he who is sent, as he who begets is other than he who is begotten, as he who makes is other than he through whom a thing is made.”²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ J. L. Neve and Otto W. Heick, *A History of Christian Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965-1966), 108.

²⁷⁰ “The Son and the Spirit are distinguished, therefore, from the Father in that they have their own subsistent being, which is not, however, based on their eternal specific individuality, but rather on their function in relation to God’s creation. Tertullian does not manage to get beyond the combination of a modalism with regard to the distinctness of the individual persons and a subordinationism with regard to their existential plurality” (Daniélou, *Latin Christianity*, 364).

²⁷¹ *Adv Prax* 9.

By articulating his Christology in the aforesaid terms, Tertullian also provides a basis for introducing the notion of subordination and otherness vis-à-vis the economic Trinity. The economy is not utterly reducible to the *incarnatio Christi*, however. While Tertullian therefore evokes Jn 14:28, he does so to demonstrate how the Son relates to the Father in the Godhead. Tertullian then appeals to Ps 8:5 which delineates the temporary minoration of God's Son.

A second point we want to draw attention to is that Tertullian's exegesis of Ps 8:5 in *Adv Prax* 9 reveals that he believes God the Father made the preexistent Son lower than the angels for a time, by generating Him antecedent to creation. This study thus urges that the Son became lower than the angels before His Incarnation. This means that Tertullian affirms the superiority of the Father over against the Son independently of the Son's human state. If Tertullian does indeed posit the view that this investigation argues, one wonders how he can concomitantly affirm the absolute (i.e. unqualified) deity of the Son. How can one who is fully God be lower than the angels in his preincarnate state? How can the Son be truly God (*vere deus*), if He is only a "portion" of the entire divine substance?

To address these questions, one might reason that the Son decided to submit Himself eternally to the Father's omnipotent Will without relinquishing his absolute deity.²⁷² Ergo, although the Son had an *ab initio* according to Tertullian, He remains fully God since he originates from the Father's very substance.²⁷³ It is possible, however, that the most convincing explanation to this seeming quandary is provided in *Adv Marc* 2.27, a text that we analyzed earlier chapter 2: "He is the Son of the Creator, his Word whom by bringing him forth from himself he caused to be his Son.

²⁷² George R. B. Murray, *John*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1987), 262.

²⁷³ E. Fortman, *Triune God*, 114-115.

From then onwards he put him in authority over his whole design and purpose, reducing him a little below the angels, as it is written in David.” Based on this passage, we can tentatively conclude that Tertullian affirms that the Son of God was made lower than the angels by means of His temporal preincarnate generation. The Son consequently experiences a “lessening” when God brings Him forth ante creation as *filius qua filius*.²⁷⁴ From henceforth, the Son *qua* Son becomes lower than the angels. Additionally, Tertullian also deals with the Son as He appears to the patriarchs, namely, in an Angelomorphic or angelophanic setting. The angelophanies in the OT thence serve as further evidence that the Son’s temporal minoration occurred before His Incarnation. We will now consider Tertullian’s treatment of such angelophanies delineated in *Adv Prax* 16.

B. Adversus Praxean 16

Tertullian relates that the Son is the agent of every divine judicial act described in the OT. The preexistent Son confounded the languages at Babel, brought forth the deluge of waters upon the incorrigible generation of Noah’s day, and rained down fire and brimstone on the two cities of Sodom and Gommorah.²⁷⁵ Furthermore, “he it always was who came down to converse with men, from Adam even to the patriarchs and prophets, always from the beginning preparing beforehand in dream and in a mirror and in an enigma that course which he was going to follow out to the end.”²⁷⁶

Tertullian’s position regarding the Son’s angelophanies is admittedly inconsistent. In certain passages, he avers that the Father is utterly transcendent and

²⁷⁴ Bethune-Baker also observes that the preincarnate Son is “made less” than the Father (*Adv Prax* 9). But he overlooks the fact that the preincarnate Christ is also made inferior to the angels (*Early History*, 142).

²⁷⁵ *Adv Prax* 16.

²⁷⁶ *Adv Prax* 16.28-32. *ipse enim et ad humana semper colloquia descendit, ab Adam usque ad patriarchas et prophetas, in visione in somnio in speculo in aenigmate ordinem suum praestruens ab initio semper quem erat persecutors in finem.*

completely invisible to human eyes. The Father, Tertullian insists, is wholly incapable of condescending to manifest Himself to beings of flesh.²⁷⁷ The preincarnate Son, on the other hand, is able to assume flesh. He literally takes on a human corpus and converses with the ancient Hebrew patriarchs and prophets in preparation for His first century Incarnation, Tertullian claims.²⁷⁸ However, the apologist adjusts his stance in *Adv Prax* 14. There we witness Tertullian having difficulty believing that the Son really assumes a body of flesh when he appears to the Hebrew patriarchs and prophets in angelophanies.²⁷⁹ As an alternative, he suggests that the Angelomorphic Son actually appeared “in dream and in a mirror and in an enigma that course which he was going to follow out to the end.”²⁸⁰ Evans observes:

Tertullian therefore in the present passage [*Adv Prax* 14], while retaining the traditional theory that the theophanies were appearances of the Son, denies their substantive reality and suggests that they were no more than visions and dreams, ‘as in a glass darkly’ and will have it that in his own Person the Son was not seen until the Incarnation.²⁸¹

There is clearly evidence of a dialectical tension in Tertullian’s thought regarding the Father’s relationship with the Son. If the apologist holds that God the Father is the invisible deity while the Son is the visible aspect of deity, his views are reminiscent of Gnosticism and they border on inadvertently dividing the divine substance he hitherto affirms in *Adversus Praxean*.²⁸² To ameliorate the tension, Tertullian declares that the Father made the Son lower than the angels for a time. In this way, Christ was able to converse with men through various divine media in order that He might learn how to

²⁷⁷ *Adv Prax* 14.

²⁷⁸ Tertullian writes: “But the Lord Himself at that very time appeared to Abraham amongst those angels without being born, and yet in the flesh without doubt, in virtue of the before-mentioned diversity of cause. You, however, cannot admit this, since you do not receive that Christ, who was even then rehearsing how to converse with, and liberate, and judge the human race, in the habit of a flesh which as yet was not born, because it did not yet mean to die until both its nativity and mortality were previously (by prophecy) announced.” (*De Carne* 6).

²⁷⁹ M. Wiles, *Making*, 125-126.

²⁸⁰ *Adv Prax* 16.

²⁸¹ E. Evans, *Adversus Praxean*, 269.

subsist as a man through intercourse with men. Hence, the Son's preincarnate visionary activity supposedly explains God's *prima facie* nescience in the OT. Such angelophanies were precursors of the Son's incarnate existential state.

The Son's OT preincarnate minoration further serves as evidence of His otherness (i.e. alterity) vis-à-vis the Father. It provides the basis for imputing a subordinate status for the preexistent Christ in relation to the whole divine substance. The taking on of human passions and emotions before Christ became fully human also achieves another divine intent. It served as evidence that human passions and psychical affections "befitted the Son, who was also going to undergo human passions, both thirst and hunger and tears and nativity itself and death itself, for this purpose made by the Father *a little lower than the angels.*"²⁸³

As this section of the study illustrates, a second way in which Tertullian applies Ps 8:5 to the Son in *Adversus Praxean* is with reference to His angelophanic appearances. So far, however, there is sufficient evidence to contend that Tertullian describes the Son *qua* Son being lower than the angels are. We will now examine Tertullian's third exegetical approach to Ps 8:5 to discern how he links the Son's Incarnation with the well-known psalm.

C. *Adversus Praxean* 23

By far, Tertullian's most common exegetical approach is to relate Ps 8:5 to the Incarnation. One discovers this usage in *Adv Prax* 23:

And thither also the Son looked up and prayed and made request of the Father-where also he taught us to lift ourselves up and pray, *Our Father which art in heaven*-though he is also everywhere. This the Father would have for his abode: *The heaven, he says, is my throne.* From this also he made the Son a little less than the angels by sending him down to earth, yet with the intention of crowning him with glory

²⁸² H. Brown, *Heresies*, 42-60.

²⁸³ *Adv Marc* 2.16.

and honour by taking him back into heaven. This he was already granting him when he said, *I have both glorified it and will glorify it.*

God the Father causes the enfleshed Logos to be inferior to the angels for a time. Of course, the Son's temporary minoration eventually culminates in His subsequent glorification and exaltation. Nevertheless, one must recall that the Son's minoration actually begins before and in anticipation of His Incarnation. Its starting point is at the very commencement of God's creative activity (*Adv Marc* 2.27). The $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ who becomes God's Son is made lower than the angels by virtue of His temporal generation (*Adv Herm* 3.18). *Adv Prax* 9 seems to bear this point out as well. However, there are some objections to the interpretation essayed in this study that we want to consider at this point. Is it possible that texts such as *Adv Prax* 9 regarding the Son's momentary state of inferiority vis-à-vis the angels does not refer to His preexistent state but only possess economic significance? Kearsley has argued that Tertullian restricts the application of Ps 8:5 to the Son's role in God's redemptive historical dealings. More specifically, he claims that the verse has reference to the incarnate Son and not to Christ in his preexistence.²⁸⁴ We will now examine Kearsley's line of argumentation and offer a critical assessment of it.

D. Kearsley and Tertullian's Interpretation of Ps 8:5 in *Adv Prax* 9

Roy Kearsley has written a groundbreaking and informative work setting forth Tertullian's theology of divine power. He argues that the Father communicates the substance (*substantia*) spoken of in *Adv Prax* 9 to the Son without division or separation. He transmits the "whole substance of the Deity" to Christ without the

²⁸⁴ Colish thinks that Tertullian teaches the consubstantiality of the Son or at least provides a basis for later thinkers to define the hypostatic union. She writes: "He wants to emphasize the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father over against heretics who reject the principle that the fullness of divinity dwells in Christ," see Colish's *The Stoic Tradition*, 2:22-23.

substance undergoing any diminution.²⁸⁵ Furthermore, Kearsley contends that *substantia* may denote “a substratum” (reality) indigenous to the three opposed relations constituting the Trinity, even though the Father appears to be the total substance of the Godhead.²⁸⁶ Kearsley then cites the pregnant phrase *pater enim tota substantia est, filius vero derivatio totius et portio* that defines the relationship between the Father and one of His lesser prolations.²⁸⁷ With regard to the Son’s derivation (*derivatio*) from the Father, Kearsley notes: “Evans concludes that a certain lessening of the Son in his divine being occurs here.”²⁸⁸ He seems reluctant, however, to concur with Evans since Kearsley thinks one should avoid interpreting Tertullian in a crude materialistic manner.²⁸⁹

In addition to the foregoing, Kearsley resists the notion that Tertullian posits a “minor portion” (the Son) being “cut off from the larger and superior mass called the Father.”²⁹⁰ He recommends stressing *derivatio* more so than *portio*, although according to Kearsley, *portio* does not merely signify “portion” in *Adv Prax* 9. He evidently bases this interpretation on Tertullian’s employment of *prolatio* to depict the relationship between the Father and the Son in *Adv Prax* 14. Moreover, he attributes Tertullian’s use of *prolatio* to the Stoic tradition. He then infers that *prolatio* should be equated with *portio*.²⁹¹ *Portio* then takes on the signification, “assignment.”

In addition to the foregoing, Kearsley thinks that Jn 14:28, a text that Tertullian cites in both *Adv Prax* 9 and 14, pertains to God’s historical redemptive

²⁸⁵ R. Kearsley, *Tertullian's Theology*, 122.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ *Adv Prax* 9.34. This section of *Adversus Praxean* also contains an allusion to Jn 14:28 indicating that the Son is, in some fashion, subordinate to the Father. We will later discuss Tertullian’s application of Jn 14:28.

²⁸⁸ R. Kearsley, *Tertullian's Theology*, 122.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

scheme (*Heilsgeschichte*). That is, God's *modus operandi* for effecting salvation in human history. Supposedly, Tertullian's quote from Ps 8:5 supports Kearsley's line of argumentation. Worded another way, Kearsley suggests that the psalm implemented by Tertullian does not pertain to the Son's pre-cosmic generation but has as its locus of referential significance, the Incarnation of the God-Man. The Son is, consequently, an "assignment of the whole" in the work of redemption: Christ is only an "assignment and outflow" (*portio et derivatio*) as the incarnate Son of God. If Kearsley's contentions are warranted, then the thesis set forth in this study regarding the pre-existent Son being lower than the angels appears to be in jeopardy. We shall now assess Kearsley's treatment of Tertullian's concept of *substantia* in the light of *Adv Prax* 9 to ascertain its historical validity. Our investigation will critique Kearsley's contentions in the order that this section has outlined them.

E. Critique of Kearsley's Treatment

Kearsley states that both the Son and the Holy Spirit are "equal possessors" (*consortes*) of the Father's substance.²⁹² The Father is the whole substance while the Son is an eternal expression and outflow of the whole substance. Tertullian thus teaches that each Person is fully God, Kearsley maintains. He concludes: "Son and Spirit possess parity in divine power because they come forth from the divine substance."²⁹³

As mentioned above, it is very difficult to ascertain what Tertullian precisely means by the term *substantia*. Regardless of what the Latin expression signifies, however, it is almost certain that Tertullian does not believe that the Son or Holy Spirit possesses divinity in its fullness. The Father is not simply the entire divine

²⁹² Ibid., 124.

²⁹³ Ibid.

substance; He is the plenitude of divinity. Moreover, Tertullian exclaims that God has not always been a Father or a Judge since there was a time when neither sin nor the Son existed beside Him (*Adv Herm* 3.18). God became a Father before the creation. For this reason, Fortman finds Tertullian's doctrine of Christ wanting. The ancient Christian rhetorician does not accept the eternal generation of the Son.²⁹⁴ Yet, he articulates so clearly, there was never a time when God was not.

Bernard Lonergan points to the seemingly contradictory elements in Tertullian's Christology, noting that the Carthaginian rightly believes that the Father is not the Son nor is the Son the Father, yet both hypostases are God. However, Tertullian also thinks that the Son is temporal, says that the Father is the whole substance of divinity, and he confirms that the Father commands while the Son obeys the dictates of the Father as the Son mediates creation. In short, Tertullian gainsays his own argument in *Adversus Praxean*, Lonergan writes.²⁹⁵ For, if God is eternal and the Son is God, then the Son must be eternal. Furthermore, if God is the whole divine substance and the Son is God, then the Son must also be the entire substance. Otherwise, Tertullian is putting forth contradictory propositions.²⁹⁶

One may proffer a solution regarding Lonergan's charge that Tertullian's Christology is logically inconsistent by noting that Tertullian does not think the Son is fully God. Tertullian may believe that the Son possesses a relative type of divinity,

²⁹⁴ E. Fortman, *Triune God*, 115.

²⁹⁵ For a discussion of Tertullian's efforts to remove the material principle (objective contradiction) from his thought, see Lonergan, *The Way to Nicea*, 48-49. Lonergan further explains the means employed by Tertullian and other pre-Nicenes to eradicate theological inconsistencies. According to Lonergan, the necessary elements for resolving dialectical tension in one's system are the formal principle (i.e. the rational subject illumined by natural reason or the light of faith) and the dialectic process (i.e. the actual act itself of eliminating contradictions). Furthermore, Lonergan speaks about the "term" or the final result of the dialectical process (either heresy or advance in theology or orthodoxy). The result of Christian dialectical movement will depend on whether natural reason is involved or reason illumined by faith, according to Lonergan, *ibid.*

²⁹⁶ Lonergan shows further logical incongruities in Tertullian's thought through the use of simple syllogisms: "if the Son is God, and God is the whole divine substance, then the Son also is the whole

thereby making Christ dependent on the Father's absolute and unqualified *ousia*.²⁹⁷ Mellone thus appears to be correct when he observes that Tertullian affirms a subordination of essence for the Son by uttering the words recorded in *Adv Prax* 9 about the Father being the whole substance.²⁹⁸

1. Kearsley's Argument in Favor of *Portio*

Kearsley next contends that *portio* does not simply mean "portion" in *Adv Prax* 9. By positing this thetic judgment, *inter alia*, he is endeavoring to avoid a materialistic construal of *portio*. Nevertheless, it is quite possible for one to understand *portio* as *pars* without imputing a crass materialistic stance to Tertullian. Tertullian's employment of *portio* appears to be metaphorical.²⁹⁹ Consequently, it seems apropos for Latin writers to use *portio* as a semantic equivalent for *pars*: the two terms are overlapping relations. *Portio* denotes "part, portion" in Tacitus and Pliny.³⁰⁰ Augustine uses it to signify *partie*, and Tertullian utilizes it metaphorically to denote "resemblance." The term means: "part" (i.e. *soin pre'fere'* or *objet pre'fere'*) in other ecclesiastical writings as well.³⁰¹ *Portio* may well signify "part" or "portion" in a metaphorical sense; it need not and probably does not mean "assignment" in *Adv Prax* 9.6. The syntax of the passage further suggests that *portio* denotes "portion" in *Adv Prax* 9.

Evans thinks that Tertullian qualifies *portio* with *totius*, hence making this construction syntactically a descriptive instead of a partitive genitive (i.e. genitive of

divine substance; if the Son is God, and God commands, then the Son also commands," see *ibid.*, 48.

²⁹⁷ C. Richardson, *The Christianity of Ignatius of Antioch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 45.

²⁹⁸ Mellone, *Leaders*, 178.

²⁹⁹ See Bertrand de Margerie, *The Christian Trinity in History* (Still River: St. Bede, 1982), 78-81.

³⁰⁰ Albert Blaise, *Dictionnaire Latin-Français Des Auteurs Chrétiens: Revu Spécialement Pour le Vocabulaire Théologique* (Brépolis: de Strashbourg 1954 [1993]), 635.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 635.

the whole).³⁰² The Son is not a part, but a “purtenance of divinity,” Evans argues.³⁰³ Christ does not exhaust deity but is, nevertheless, fully God.³⁰⁴

Evans cites a number of texts that appear to support understanding *portio totius* as a descriptive genitive.³⁰⁵ For instance, he quotes *Adv Prax* 26 to buttress the notion that *portio totius* may be a descriptive genitive in *Adv Prax* 9. *Adv Prax* 26.11-13 reads: “For when he said The Spirit of God, although God is spirit, yet since he did not mention God in the nominative case he wished there to be understood an assignment of the whole which was to go to the Son’s account.”³⁰⁶ While one could read this passage as a descriptive genitive, one could equally construe the text as a genitive of the whole.³⁰⁷ It is difficult to settle this issue based on grammar alone. However, the way that Tertullian and other pre-Nicenes employ *portio* lends credence to the view that the construction, “portion of the whole” (*portio totius*) is a genitive of the whole. Two texts that suggest *portio* is a partitive genitive in *Adv Prax* 9 are Novatian’s *De Trin* 11 and Tertullian’s *Adv Marc* 3.6.³⁰⁸ In the final analysis, we must admit that a certain amount of obscurity surrounds the issue.

Kearsley not only contends that the phrase, *portio totius*, should be translated “assignment of the whole,” (descriptive genitive), he also argues that Tertullian applies Jn 14:28 to the incarnate Son only in *Adv Prax* 9. We will now critically assess Kearsley’s remarks in the next section of this study.

³⁰² E. Evans, *Adversus Praxean*, 247.

³⁰³ Ibid 246.

³⁰⁴ See *Adv Prax* 26; cf. Kearsley, *Tertullian’s Theology*, 123.

³⁰⁵ E. Evans, *Adversus Praxean*, 246.

³⁰⁶ *Dicens autem, Spiritus dei, etsi spiritus dei, tamen non directo deum nominans portionem totius intellegi voluit quae cessura erat in filii nomen.*

³⁰⁷ Compare Juvenal’s *Satura* ix.128ff: *festinat enim decurrere velox flosculus angustae miseraeque breuissima vitae portio; dum bibimus, dum sarta, unguenta, paellas poscimus, obrepit non intellecta senectus Satura.*

³⁰⁸ *De Trin* 11: “because any one who should exclude one *portion* of the truth will never hold the perfect truth” (*quoniam nec tenebit perfectam veritatem quisquis aliquam veritatis excluderit portionem*). See *De Res* 16.

2. Kearsley's Application of John 14:28

Lastly, Kearsley avers that Tertullian refers to the incarnate Son when he references Jn 14:28 in *Adv Prax* 9. The text, he declares, applies to the economy and the economy only. However, the context of *Adv Prax* 9 indicates that neither Ps 8:5 nor Jn 14:28 only apply to the Son's incarnate state. This point seems evident from Tertullian's exegesis of Ps 8:5 in *Adv Marc* 2.27 and the ante-Nicene exegesis of Jn 14:28.

While some church fathers choose to apply Jn 14:28 exclusively to the human nature of Christ, Barrett demonstrates that this textual reading is neither the earliest interpretation nor the predominant explanation of the Johannine text among the pre-Nicenes.³⁰⁹ Most early church writers think that Jn 14:28 is to be explained "independently of the circumstances of the incarnation."³¹⁰ Barrett's evaluation of the exegetical history of Jn 14:28 is confirmed in *Adv Prax* 14, where Tertullian unambiguously applies the Johannine passage to the Son without restricting it to the Incarnation.

In *Adv Prax* 22, Tertullian refers Jn 10:30 to the heavenly *λογος*. Origen also thinks Jn 14:28 teaches that the Father is greater than the Son according to "their proper being and intrinsic relationship."³¹¹ Irenaeus seems to hold a similar doctrinal view.³¹² Additionally, Tertullian believes that Jn 1:9 is a reference to the preexistent

³⁰⁹ CK Barrett's *Essays on John* (London: SPCK, 1982), 27. See the Tome of Leo (*Ad Flavianum, Epistola* 4) and Augustine's *Tractate on John* 78.2.

³¹⁰ Barrett lists Tertullian's *Adv Prax* 9 as one example of a pre-Nicene who thinks that Jn 14:28 refers to the Son independently of His incarnate state. Barrett, *Essays*, 27.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

³¹² Irenaeus reasons: "For if any one should inquire the reason why the Father, who has fellowship with the Son in all things, has been declared by the Lord alone to know the hour and the day [of judgment], he will find at present no more suitable, or becoming, or safe reason than this (since, indeed, the Lord is the only true Master), that we may learn through Him that the Father is above all things. For "the Father," says He, "is greater than I." The Father, therefore, has been declared by our Lord to excel with respect to knowledge; for this reason, that we, too, as long as we are connected with the scheme of things in this world, should leave perfect knowledge, and such questions [as have been mentioned], to God, and should not by any chance, while we seek to investigate the sublime nature of the Father, fall into the danger of starting the question whether there is another God above God." *Adv Haer* 2.28.3.

Son in *Adv Prax* 12. Christ, in his preexistent state, is there called “assistant and minister” of the Father. It should therefore be no surprise that verses commonly interpreted as references to the human *ousia* of Christ in post-Nicene times, were viewed as references to the immanent relationship of the Father and Son by most pre-Nicenes. We therefore conclude that Tertullian follows a pre-Nicene pattern and interprets Jn 14:28 “independently of the circumstances of the incarnation.”

Now that we have assessed Kearsley’s arguments, we will report the findings of this study and conclude by showing the relevance of the investigation we have undertaken. In doing so, we will further summarize the main points emphasized throughout this thesis.

Conclusion

Findings Regarding Tertullian, Psalm 8:5 and Angelomorphic Christology

The initial goal of the present investigation was to explore three questions dealing with Angelomorphic Christology and Ps 8:5. We will now outline three findings of this inquiry in succession.

(1) Daniélou writes that Tertullian rejects all angelomorphic Christology. After exploring Tertullian’s writings, however, we are inclined to think that either Daniélou’s reading of Tertullian needs to be corrected or the ecclesiastical historian is employing the standard nomenclature of Angelomorphic studies in an imprecise manner. For while Tertullian is reluctant to call Christ an angel and he has a manifest “distate” for Angelomorphic Christology, the Carthaginian does not repudiate angelomorphism *in toto*. His writings show that he believes there is a sense in which Christ is or appears as an angel. Tertullian explicitly calls Christ an angel in *De Carne* and avails himself of Angelomorphic themes. Maybe, as Stuckenbruck suggests, one should speak of Tertullian’s angelophanic Christology in view of his depiction of

Christ as the angel of the Lord who appeared to the Hebrew patriarchs and prophets. At any rate, we can safely propose that Tertullian does not reject all Angelomorphic Christology.

(2) More than one commentator has stated that Tertullian thinks there is an ontological divide between Christ and the holy angels of God. Daniélou appeals to *Adv Prax* 3.4-10 to buttress this contention. However, this particular section of Tertullian's work may not provide sufficient warrant for positing an ontological chasm between Christ and the angels since the translation of this passage is definitively uncertain. Furthermore, other parts of Tertullian's work indicate that the angels probably share in the substance, though not the being of God. If man, as a finite rational agent, partakes of the *substantia* of God, then should not the angels also share in the Father's substance? After all, they are superior in status and substance to man. Additionally, Tertullian indicates that the angels administer God's *monarchia*: myriads and myriads of spirit beings attend God's throne. They are thus officials of the esteemed divine monarchy. Tertullian does not posit an ontological chasm vis-à-vis the angels and the two *prolationes* of the Trinity.

(3) The main contention of this study is that God made the Son *qua* Son lower than the angels are. We base this argument on two texts from Tertullian's corpus, namely, *Adv Marc* 2.27 and *Adv Prax* 9. Tertullian primarily invokes Ps 8:5 with reference to the incarnate Son and he further applies the text to the Son as He appears in angelophanies. However, *Adv Marc* 2.27 unambiguously declares that the preincarnate Son became lower than the angels when God generated Him for and before creation. Therefore, it seems that God made the Son as such inferior to the angels for a time. It is imperative to remember that God made the Son inferior before He became a man. Ergo, the basis for such a lesser position in relation to the angels is

the *perfecta nativitas sermonis*, an event antecedent to creation. This complete nativity occurs when God exclaims, *fiat lux*, at the *ab initio creationis*. Additionally, Tertullian argues that the Son is both inferior to and other than the Father in *Adv Prax* 9. His comments apply to the preincarnate Son in view of how Tertullian and other pre-Nicenes elsewhere exegete Jn 14:28.

Implications of This Study

Tertullian is well-versed in the OT writings. He shows familiarity with the divine appellatives and readily invokes the titles appertaining to deity that the Law and Prophets contain. The zealous spokesman for Christianity teaches that the Son is *omnipotens* and is literally the self-designation (*nomen*) of the Father, in some contexts, since He comes in the Father's name.³¹³ Despite formulating a somewhat "high Christology" and interpreting OT references concerning YHWH as references to Christ, Tertullian is nevertheless careful to note that the two deific beings that he so clearly affirms in *Adversus Praxean* are nonetheless unequal in eternity, power and divinity.

The divinity of the second Lord is relative, being dependent on the Father. Furthermore, the second Lord is subordinate to the Father before His Incarnation: the Son *qua* Son is inferior to the angels preceding His enfleshment. Christ the Lord is also not an eternal *persona*. He becomes a Son *in tempo* when God sounds forth His own *λογος*. All of this means that there is a marked disparity between the two Lords toward whom Tertullian displays reverence. Wilken's observation comes to mind, when he writes that the pre-Nicenes thought Christ was God, in some sense, but they did not believe that He was "fully God." In particular, he writes:

During these years [the first three centuries of Christianity's

³¹³ See Tertullian's *De Oratio*.

existence], most Christians vaguely thought of Jesus as God; yet they did not actually think of him in the same way as they thought of God the Father. They seldom addressed prayers to him, and thought of him somehow as second to God—divine, yes, but not fully God.³¹⁴

Two fundamental tenets of Christianity are that God is one deity and that He has revealed Himself through Jesus Christ at the fullness of time (Gal 4:4). Similarly, Richardson points out that the basis of Christian belief is God's unicity and the revelation of Himself "in Jesus Christ."³¹⁵ He then adds:

When the early Christians found it necessary to consider the implications of this conviction they did not find it difficult to suppose that the God *qui est super omnia* allowed his monarchy to be administered by the Son, who was dependent upon Him for immortality and a relative divinity.³¹⁶

At this point, Richardson unequivocally has Tertullian in mind. He explicitly writes: "This is the basis of the argument of Tertullian against Praxeas. The popular idea of the relative divinity of the 'created gods' can be found in Plato (Tim. 41), and, in Stoicism, man is ὁ θεός because he possesses reason, or part of the essence of the Godhead."³¹⁷

The conclusion that we thus draw from the research undertaken here is that Tertullian's doctrine of Christ does not escape a subordination of essence. Tertullian presents Christ as a deity, who only possesses a relative form of divinity. He nuances and qualifies the Son's deity, distinguishing Him from the Father, "who is over all" (*qui est super omnia*). There is also a sense in which the preexistent Christ may be spoken of as a "created god" in view of Tertullian's leanings towards Stoicism and his detailed interpretation of Prov 8:22-31.

In conclusion, we may say that while his particular form of Christian teaching

³¹⁴ R. Wilken, *Christian Beginnings*, 179.

³¹⁵ C. Richardson, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 44.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, fn 70, page 98

did not permanently influence the Christian Church, the theological language that he utilized to delineate the three persons of the Trinity (*tres personae trinitatis*) did have a lasting effect on the subsequent formulation of the Trinity doctrine and the Church's theological doctrine of Christ.³¹⁸ Hence, Milman does not speak hyperbolically, when he notes that Tertullian was the first Latin writer to gain a public hearing and, in view of his activities, one can conclude: "Africa, not Rome, gave birth to Latin Christianity."³¹⁹

³¹⁸ J. Quasten notes: "It is in the doctrine of the Trinity and the intimately connected Christology that Tertullian made the greatest contribution to theology" (*Patrology*, 324). While the present author concurs with Quasten's analysis somewhat, he thinks it is important to make a distinction between Tertullian's contribution to Trinitarian language and his contribution to the ontological dogma itself. We seem justified in concluding that Tertullian is a long way from Nicaea in his thinking and treatment of the Trinity, a point apparently admitted by Quasten himself (326). We do well, therefore, to avoid retrojecting Nicæan language or post-Nicene ontological categories back onto Tertullian's *Adversus Praxean*. Contra Osborn, Tertullian does not believe that the "economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity (a phrase popularized by Karl Rahner)" and vice versa (Osborn, *Tertullian*, 121) Harnack appears to be correct when he limits Tertullian's Trinity to God's economy or *Heilsgeschichte*.

³¹⁹ Henry Milman, *History of Latin Christianity: Including that of the Popes to the Pontificate of Nicolas V*, 8 vols. (New York: W. J. Widdleton, 1870), 1:56-59.

Appendices

I. *Persona and Tertullian*

What does Tertullian intend to say when he categorizes the three metaphysical *supposita*, which presumably constitute the Trinity, as *personae*? Does he thereby impute consciousness to each divine Person?

Grillmeier examines Tertullian's use of the Latin signifier and remarks that he rarely utilizes *persona* to mean: "mask" or "theatre role."³²⁰ He adds that there are about thirty occurrences of the term, having the denotation, "person." The ecclesiastical historian suggests that the Latin church father ascribes individuality or concreteness to the expression at times. Tertullian may also perceive a nexus per *significatio* between *persona* and *substantia* in *Adv Praxean*. Nevertheless, Grillmeier points out that Tertullian does not develop his treatment of the *terminus technicus* beyond the denotation, concrete presentation. *Persona* is "ultimate individualization," according to Tertullian.³²¹ He emphatically rejects the Modalist understanding of the three divine persons as successive temporary modes of being.

We are not sure if Tertullian was the first theologian to use *persona*. He certainly brought it to the fore by attributing a number of different senses (*Simen*) to the word, however. Fortman notes that in Tertullian's literary corpus, *persona* signifies "mask," "face," and is "in a sense equivalent to *homo* or *vir*." *Persona* further connotes "the concrete presentation of an individual as such."³²² Nevertheless, Fortman points out that "the idea of self-consciousness" is not prominent in Tertullian's usage of the word.³²³ The Carthaginian rhetorician evidently does not

³²⁰ Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 126-127. See *De Spec* 22.

³²¹ Kelly writes that *persona* came to denote "individual" as it transitioned from its signification "mask." Tertullian may use it to connote the "concrete presentation of an individual as such" (115).

³²² E. Fortman, *Triune God*, 113.

³²³ J. N. D. Kelly, *History of Early Doctrine*, 115.

impute consciousness, at least not clearly and explicitly, to the three Persons.

II. Substantia and Tertullian

Bethune-Baker maintains that Tertullian may posit a juristic denotation for substance ala Harnack, although this can hardly be what Tertullian means, in view of what he writes in *De Anima* 32 and *Adv Herm* 3. He rightly notes that Tertullian uses *substantia* to denote “a particular form of existence” though he still curiously seems to argue in favor of the juristic understanding of substance in Tertullian.³²⁴

Substance and nature are two distinct modes in Tertullian.³²⁵ Stone and iron are two distinct substances (*substantiae*). But they share the common nature of hardness. Substance demarcates stone and iron; the nature of firmness unites the particulars.³²⁶ Baker thus rightly argues that substance can never mean “nature” in Tertullian.³²⁷ Substance as it pertains to the Father, says Baker, can also function as an “exegetical periphrasis” for the Father Himself. That is, as a delineation of “His own being” in view of *Adv Prax* 8.³²⁸ Conversely, Grillmeier thinks that “By the substance of God, Tertullian understands a light, fine, invisible matter which while being a unity is differentiated within itself.”³²⁹ Father, Son and Holy Spirit thus constitute the “one total reality of God.”³³⁰

Blaise³³¹ supplies the following definitions for *substantia*: substance, matière (*Adv Prax* 14), existence (*vie*), οὐσία or *réalité* (*Adv Prax* 7), *être* (*Adv Prax* 26);

³²⁴ Bethune-Baker, *Early History*, 140

³²⁵ *De Anima* 32

³²⁶ Bethune-Baker, *Early History*, 140-141.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 141. Prestige further observes: “It may be argued that to Tertullian *substantia* did not exclude the notion of secondary substance,” see *Patristic Thought*, 220. He makes a distinction between *substantia* and *natura substantiae*. He notes that *substantia* in Tertullian refers to particulars, but *natura* may be a common feature that obtains between disparate objects. Cattle thus resemble mankind in nature but not substance. Substance is “individualised in a particular instance.”

³²⁸ Bethune-Baker, *Early History*, 141. See *Adv Prax* 4 where *substantia* could have this sense.

³²⁹ Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 142.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

³³¹ *Dictionnaire*, 786-787.

essence, nature, *qualité* (*Adv Prax* 16), *personne*, hypostasis.³³² Coupled with the aforesaid observations in this Appendix, the proofs in this section provide ample evidence that Olson's suggestion regarding *substantia* in Tertullian's *Adversus Praxean* signifying "that fundamental ontological being-ness that makes something what it is" (i.e. the nature of an entity).³³³ More than likely, *substantia* in Tertullian is not what Aristotle calls, secondary substance (*substantia secunda*). Ergo, while one may not be able to settle with definiteness what Tertullian meant by *substantia*, we can confidently argue that Stoicism influenced his theory of being and doctrine of Christ.

³³² See Augustine's *De Trin* 5.8.10.

³³³ Olson, *Story of Christian Theology*, 96.

III. *Sophia and Angelomorphic Christology in Adversus Praxean*

Tertullian follows his theological predecessors in that he posits a precosmic *Sophia* that is an impersonal attribute of God, and not an eternal hypostasis.³³⁴ While Charles Gieschen thinks that Prov 8:22-31 portrays *Sophia* as: “an hypostasis, an aspect of God that has a degree of independent personhood” or that she is the protological “master craftsman” of YHWH, being “beside” God and in his presence—Tertullian maintains that *Sophia* is a divine attribute God uses to bring about the cosmos.³³⁵ When the Most High God speaks the momentous words, “*fiat lux*,” *Sophia* then becomes fully personalized and God makes *Sophia* His Son. Can one speak of Wisdom’s generation in terms of a creative act, however?

Gieschen proposes that the MT language of Prov 8:22 (*qanah*) introduces a procreative motif. He thinks that one should distinguish this particular usage of *qanah* in the MT from *ektisen* in the LXX.³³⁶ Gieschen also contends that the *Sophia* depicted as “begotten” in Proverbs 8:22-31 is a “divine agent” over against being a

³³⁴ That Tertullian thinks of *Sophia* as a divine attribute is evident from his exegesis of Prov 8:22-31 in *Adv Herm* 20.1: “When Wisdom, however, was referred to, it was quite right to say, in the beginning. For it was in Wisdom that He made all things at first, because by meditating and arranging His plans therein, He had in fact already done (the work of creation); and if He had even intended to create out of matter, He would yet have effected His creation when He previously meditated on it and arranged it in His Wisdom, since It was in fact the beginning of His ways: this meditation and arrangement being the primal operation of Wisdom, opening as it does the way to the works by the act of meditation and thought.”

³³⁵ Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 90-91.

κυριος εκτισεν με αρχην οδων αυτοῦ ει εργα αυτους προ του αιωνος
ετημελιωσεν με εν αρχη προ του την γην ποτησαι και προ του τας
αβουσσους ποιησαι προ του προελθειν τας πηγας των υδατων προ
του ορη εδρασθηναι προ δε παντων βουνων γεννα με κυριος
εποιησεν χωρας και ανοικητους και ακρα οικουμενα της υπ ουρανόν (Prov
8:22-26 LXX, Rahlf’s). Vg reads: *Dominus possedit me initium viarum suarum antequam quicquam
faceret a principio ab aeterno ordita sum et ex antiquis antequam terra fieret necdum erant abyssi et
ego iam concepta eram necdum fontes aquarum eruperant* (Prov 8:22-24).

³³⁶ Justin, evidently influenced by the LXX reading, uses the term “created” when delineating the generation of the Logos: “And it is written in the book of Wisdom: ‘If I should tell you daily events, I would be mindful to enumerate them from the beginning. The Lord created me the beginning of His ways for His works. From everlasting He established me in the beginning, before He formed the earth, and before He made the depths, and before the springs of waters came forth, before the mountains were settled; He begets me before all the hills’” (*Dial* 129.3). See Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 1.162-

deific attribute: “some depictions of Wisdom go beyond the bounds of literary personification and present her as an hypostatized aspect of God.”³³⁷ Gieschen also suggests that Angelomorphic motifs significantly influence certain Wisdom traditions: “some Wisdom traditions are dependent upon and were shaped by Angelomorphic traditions.”³³⁸ James Dunn, on the other hand, insists that there is no clear sign that Wisdom language goes beyond “vivid personification” in Proverbs, Sirach or any other Wisdom writings.³³⁹

When critically assessing the Arian Controversy, Wiles submits that according to the language of Scripture: “Wisdom derives its being from God, and the languages of creation and begetting are alternative designations for the same reality.”³⁴⁰ The two expressions are actually interchanged in Isa 1:2; Deut 32:18 and Job 38:28. Create is accordingly a generic term that overlaps with beget implying “the unique and intimate nature of this primary act of creation.”³⁴¹ Eusebius of Nicomedia reasoned in this way. The previously mentioned Bible texts may uphold his interpretation.³⁴²

Werner notes that although Tertullian opposed “Angel-Christology” he did not dispute the putative Christological tradition that had obtained for two centuries earlier.³⁴³ He argues that Tertullian referred to the creation of the Son in Prov 8:22-25: “Tertullian could even maintain, quite impartially, that there was no essential difference between ‘*natum*’ and ‘*factum*’. Thus the creation of Logos-Christ found

163. Cf. Sir 1.4, 9; 24.3. Also Prov 8:24-25.

³³⁷ Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 89.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

³³⁹ James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London: SCM, 1980), 170-173. See Prov 2:6; 3:19; Sir 14.26-15.2; 42:21; Wisdom of Sol 7:22; Song of Sol 8.21-9.6.

³⁴⁰ Maurice Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy: Arianism through the Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 13.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

³⁴² Theodoret, *Church History*, 1.5.

³⁴³ Werner, *Formation*, 138-139.

expression in a twofold manner.”³⁴⁴

Depending on what one means by “creation,” he or she can probably employ such language to describe Tertullian’s Christology. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that Tertullian does not say that the Son came forth *ex nihilo*.

³⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 139-140.

IV. Stoicism and Substance

The ontological basis for Tertullian's notion of substance is the Stoic theory of being. The four categories (*κατηγοριαί*) of Stoic metaphysics are as follows: substance, quality, disposition and relative position.³⁴⁵

Arnold notes that the Stoics considered both substance (i.e. the substrate or underlying reality) and quality to be corporeal.³⁴⁶ The two categories are essentially two aspects of the same reality in Stoicism. We might then say that there is only a formal distinction (*distinctio formalis*) between the two metaphysical classifications of substance and quality.³⁴⁷ Since substance (*το ποιον ὑποκειμενον*) implies existence, however, the Stoics were able to prescind from quality and exclusively contemplate the ontological substance or subject.³⁴⁸

The predications that the Stoics call "quality" (*το ποιον, qualitatis*) determine substance, making it entity *x* or *y*.³⁴⁹ Examples of quality are sweetness, redness, and roundness.³⁵⁰ These qualities, say the Stoics, are also examples of body (*corpus*). They do not exist independently of substance and are therefore *corpora* in a secondary sense.³⁵¹ The Stoics consequently define qualitative causality in terms of motive rarefaction.

Disposition (*πως εχοντα, res quodammodo se habens*) is associated with the

³⁴⁵ Arnold, *Stoicism*, 165-169. Frederick Copleston in *A History of Philosophy: Greece and Rome* (Garden City: Image Books, 1962), 130 notes that the four Stoic categories derive from the ten Aristotelian categories. He then classifies the four Stoic categories as the substrate (*το ὑποκειμενον*), the essential constitution (*το ποιον ὑποκειμενον*), the accidental constitution (*το πως εχον*), and the relative accidental constitution (*το προς τι πως εχον*).

³⁴⁶ Arnold, *Stoicism*, 165.

³⁴⁷ See John D. Caputo's *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 68. He notes that Duns Scotus suggests that essence and existence are two non-distinct realities. Scotus then posits there is only a *distinctio formalis* between existence and essence. Existence is therefore: "a formally different aspect of the selfsame reality which is both essence and existence." Hence, Scotus concludes: "Existence is real, but not a reality (a *res*)."

³⁴⁸ Arnold, *Stoicism*, 165.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 166

συμπτώματα (i.e. accidents) which vary in their nature (sleep, stand, walk, run).³⁵² An accident, in Aristotelian and Stoic language, is a mode of being that can only exist in another being. It is non-essential or non-substantial.³⁵³ Therefore, the self-same entity may alternately sit, stand, walk or run. Sitting, sleeping, walking, and running are not essential properties of a substance. The Stoics thus classify such activities as συμπτώματα.

We can illustrate relative position (πρὸς τι πῶς ἔχον) or “relative accidental constitution” by pointing to right and left hand oppositions that are dependent on opposed relations such as father and son or husband and wife, with each relation being dependent on the other relative position. Slave and master or king and subject are other examples of relative dispositions.³⁵⁴ We should also mention that relative position is a function of *corpus*. Understanding Stoic metaphysics elucidates Tertullian’s use of *substantia*. In the manner of the Stoics, Tertullian emphasizes *corpora* and particulars.

³⁵¹ Rex Warner, *The Greek Philosophers* (New York: Signet, 1958), 166.

³⁵² Arnold, *Stoicism*, 167-168. F. Copleston labels this category, “accidental constitution” (*A History of Philosophy*, 130).

³⁵³ Peter Kreeft, *A Shorter Summa: The Most Essential Philosophical Passages of St. Thomas Aquinas’ Summa Theologica* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993) 27.

³⁵⁴ Arnold, *Stoicism*, 169.

V. Carthage and Christianity

The Libyans inhabited North Africa when the Phoenicians arrived there.³⁵⁵ The Phoenicians eventually settled in Tunisia, a fecund area with two vast rivers named Miliana and Medjerda. The traditional date for the founding of Carthage north of Medjerda is 1101 BCE.³⁵⁶ From that point, Punic Carthage eventually became a nautical force that waged war with the Greeks. This area of North Africa began to expand in the fifth century, and after the three momentous Punic wars, it fell to Rome's Scipio Africanus in 146 BCE. The Romans then commandeered the territory—distributing it as they willed.

Although the Romans conquered Carthage, it “became the seat of the provincial governor and thus the administrative centre of this new province.”³⁵⁷ Rome granted the city exemption from taxation, so that Carthage enjoyed *immunitas*. Consequently, the city prospered, being as prosperous as “any city in Libya.”³⁵⁸ Tertullian, using characteristic hyperbole implied that Carthage was primarily composed of Christians in his day. At the very least, it seems that we may infer that there was a thriving Christian community there in his day.³⁵⁹ Christians were no doubt active in Carthage by 150 CE and even before that time. Christianity may have come to Carthage from the east.³⁶⁰

Regardless of how Christianity originated in Carthage, the historical starting point for the Christian religion in North Africa is the martyrdom of a few Christians at

³⁵⁵ J. B. Rives. *Religion and Authority in Roman Carthage from Augustus to Constantine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 17.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 22-26.

³⁵⁹ *De Scap* 3.1; 5.2.

³⁶⁰ Rives, *Carthage*, 225.

Scilli in 180 CE.³⁶¹ The martyrdom of this small group of Christians (seven men and five women), who refused to offer sacrifices to gods other than the Christian one or swear to the “genius” of the Emperor of Rome,³⁶² adumbrated developments that transpired as Christianity expanded throughout North Africa.³⁶³

³⁶¹ See H. Milman, *Latin Christianity*, 1:56-59.

³⁶² Metzger, *Canon*, 156-157. See *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*.

³⁶³ W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 87.

VI. Tertullian and the *Regula Fidei*

N. T. Wright points out that the Latin term for “creed” (*symbolum*) is not accidental.³⁶⁴ He reports that the first Christian statements of belief functioned as symbols, identifying the community as worshipers of the God revealed through Christ Jesus. Therefore, the early creeds were a matter of a “community seeking definition.”³⁶⁵ That is why these symbols do not stress verbatim phrases or abstract theological formulations. They function as ecclesiastical markers (i.e. signs) nourished in a liturgical context shaped by the ancient Christian community.³⁶⁶ This detail accounts for differences in wording of the *regula fidei*. We provide Tertullian’s wording of the “rule of faith” below so that the reader may see both the complementary ideas expressed in the *regula* that Tertullian outlines as well as the disparate notions articulated:

Now, with regard to this rule of faith—that we may from this point acknowledge what it is which we defend—it is, you must know, that which prescribes the belief that there is one only God, and that He is none other than the Creator of the world, who produced all things out of nothing through His own Word, first of all sent forth; that this Word is called His Son, *and*, under the name of God, was seen “in diverse manners” by the patriarchs, heard at all times in the prophets, at last brought down by the Spirit and Power of the Father into the Virgin Mary, was made flesh in her womb, and, being born of her, went forth as Jesus Christ; thenceforth He preached the new law and the new promise of the kingdom of heaven, worked miracles; having been crucified, He rose again the third day; (then) having ascended into the heavens, He sat at the right hand of the Father; sent instead of Himself the Power of the Holy Ghost to lead such as believe; will come with glory to take the saints to the enjoyment of everlasting life and of the heavenly promises, and to condemn the wicked to everlasting fire, after the resurrection of both these classes shall have happened, together with the restoration of their flesh. This rule, as it will be proved, was taught by Christ, and raises amongst ourselves no other questions than those which heresies introduce, and which make men heretics. (*De Praescr Haer* 13.1-5)³⁶⁷

³⁶⁴ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 368

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁷ *Regula est autem fidei, ut iam hinc quid defendamus profiteamur, illa scilicet qua creditur. Vnum*

Notice the different emphases in the following text:

The rule of faith, indeed, is altogether one, alone immoveable and irreformable; the rule, to wit, of believing in one only God omnipotent, the Creator of the universe, and His Son Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, raised again the third day from the dead, received in the heavens, sitting now at the right (hand) of the Father, destined to come to judge quick and dead through the resurrection of the flesh as well (as of the spirit). This law of faith being constant, the other succeeding points of discipline and conversation admit the "novelty" of correction; the grace of God, to wit, operating and advancing even to the end. (*De Vir Vel* 1.3)

Bray points out that the *regula fidei* recorded in *De Praescriptione* is generally "more detailed, except, interestingly enough, in the clauses which deal with the crucifixion and the resurrection" than Tertullian's delineation of the *regula fidei* elsewhere³⁶⁸ Bray concludes that Tertullian did not view the rule of faith as a "proto-creed."³⁶⁹

omnino Deum esse nec alium praeter mundi conditorem qui uniuersa de nihilo produxerit per uerbum suum primo omnium emissum. Id uerbum filium eius appellatum in nomine Dei uarie uisum a patriarchis, in prophetis semper auditum, postremo delatum ex spiritu patris Dei et uirtute in uirginem Mariam, carnem factum in utero eius et ex ea natum egisse Iesum Christum. Exinde praedicasse nouam legem et nouam promissionem regni caelorum, uirtutes fecisse, cruci fixum, tertia die resurrexisse, in caelos ereptum sedisse ad dexteram patris, misisse uicariam uim spiritus sancti qui credentes agat, uenturum cum claritate ad sumendos sanctos in uitae aeternae et promissorum caelestium fructum et ad profanos adiudicandos igni perpetuo, facta utriusque partis resuscitatione cum carnis restitutione. Haec regula a Christo, ut probabitur, instituta nullas habet apud nos quaestiones nisi quas haereses inferunt et quae haereticos faciunt.

³⁶⁸ Bray, *Holiness*, 100-101.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

VII. Consors

Consors may denote one who shares an inheritance; it can also signify a partner, colleague, or sharer (e.g. a brother, sister, wife) in other contexts.³⁷⁰ The term further delineates living in a community of goods or partaking of property in common. Latin writers employ the word to describe common heirs and the act of dividing something with one; having an equal share or partaking of a particular substance. *Consors* is also used of a partner or of subjects that share the same condition.³⁷¹ Suetonius utilizes the term to depict colleagues in power.³⁷²

³⁷⁰ OLD 1:418.

³⁷¹ Virgil, *Georgicon* 4.153.

³⁷² *Th* 9

VIII. Omnipotence of Christ in Tertullian

Despite Kearsley's insistence to the contrary, it seems that Tertullian believes the Son of God is Omnipotent in a qualified sense.³⁷³ Tertullian reasons that "the Father's name is God Almighty, the Most High, the Lord of hosts, the King of Israel, I am."³⁷⁴ Nevertheless, these names also apply to the Son. The Scriptures attribute divine titles to Him insofar as he became man, "and in these [names] always acted, and thus in himself manifested them to men."³⁷⁵

One name that the Son makes known and functions as the representative for, is God Almighty. The Son is only Omipotent in a limited sense, however. Tertullian explains the Son's omnipotence by appealing to Mt 28:18 and Acts 2:33. The Matthean text shows that Christ received His omnipotence after God raised him from the dead. The Synoptic account declares that God vouchsafed such power to Him. In Acts 2:33, the apostle Peter proclaims that God has seated Christ at His right hand. Thus, the Father has subjected all things to the Son. He is accordingly Almighty in a qualified sense.

On the other hand, Kearsley argues that the Son's omnipotence is not accidental since the quality of almightiness "belongs to the Son on account of both substance *and* economy."³⁷⁶ He bases this conclusion in part on the fact that Christ by virtue of his sonship and status, as *λογος του θεου* is *omnipotens*. Admittedly, Tertullian does attribute almightiness to the Word as such, though it appears the Son *qua* Son only possesses omnipotence derivatively.

³⁷³ See R. Kearsley, *Tertullian's Theology*, 115.

³⁷⁴ *Adv Prax* 17.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁶ R. Kearsley, *Tertullian's Theology*, 128.

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