

The Evolution of God

4. The Early Christian Apologists

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The pastoral Christian writers from earliest times wrote primarily to interact with fellow Christians. Yet shortly after the last Apostles died, some took up the task as apologists for pristine Christianity, interacting indirectly and/or directly with the outside world, both with the Jews and with the Greeks and Romans. The greatest and most widely read of these earliest Christian apologists was Justin Martyr of Rome. The term “Martyr” is descriptive, not his real name. He is famous for being beheaded because of his staunch and bold defense of Christianity and condemnation and ridicule of paganism and the Greek philosophers.

Justin Martyr of Rome:

Justin (AD 100-165) was the earliest Christian writer outside the New Testament to give us an extremely detailed description and defense of the apostolic view of God and His Son. He was born about the time of John’s death. Justin was originally from Samaria of Roman ancestry. He had initially pursued Greek philosophy but became disgusted with its schools, its teachers, and its failure to answer his nagging questions. Justin completely abandoned those studies when an older Christian man pointed him to the superior, divinely inspired “philosophy” of the Hebrew prophets.¹ After becoming a Christian, Justin eventually settled in Rome as a member of the Roman assembly. There is no direct evidence that he held the office of elder or deacon. However, he was a highly respected Christian teacher, writer, and apologist. Justin defended apostolic Christianity in written works addressed to the Roman emperor,² to the Roman Senate,³ and to the pagan Greeks and Romans.⁴ He was no lightweight in the Roman assembly. Justin’s Apologies provide details of many of the universally accepted beliefs and practices of Christians at Rome at the close of the apostolic age. Justin’s works addressed to the pagans contrasted pristine Christian monotheism with Roman and Greek polytheism, attempting to appeal to the polytheistic mind using terminology and concepts familiar in the Greco-Roman culture. For this reason he is sometimes wrongly charged with syncretism between Greek and Christian concepts. The reality is, however, that he employed the same kind of arguments that Paul used in his address to the Greeks at Athens in Acts 17.

¹ For Justin’s own testimony to this fact, see the first few chapters of his Dialogue with Trypho.

² First Apology of Justin

³ Second Apology of Justin

⁴ Discourse to the Greeks; Hortatory Address to the Greeks

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The following quote is from Justin's presentation to the Roman Emperor concerning the Christian doctrine of the one true God and His only-begotten Son. As such, his address presumes that he was speaking for all of the Christian assemblies under the rule of the Roman Emperor.

"Jesus Christ is the only proper Son who has been begotten by God, being His Word and first-begotten, and power; and, becoming man according to His will, He taught us these things for the conversion and restoration of the human race."⁵

In this short quote Justin acknowledged three important theological points: (1) that the Son was "begotten" by God as His only literally "begotten Son," thus illustrating the early Christian understanding of the term "only-begotten," (2) that as such He was called "Word" (Logos – of John 1:1), and (3) He afterwards was transformed into a Man, using the term "becoming" (taken from John 1:14), which implies transformation into flesh not merely adding flesh as the later Platonic-Incarnation doctrine required.

In the same work, Justin spoke more extensively about the preexistence of the Son prior to His transformation to the Man Jesus.

"But lest some should, without reason, and for the perversion of what we teach, maintain that we say that Christ was born one hundred and fifty years ago under Cyrenius, and subsequently, in the time of Pontius Pilate, taught what we say He taught; and should cry out against us as though all men who were born before Him were irresponsible — let us anticipate and solve the difficulty. We have been taught that Christ is the first-born of God, and we have declared above that He is the Word of whom every race of men were partakers; But who, through the power of the Word, according to the will of God the Father and Lord of all, He was born of a virgin as a man, and was named Jesus, and was crucified, and died, and rose again, and ascended into heaven, an intelligent man will be able to comprehend from what has been already so largely said."⁶

In his Christian apologetic work addressed to the Roman Senate, Justin also explained the origin of the Son, His preexistence, and His complete transformation to humanity.

"But to the Father of all, who is unbegotten, there is no name given. For by whatever name He be called. He has as His elder the person who gives Him the name. But these words, Father, and God, and Creator, and Lord, and master, are not names, but appellations derived from His good deeds and functions. And His son, who alone is properly called Son,

⁵ Justin, First Apology (to the Emperor), ch. xxiii

⁶ Ibid ch. ilvi

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*the Word, who also was with him and was begotten before the works, when at first He created and arranged all things by Him, is called Christ, in reference to His being anointed and God's ordering all things through Him; this name itself also containing an unknown significance; as also the appellation "God" is not a name, but an opinion implanted in the nature of men of a thing that can hardly be explained. But "Jesus," His name as man and Saviour, has also significance. For He was made man also, as we before said, having been conceived according to the will of God the Father, for the sake of believing men, and for the destruction of the demons."*⁷

As with the previous quotes, Justin emphasized the crucial points regarding the earliest Christology: (1) that The Son of God is the only one properly and literally "begotten" by God (thus God's "only-begotten Son," the only one literally "begotten" out of God), (2) that God is His "elder" which denies a co-eternal existence, (3) that "Word" (Logos) was His name, (3) that the Son "*was with Him and was begotten before the works*" of creating the world, (4) that God "*created and arranged all things by Him,*" and (4) that "*He was made Man*" and then named "*Jesus.*" This language again implies transformation of nature, essence, and kind, not merely cloaking Himself in human flesh while remaining essentially unchanged or undiminished.

All of Justin's works, being apologetic in nature, presume to speak publicly for Christians in general at the time of writing (middle of the second century). Even though there were some small clusters of Christians who held different opinions on certain points and practices, these did not affect the basic and primary theology concerning God and His Son in the middle of the second century (around fifty years after John's death).

Especially helpful for our purposes is Justin's longest and greatest work, his "*Dialogue with Trypho (a Jew).*" This work is unlike his other apologetic works which were addressed to pagans in which he used language and concepts familiar to their way of thinking in order to introduce Christianity. In those works Justin did not get deep into theology or biblical exegesis, since such would have been meaningless to his audience. However, Justin's Dialogue with Trypho the Jew digs deep into the Old Testament Scriptures and rests on the common framework, using the Scriptures and terminology common between the Jews and the Christians.

Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* is portrayed as a transcript of an extensive theological discussion between Justin and Trypho, a Jewish student of the rabbis.⁸ This face to face

⁷ Justin, 2nd Apology, ch. vi.

⁸ Some claim that the debate never took place, and that Justin wrote this as a means to educate Christians how to successfully interact with Jews. The fact that in the end, Trypho was not persuaded and did not become a Christian,

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discussion occurred in Rome, “while I was going about one morning in the walks of the Xystus.”⁹ The discussion/debate pitted Christian theology at the end of the apostolic age against the theology of the rabbis and synagogues of that time who were vehemently opposing Christianity. The direct interaction is extremely helpful because Justin as a Christian and Trypho as a rabbinical student shared a common starting point – their acceptance of the Old Testament Scriptures as inspired by God Himself. Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho* sheds plenty of light on early Christian monotheism in Rome as well as the state of rabbinic Judaism just a few decades after the fall of Jerusalem. But more importantly, it demonstrates the biblical basis and interpretation of a host of Old Testament texts used to support it. It is therefore extremely valuable for our purposes in understanding both apostolic Christianity and its historical standing within the current Jewish monotheism. The honest student of Justin’s works should be able to easily discern that the basis for His view concerning God and His Son rests squarely upon the Jewish Scriptures, and not on the writings of the Greek philosophers.

After offering his personal testimony, why he abandoned Greek philosophy in favor of the Hebrew prophets, Justin declared to Trypho and his companions that the God of the Christians is the same God the Jews worshipped, the one and only true God. Thus, they had the same basic monotheism in common. It is important to note that Trypho, as a rabbinical student, did not object to Justin’s statement of this fact.

“There will be no other God, O Trypho, nor was there from eternity any other existing’ (I thus addressed him), ‘but He who made and disposed all this universe. Nor do we think that there is one God for us, another for you, but that He alone is God who led your fathers out from Egypt with a strong hand and a high arm. Nor have we trusted in any other (for there is no other), but in Him in whom you also have trusted, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.’”¹⁰

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

argues against that conjecture. But even if it were true, in order to be an effective tool to evangelize Jews, the theological positions of both Christians and Jews at the time would have to be presented accurately. So, in either case, it serves our purposes well in documenting what those views were.

⁹ Justin, *Dialogue*, ch. I, the Xystus was “(in ancient Rome) a covered garden walk or one lined with trees”

<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Xystus>

¹⁰ Justin, *Dialogue*, ch. xi

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*“And Trypho said, ‘Sir, it were good for us if we obeyed our teachers, who laid down a law that we should have no intercourse with any of you, and that we should not have even any communication with you on these questions. **For you utter many blasphemies, in that you seek to persuade us that this crucified man was with Moses and Aaron, and spoke to them in the pillar of the cloud; then that he became man, was crucified, and ascended up to heaven, and comes again to earth, and ought to be worshipped.**”¹¹*

According to Trypho, the Jewish rabbis had forbidden their Jewish students from all dialogue with Christians. This was in part because Christians claimed that “this crucified man” (Jesus) preexisted as the one who had appeared to the patriarchs and Moses, and had afterward become fully human and was crucified. That the rabbis had forbidden their students from entering discussions with Christians partly on this account shows that it was indeed the common Christian teaching of the time, fully known to the Jewish rabbis, **and was therefore not unique to Justin** nor was it a minority opinion. Note that Trypho brought this charge against Christians after Justin announced that they worshipped the same one true God.

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

“Justin does well say: ‘I would not have believed the Lord Himself, if He had announced any other than He who is our framer, maker, and nourisher. But because the only-begotten Son came to us from the one God, who both made this world and formed us, and contains and administers all things, summing up His own handiwork in Himself, my faith towards Him is steadfast, and my love to the Father immoveable, God bestowing both upon us.’ For no one can know the Father, unless through the Word of God, that is, unless by the Son revealing [Him]; neither can he have knowledge of the Son, unless through the good pleasure of the Father.”¹²

This very close association with the apostolic age and even with the Apostles themselves is an insurmountable problem for Unitarians who deny the preexistence of the Son and

¹¹ Justin, Dialogue, ch. xxxviii

¹² Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. IV, ch. vi:2-3

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for Trinitarians who claim that the Son co-existed eternally with the Father. Justin's Dialogue with Trypho makes the fact abundantly certain that at the close of the apostolic age Christians in general were seeking to persuade Jews that it was the Son of God who personally led Israel out of Egypt, the one who was with Moses, who spoke in the pillar of cloud. It was not God the Father Himself.¹³ Many New Testament Scriptures agree, claiming that God is invisible, and that He has never been seen by mortals, nor can He be seen by mortals.¹⁴

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

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

That Justin referred to the preexistence of Christ as "*this great Wisdom of God*" and that this was a mystery that was "hidden" from the Jews strongly implies that he was relying upon Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 2:7-8. "*But we speak **the wisdom of God** in a mystery, the **hidden wisdom** which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have **crucified the Lord of glory.***"

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

*"And Trypho said, 'We have heard what you think of these matters. Resume the discourse where you left off, and bring it to an end. For some of it appears to me to be paradoxical, and wholly incapable of proof. For **when you say that this Christ existed as God before the ages, then that He submitted to be born and become man**, yet that He is not man of man,¹⁵ this [assertion] appears to me to be not merely paradoxical, but also foolish."*¹⁶

Justin's task was divided into two parts; first, to prove that there was a second person called "God" who appeared as "God" to the patriarchs, second, to prove that this second person became man and was in fact Jesus Christ who was crucified.

¹³ In 1 Cor. 10:1-4, Paul identified Israel's 'Rock' (from Deut. 32:4,15,18,30,31) with Christ. See also Exodus 23:20.

¹⁴ John 1:18; John 5:37; John 6:46; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 Tim. 6:16; Heb. 11:27; 1 John 4:12,20

¹⁵ That is, born of a virgin without a human father

¹⁶ Justin Dialogue, ch. xlvi

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

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

'Do you think that God appeared to Abraham under the oak in Mamre, as the Scripture asserts?'

He said, 'Assuredly.'

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

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

*Then I replied, 'Reverting to the Scriptures, I shall endeavor to persuade you, that He who is said to have appeared to Abraham, and to Jacob, and to Moses, and who is called God, is distinct from Him who made all things, — numerically, I mean, not [distinct] in will. For I affirm that He has never at any time done anything which He who made the world — above whom there is no other God — has not wished Him both to do and to engage Himself with.'*¹⁷

Justin went on to prove that this second Person who is also called "God," who was one of the three that appeared to Abraham, was distinct from "God" in heaven. He did so by continuing in this passage down to Genesis 19:23.

"Then I said, 'The Scripture just quoted by me will make this plain to you. It is thus: "The sun was risen on the earth, and Lot entered into Segor (Zoar); and the Lord rained on Sodom sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven, and overthrew these cities and all the neighborhood.'"¹⁸

¹⁷ Justin, Dialogue, ch. lvi

¹⁸ Justin, Dialogue, ch. lvi

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Justin went on to give more proof from the Psalms that there is a second person, distinct from God, who is called both “God” and “Lord” by David.

*“It is not on this ground solely,’ I said, ‘that it must be admitted absolutely that some other one is called Lord by the Holy Spirit besides Him who is considered Maker of all things; not solely [for what is said] by Moses, but also [for what is said] by David. For there is written by him: “**The Lord says to my Lord**, Sit on My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool,”¹⁹ as I have already quoted. And again, in other words: “**Thy throne, O God**, is for ever and ever. A sceptre of equity is the sceptre of Thy kingdom: Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity: therefore **God, even Thy God**, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows.” If, therefore, you assert that the Holy Spirit calls some other one God and Lord, besides the Father of all things and His Christ, answer me.’”*

Justin continued citing several other examples to prove his first task, that there is a second Person called both “God” and “Lord” in the Jewish Scriptures.²⁰ God has always interacted with humanity through His personal agent, never Himself directly. This personal agent of God is referred to in Scripture as “the Messenger (Angel) of the Lord,” “the Word,” “Wisdom,” “Son,” and other titles. Yet this agent was begotten by God Himself, not created from matter, before any of His works of creation. Justin repeatedly reinforced this point to prove just who this second person called God was.

*“I shall give you another testimony, my friends,” said I, “from the Scriptures, that **God begat before all creatures a Beginning**, [who was] a certain rational power [proceeding] from Himself, who is called by the Holy Spirit, now the Glory of the Lord, now the Son, again Wisdom, again an **Angel** [Messenger], then God, and then Lord and Logos [Word]; and on another occasion He calls Himself Captain when He appeared in human form to Joshua the son of Nave (Nun). For He can be called by all those names, since He ministers to the Father’s will, and since **He was begotten of the Father** by an act of will; The Word of Wisdom, who is Himself this God **begotten of the Father** of all things, and Word, and Wisdom, and Power, and the Glory of the Begetter, will bear evidence to me, ...”²¹*

This earliest recorded Christian view of God’s Son (outside the New Testament) was monotheistic in this sense: that there is one unbegotten, uncreated, all-powerful, eternal

¹⁹ Psalm 110:1

²⁰ Justin was of course quoting from the Septuagint. However his argument is even more powerful from the Hebrew text because some of the passages he cited not only use the Hebrew terms “Elohim” and “Adonai,” but also use God’s covenantal name, “YHVH” (Jehovah). Thus, this second Person who Justin proved was the Messenger of YHVH was called by God’s titles as well as by His personal name YHVH.

²¹ Justin, Dialogue, ch. lxi

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Being who exists outside of the creation – the Father. What appears to be a second Person referred to as “God” in the Old Testament was not another deity of equal power, as in the many competing gods of polytheism. Rather, the second Person was “*begotten by the Father by an act of the will*” at the beginning of creation week. Consequently, as a Son begotten of the Father, He necessarily was of the same kind, sharing in the divine attributes (just as a human son shares the human attributes of his father). Yet, the Son is not another self-sustaining, eternal, independent Deity. Rather, His nature and His authority was the Father’s (just as Seth received humanity from Adam). The Son was begotten by the Father for the purpose of being His personal agent to mankind, playing a mediator role in the divine monarchy.

In the earliest Christian theology, God never interacted personally (visibly or audibly) with mankind in the Old Testament. He instead always interacted through His personal agent, His only-begotten Son, “the Messenger of the LORD”²² whom God fathered at the beginning of time (the six days of creation), before creating anything. Thus, no one has ever seen God – the Father, or even heard His voice in Old Testament times. These concepts are explicitly stated in the New Testament,²³ but Justin did not cite the New Testament because Trypho did not accept the New Testament. So Justin confined his biblical arguments to the Old Testament exclusively.

The Son was entrusted with God’s personal name (YHVH) as a means of extending His authority to act on His behalf and to enter into covenants in God’s name,²⁴ even to forgive sins.²⁵ His authority was so complete to act on God’s behalf that what “the Messenger of the LORD” did, God is said to have done. Thus, “the Messenger of the LORD” carried the authority of God who sent Him. Worship of the unique “Messenger of the LORD,” God’s only-begotten Son, was considered vicarious worship of God Himself through His personal agent. This is how the earliest Christians maintained monotheism, yet at the same time acknowledged the divinity, the likeness of kind, of the only-begotten Son. They worshiped the Messenger as an expression of worship of the one true God who sent Him. Jesus Himself validated this concept of vicarious worship when He said, “*Whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me.*”²⁶

²² See: Justin, Dialogue, ch. cxxvii

²³ John 1:18; John 5:37; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 Tim. 6:16; Heb. 11:27; 1 John 4:12,20

²⁴ Gen. 22:11-18

²⁵ Exodus 23:20-23

²⁶ Mark 9:37

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Justin went on to appealed to the clause, “*Let Us make man in Our image, and after Our likeness,*”²⁷ claiming that God was speaking to His Son whom He had just begotten as a distinct Person to be His Agent.

*“And the same sentiment was expressed, my friends, by the word of God [written] by Moses, when it indicated to us, with regard to Him whom it has pointed out, that God speaks in the creation of man with the very same design, in the following words: ‘Let **Us** make man after **our** image and likeness. . . . I shall quote again the words narrated by Moses himself, from which we can indisputably learn that [God] conversed with **someone who was numerically distinct from Himself, and also a rational Being**. These are the words: ‘And God said, Behold, Adam has become as one of **Us**, to know good and evil.’ In saying, therefore, ‘as one of **Us**,’ [Moses] has declared that [there is a certain] number of persons associated with one another, and that they are at least two. For I would not say that the dogma of that heresy which is said to be among you is true, or that the teachers of it can prove that [God] spoke to angels, or that the human frame was the workmanship of angels. But **this Offspring, which was truly brought forth from the Father, was with the Father before all the creatures**, and the Father communed with Him; even as the Scripture by Solomon has made clear, that **He whom Solomon calls Wisdom, was begotten as a Beginning before all His creatures and as Offspring by God,**²⁸ who has also declared this same thing in the revelation made by Joshua the son of Nave (Nun). Listen, therefore, to the following from the book of Joshua, that what I say may become manifest to you; it is this: ‘And it came to pass, when Joshua was near Jericho, he lifted up his eyes, and sees a man standing over against him. And Joshua approached to Him, and said, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And He said to him, I am **Captain** of the Lord’s host: now have I come. And Joshua fell on his face on the ground, and said to Him, Lord, what commandest Thou Thy servant? And the Lord’s Captain says to Joshua, Loose the shoes off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. And Jericho was shut up and fortified, and no one went out of it. And **the Lord** said to Joshua, Behold, I give into thine hand Jericho, and its king, [and] its mighty men.’”²⁹*

“The Messenger of the LORD” was certainly known to Trypho because He is repeatedly mentioned in the Torah of Moses, and in Joshua and Judges. He was the one who appeared in the burning bush, saying to Moses: “*I am the God of your father – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.*”³⁰ “The Messenger of the LORD” is the one who called to Abraham out of heaven, telling him not to slay his son Isaac, and swearing

²⁷ Gen. 1:26

²⁸ Prov. 8:22-31

²⁹ Justin, Dialogue with Trypho, ch. lxii

³⁰ Exodus 3:2-6

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the oath of the covenant: *“by Myself I have sworn,’ says the LORD, ‘because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son – blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.’”*³¹

According to Justin, this Messenger was the Son of God, having been begotten at the beginning of creation (as “the Beginning” of God’s works in measured time), and was also the agent through whom God created everything, including the angels. He is the one who has always interacted with man as God’s personal Agent. He is the one who walked with Adam in Eden, the one who commanded Noah to build the ark, and the one who called Abraham to leave His homeland and go to the place he would afterward receive as the permanent inheritance.

*“What larger measure of grace, then, **did Christ bestow on Abraham?** This, namely, that **He called him with His voice** by the like calling, telling him to quit the land wherein he dwelt. And He has called all of us by that voice, and we have left already the way of living in which we used to spend our days, passing our time in evil after the fashions of the other inhabitants of the earth; and along with Abraham we shall inherit the Holy Land, when we shall receive the inheritance for an endless eternity, being children of Abraham through the like faith. For as he believed the voice of God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness, in like manner we having believed God’s voice spoken by the apostles of Christ, and promulgated to us by the prophets, have renounced even to death all the things of the world. Accordingly, He promises to him a nation of similar faith, God-fearing, righteous, and delighting the Father”*³²

Justin’s first task involved demonstrating there is indeed a second Person called “God” and “Lord” and then identifying Him as the divine “Messenger of God” who spoke in the name of God.

After Justin had drawn many similar arguments directly from the Old Testament Scriptures Trypho finally admitted that Justin had proven his first task, that there was another – the “Messenger of the LORD” – who was numerically distinct from God, yet who is also called “God,” even called by God’s personal name, YHVH.

Trypho then insisted that Justin prove the second thesis from the Scriptures, this second Person called “God” became a fully human being capable of death.

³¹ Gen. 22:11-18

³² Justin, Dialogue with Trypho, ch. xxxii

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*“And Trypho said, ‘This point has been proved to me forcibly, and by many arguments, my friend. It remains, then, to prove that **He submitted to become man** by the Virgin, according to the will of His Father; and to be crucified, and to die. Prove also clearly, that after this He rose again and ascended to heaven.’”³³*

*“... you may now proceed to explain to us how **this God** who appeared to Abraham, and **is minister to God the Maker of all things**, being born of the virgin, became man, of like passions with all, as you said previously.”³⁴*

Having accepted Justin’s proof, there is a glaring admission on Trypho’s part which should not go unnoticed by the careful reader who holds the Unitarian viewpoint. **Trypho, himself a Jewish student of the rabbis, referred to two persons called “God” in the Jewish Scriptures.** That is, he acknowledged something that Unitarians claim is utterly impossible, claiming that Jewish monotheism was incapable of absorbing. Further, Trypho made no charge at all against Justin or Christians in general concerning allegedly abandoning monotheism.³⁵ The idea of a second Person called “God” in the Old Testament did not come as a great shock at all to Trypho, a second century Jew, nor did he consider it an affront to the Shema or Jewish monotheism, as Unitarians do today. In fact, Trypho acknowledged that Justin had indeed proven this critical point from the Jewish Scriptures. There is indeed a second Person called “Lord” and “God” in the Old Testament who is the divine Messenger and personal agent of the one true God. Trypho would have made no such admission if doing so had been viewed either by himself or by his Jewish teachers as abandoning the Shema – *“Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.”*³⁶ This fact should give pause to Unitarians, Rabbinic Jews, and Muslims, or anyone who would claim that a preincarnate Son, begotten by God of the same kind, is incompatible with early Jewish monotheism. It was not considered incompatible with monotheism by the Jews in Justin’s day. Neither was it considered incompatible a century earlier in Jesus’ day as is proven by the reactions of the Scribes and Pharisees to Jesus’ repeated claims to being the begotten Son of God (particularly in John’s Gospel), having

³³ Justin, Dialogue, ch. lxiii

³⁴ Justin, Dialogue, ch. lviii

³⁵ This is critically important because the entire basis for Unitarians’ denial of the preexistence of Christ is the supposed incompatibility with the “one God” statements of Jewish monotheism. Trypho’s reactions to Justin’s proof absolutely overthrows this basic assumption of Unitarianism and shows that the earliest view of the Godhead by Christians was not at all incompatible with Jewish monotheism.

³⁶ Rabbinic scholar, Alan F. Segal, in his major work, “Two Powers in Heaven,” has demonstrated that this very idea was not considered heretical (or contrary to the passages that claim monotheism) by Jewish authorities in the early second century. It was only labeled “heresy,” and contrary to monotheism, later due to Christianity’s claims that Jesus is “the second power in heaven.”

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been sent down from heaven by His Father,³⁷ and even having “*emerged out of God*.”³⁸ No charges of abandonment of monotheism or the Shema were ever hurled at Jesus. Neither were such charges ever made against the Apostles as they interacted with the synagogues throughout the Roman Empire. The sole charge against Jesus and His Apostles by the Jews was that Jesus was making Himself out to be someone He was not. He therefore had no authority to supersede the Law of Moses with His own Law. They could not accept that Jesus was “the Christ” of prophecy. The reason no charges of polytheism were ever hurled by Jews at Jesus, the Apostles, or Justin was because the claims concerning Christ by Christians did no damage at all to monotheism (as defined by Temple Judaism), because Christians did not hold Him up as a co-equal and co-eternal second person of a Trinity. Rather, all claims concerning the Son of God were consistent with Old Testament monotheism, viewing Jesus Christ as formerly the divine Messenger of the LORD, God’s begotten Son, a Person well documented in the Jewish Scriptures, just as Justin conclusively proved to Trypho. The concept of a single divine authority or “monarchy” (monotheism) was maintained because the Son was subordinate to His Father, from the Father’s own essence, acting as His agent and mediator to mankind.

Trypho’s remaining hurdle, after having acknowledging the second divine Person in the prophetic Scriptures, was the Christian claim that this second Person had become Man as the Messiah, especially that He was “this crucified man” in particular, whose messianic claims the Jews had rejected. Justin responded to Trypho’s challenge “to prove that He submitted to become man by the Virgin, according to the will of His Father; and to be crucified, and to die,” by appealing to several passages including Isaiah 53’s statement, “who will declare His generation?”³⁹

However, Isaiah 7:14 was Justin’s strongest proof. The human virgin of the house of David would supernaturally conceive a Son, without a man, whose name would be called “Emmanuel,” meaning “**God with us**.”⁴⁰ While Trypho objected to the term “virgin” in the LXX on the grounds that the Hebrew word merely means a young maiden of

³⁷ John 3:13; John 3:31; John 6:33,38,51,62; John 8:23; John 16:28

³⁸ John 8:42 reads: εἰ ὁ Θεὸς πατὴρ ὑμῶν ἦν, ἠγαπᾶτε ἂν ἐμέ· ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐξῆλθον (Lit. “If God was your Father you would love Me, for **I emerged out of God** ...”).

³⁹ Isa. 53:6 was taken by Justin to show that the Jews were ignorant of His transformation to flesh, the word “generation” referring to His human “generation” in the womb of a virgin.

⁴⁰ Justin, Dialogue, ch. lxvi. In the following chapter, Trypho disputed the Greek Septuagint that Justin quoted which has “ἡ παρθένοσ” (the virgin), insisting instead on the Hebrew text which has “הַמְלָצָה” (young woman), claiming that the prophecy was about the birth of king Hezekiah, who was a “son” of God by adoption. Justin went on to show that the prophecy could not refer to Hezekiah but only to the Messiah, and that even in the Hebrew Bible this term only refers to a virgin. Justin’s point concerning the term “virgin” was to show that the Son had no human father, which is why He is called “God with us.” (See: chs. lxxviii & lxxvii - lxxviii).

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marriageable age,⁴¹ Justin's real point did not really hinge on the fact that Mary was a virgin, but rather that this human child was called "Emmanuel," which means "God with us," thus showing that the second person called "God" was the one who became a man.

Justin also appealed to Isaiah 9:6 as proof that it was the one called "the Messenger of the LORD" who was later to be born as this human child and would be Messiah. "*And when Isaiah calls Him the Angel [Messenger] of Mighty Counsel, did he not foretell Him to be the Teacher of those truths which He did teach when He came [to earth]? For He alone taught openly those mighty counsels which the Father designed both for all those who have been and shall be well-pleasing to Him.*"⁴² The clause "the Messenger of Mighty Council" was Justin's quote from Isaiah 9:6 in the LXX⁴³ which is significantly different from the modern Hebrew text in this passage. The modern Masoretic Text reads:

"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, ⁴⁴ Prince of Peace.⁴⁵

But the LXX reads:

ὅτι παιδίον ἐγεννήθη ἡμῖν, υἱὸς καὶ ἐδόθη ἡμῖν, οὗ ἡ ἀρχὴ ἐγενήθη ἐπὶ τοῦ ὤμου αὐτοῦ, καὶ καλεῖται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ **μεγάλης βουλῆς ἄγγελος**. ἐγὼ γὰρ ἄξω εἰρήνην ἐπὶ τοὺς ἄρχοντας εἰρήνην καὶ ὑγίειαν αὐτῶ⁴⁶

A literal translation is as follows:⁴⁷

⁴¹ Justin, Dialogue, ch. lxvii

⁴² Justin, Dialogue with Trypho, ch. lxxvi

⁴³ LXX, the Roman numeral for 70, was the abbreviated title for the Greek translation of the Old Testament made around 250 BC by 70 Jewish scholars for Ptolemy, king of Egypt for his library at Alexandria. Throughout this discourse, Justin referred to "the Translation of the Seventy" in contrast to the Hebrew text extant at the time. This translation was in wide use in the synagogues in Jesus' day, and is the basis for most of the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament.

⁴⁴ The Hebrew אבִיָּהוּ can also be translated, "Father of the age to come."

⁴⁵ NASB Some translations, such as the KJV & NKJV, incorrectly render "Wonderful" and "Counselor" as distinct names rather than "Wonderful" being an adjective modifying "Counselor."

⁴⁶ Alfred Rahlfs, Septuaginta, Vol. II, p. 578, Privileg. Wurt. Bibelanstalt Stuttgart (1935).

⁴⁷ The author's literal translation from the Greek

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“Because a child was⁴⁸ born to us, and a Son was given to us, of whom the Beginning⁴⁹ occurred⁵⁰ upon His shoulder: and his name is called the Messenger of Great Counsel. For I will bring peace upon the rulers, and health to him.”

That the Septuagint reading which Justin quoted was known and considered valid by Trypho (rather than the modern Masoretic Text’s “wonderful counselor”) is shown by Trypho’s response to Justin’s treatment of Isaiah 9:6 from the LXX.

“Then Trypho said, ‘I admit that such and so great arguments are sufficient to persuade one; but I wish [you] to know that I ask you for the proof which you have frequently proposed to give me. Proceed then to make this plain to us, that we may see how you prove that that [passage] refers to this Christ of yours.’”⁵¹

Thus Trypho, who knew both the Hebrew text and the Greek LXX, did not object in this case to Justin’s quote of Isaiah 9:6 from the LXX or his proof from it that the “Messenger of God” who was here called “*the Messenger of Great Council*” would be born as a child.⁵² According to Trypho, what Justin was attempting to prove was an absurdity.

“And Trypho said, “You endeavor to prove an incredible and well-nigh impossible thing; [namely], that God endured to be born and become man.”⁵³

This is an important statement regarding Trypho’s understanding of what Christians believed. The evolution of the doctrine the transformation of the Son to humanity, how it originally meant a total transformation of nature from the God-kind to the human-kind, and how this was eventually modified to mean an unchanging divine being merely cloaking Himself in human flesh (in the Platonic mold), will be dealt with extensively in the sixth article in this series. Yet it is important to recognize at this very early period Justin was not in any sense arguing for Jesus being an immortal divine being merely

⁴⁸ Note the use of the past tense (aorist indicative) throughout the prophecy, speaking from the perspective of after the events were to be carried out. This was a device for expressing the certainty of the prophecy.

⁴⁹ ἡ ἀρχὴ literally means “the beginning,” but can also be translated rule, authority, or government.

⁵⁰ The Greek verb ἐγενήθη means either to “happen” or “occur,” to come into being (be generated), or to become something else (a transformation).

⁵¹ Justin, Dialogue with Trypho, ch. lxxvii

⁵² Elsewhere in this Dialogue there were disputes over the rendering in the LXX vs. the Hebrew Text. One such difference discussed between them was the word “virgin” in Isaiah 7:14 while the Hebrew word specifies a maiden of marriageable age while not specifically requiring her to be a virgin. While Justin’s point sometimes rested on the LXX reading, whenever textual differences were brought up, Justin would allow the Hebrew reading for the sake of argument and then go on to prove his point from other passages where no such disagreements occur.

⁵³ Ch. lxxviii

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clothing Himself in human flesh, but rather that He was entirely transformed to become completely human.

Trypho's admissions show that the acceptance of a second Person called "God" and even His transformation to human flesh, was not antithetical to monotheism as expressed in the Shema. The objection was merely that this transformation appeared preposterous to Trypho. He agreed to the concept of a second Person called God and Lord, and he could not refute Justin's attempt to prove the transformation to humanity from such passages as Isaiah 7:14 and Isaiah 9:6-7. However, he simply refused to acknowledge that Jesus of Nazareth, "this crucified man," was indeed the Messiah of Israel. This is what was considered anathema by the Jewish authorities. And this is perfectly consistent with the picture we have in the Gospels, "for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue."⁵⁴

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

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

*"This, then, 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive,' signifies that a virgin should conceive without intercourse. For if she had had intercourse with any one whatever, she was no longer a virgin; but ***the power of God having come upon the virgin, overshadowed her***, and caused her while yet a virgin to conceive. And the angel of God who was sent to the same virgin at that time brought her good news, saying, 'Behold, ***thou shalt conceive****

⁵⁴ John 9:22

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of the Holy Spirit,⁵⁵ and shalt bear a Son, and He shall be called the Son of the Highest, and thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins,' — as they who have recorded all that concerns our Savior Jesus Christ have taught, whom we believed, since by Isaiah also, whom we have now adduced, the Spirit of prophecy declared that He should be born as we intimated before. It is wrong, therefore, to understand the Spirit and the Power⁵⁶ of God as anything else than the Word, who is also the first-born of God, as the foresaid prophet Moses declared; and it was this which, when it came upon the virgin and overshadowed her, caused her to conceive, not by intercourse, but by power."⁵⁷

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

In Justin's view, the divine essence which overshadowed Mary, which is called both "the Holy Spirit" and "the power of the Highest,"⁵⁸ was the divine essence possessed by the preexistent Son as He entered her womb. Justin's view agreed with Paul's in Philippians 2:5-11 that the preexistent Son chose to "empty Himself" in order to take the form of Man, a self-aware and self-accomplished act of the preincarnate Son.

Justin also stated plainly that "the prophetic Spirit" was the Word (Logos), but that sometimes He spoke through the Old Testament prophets FROM the Person of the Father, and at other times the Word as "the prophetic Spirit" spoke FROM the Person of the Son.

"But when you hear the utterances of the prophets spoken as it were personally, you must not suppose that they are spoken by the inspired themselves, but by the Divine Word who moves them. For sometimes He declares things that are to come to pass, in the

⁵⁵ The English translation of Justin has "Holy Ghost" here. This itself is an example of bias by the translator. The Greek is πνεύματος ἁγίου – of the Holy Spirit/Breath, πνεύμα literally meaning "breath" or "wind." The rendering of "Holy Ghost" by the English translator imposes a later concept, "Ghost" being a personal conscious entity, while the Greek does not convey this idea at all.

⁵⁶ Both "the Spirit and the Power" are held by Justin to be the same thing – the Word (Logos). Justin derived these two terms from the parallelism found in Luke 1:35: "the Holy Spirit will come upon you" and "the power of the Highest will overshadow you." Parallelisms are a restating of a previous statement using other words, often separated by "and." That Justin viewed this passage as a parallelism is proven by his application of both terms to the Logos, the preincarnate Son.

⁵⁷ Justin, First Apology, ch. xxxiii

⁵⁸ Luke 1:35

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*manner of one who foretells the future; sometimes He speaks **as from the person of God the Lord and Father of all; sometimes as from the person of Christ**; ... And this the Jews who possessed the books of the prophets did not understand, and therefore did not recognize Christ even when He came, but even hate us who say that He has come, and who prove that, as was predicted, He was crucified by them.⁵⁹*

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

*“And **when the Spirit of prophecy speaks from the person of Christ**, the utterances are of this sort: ‘I have spread out My hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people, to those who walk in a way that is not good.’ And again: ‘I gave My back to the scourges, and My cheeks to the buffetings; I turned not away My face from the shame of spittings; and the Lord was My helper: therefore was I not confounded: but I set My face as a firm rock; and I knew that I should not be ashamed, for He is near that justifieth Me.’ And again, when He says, ‘They cast lots upon My vesture, and pierced My hands and My feet. And I lay down and slept, and rose again, because the Lord sustained Me.’ And again, when He says, ‘They spake with their lips, they wagged the head, saying, Let Him deliver Himself.’ And that all these things happened to Christ at the hands of the Jews, you can ascertain. For when He was crucified, they did shoot out the lip, and wagged their heads, saying, ‘Let Him who raised the dead save Himself.’”⁶⁰*

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

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

⁵⁹ Justin, First Apology, ch. xxxvi

⁶⁰ Justin, First Apology, chs. xxxvii-xxxviii

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

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

*These things, I think, **Plato having learned from the prophets regarding the Holy Ghost, he has manifestly transferred to what he calls virtue. For as the sacred prophets say that one and the same spirit is divided into seven spirits, so he also, naming it one and the same virtue, says this is divided into four virtues;** wishing by all means to avoid mention of the Holy Spirit, but clearly declaring in a kind of allegory what the prophets said of the Holy Spirit. ... You see how he calls only by the name of virtue, **the gift that descends from above;** and yet he counts it worthy of inquiry, whether it is right that this [gift] be called virtue or some other thing, fearing to name it openly **the Holy Spirit,** lest he should seem to be following the teaching of the prophets.”⁶¹*

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

Thus these early writers viewed the term “Spirit” (as it relates to God) as the powerful essence of God Himself, akin to divinity itself, a divine essence or substance that God had in common with His only-begotten preincarnate Son (just as humanity is shared from Adam to all his descendants). When the “Spirit” interacted with mankind, it was Logos, the Son, who was “Spirit of God” and who appeared to mankind. Even Trinitarian scholars have admitted that the earliest Christians writers did not distinguish the “Spirit” in interacting with mankind apart from Logos, the Son.⁶²

⁶¹ Justin, Hortatory Address to the Greeks, ch. xxxii

⁶² Trinitarian Oxford professor, F. C. Conybeare, writes: “We must also not forget that **the clear distinction between the Word and the Holy Spirit is late in Christian theology,** and that the early fathers, like Justin, confuse them.” [bold & underline mine]. The Philosophical Aspects of Divine Incarnation, Jewish Quarterly Review, 1 Aug. 1895, p. 614

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

In Justin's defense of post-apostolic Christianity, there is one God (one Monarch, one ultimate authority), the eternal uncreated, self-existing One. The preexistent Word, God's Son, was God's own offspring, begotten to become God's authorized agent in creation and to interact with humanity in His name and on His behalf. The Spirit of God is a limited expression of the essence of God (exactly as in Judaism),⁶³ yet in early Christianity this "Spirit" essence was shared by both the Father and the preincarnate Son.

⁶³ The reader of the English translation of Justin's First Apology might suppose that Justin believed the Spirit to be a third divine Person who is worshipped along with the Father and the Son. Chapter vi reads as follows: "Hence are we called atheists. And we confess that we are atheists, so far as gods of this sort are concerned, but not with respect to the most true God, the Father of righteousness and temperance and the other virtues, who is free from all impurity. But both Him, and the Son (who came forth from Him and taught us these things, and the host of the other good angels who follow and are made like to Him), and the prophetic Spirit, we worship and adore, knowing them in reason and truth, and declaring without grudging to every one who wishes to learn, as we have been taught." Note that the translator bracketed a portion which awkwardly interrupts the flow of Justin's words, and introduces a heretical statement (that Christians worship angels know them in reason and in truth). In a footnote, the translator noted that worship of angels flatly contradicts Justin's other comments in chs. 13, 16, & 61. This passage almost certainly contains a later addition. However, the translator should also have included the words "and the prophetic Spirit" as part of the interpolation and not the words "who came forth from Him and taught us these things." The text flows much more smoothly without these words and without the heretical statement. "But both Him, and the Son who came forth from Him and taught us these things [snip], we worship and adore, knowing them in reason and in truth ..." Note also the word "both" (τε) which normally implies a second as opposed to multiple following entities. Again, in chapter xiii there appears to be another interpolation

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Justin's description of the preincarnate Son is sometimes challenged by Unitarians as being unique to him. As we have seen, this idea is untenable on the following grounds: that before meeting Justin, Trypho was already aware from his Jewish teachers that Christians in general believed in the divine Son of God having become flesh. Even the Epistle of Barnabas, which scholars date prior to Justin (about AD 100), written most likely from North Africa, acknowledges the preexistence of the Son. "*For the Scripture says concerning us, while He speaks to the Son, 'Let Us make man after Our image, and after Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the beasts of the earth, and the fowls of heaven, and the fishes of the sea.'*"⁶⁴

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

Yet, Justin's own testimony at the beginning of this Dialogue claimed that when he became a Christian he abandoned Greek philosophy, having been persuaded by reading Moses and the prophets⁶⁵ the superiority of true divine revelation over the worthless speculations of the philosophers. He concluded that the Greek philosophers were foolish and knew nothing.⁶⁶ All of his arguments concerning God throughout this discourse were drawn exclusively from the Jewish Scriptures⁶⁷ from which he quoted extensively in

concerning a third Person. The text reads: "*Our teacher of these things is Jesus Christ, who also was born for this purpose, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judaea, in the times of Tiberius Caesar; and that we reasonably worship Him, having learned that He is the Son of the true God Himself, and holding Him in the second place, and the prophetic Spirit in the third, we will prove.*" That the words "*and the prophetic Spirit in the third*" are most likely an addition by a later editor is evident because Justin only went on to prove that Christians "*reasonably worship*" the Son. He did not attempt to show the same for "*the prophetic Spirit*." Justin either failed to do what he said he would do, or else this is an interpolation. Also, in ch. xxxiii Justin stated plainly that the "*Spirit of prophecy*" was the Son. "*[T]he Spirit of prophecy declared that He should be born as we intimated before. It is wrong, therefore, to understand the Spirit and the power of God as anything else than the Word, who is also the first-born of God.*" In chs. xxxvii & xxxviii Justin said that the "*Spirit of prophecy*" speaks either from the Person of the Father or from the Person of Christ. It is therefore not a distinct divine Person in Justin's theology.

⁶⁴ Epistle of Barnabas, ch. vi

⁶⁵ Justin, Dialogue, ch. ii - viii

⁶⁶ Justin, Dialogue, ch. v-vii

⁶⁷ Justin used the Greek Septuagint exclusively. However, in his discussions with Trypho, he dealt with some variant readings between the Hebrew and Greek versions, showing that he had extensive knowledge of both.

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support of virtually every point.⁶⁸ His views are portrayed throughout his dialogue as the standard and universally accepted Christian view of God and His Son at the end of the apostolic age.

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

Tatian of Syria:

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

In harmonizing the four Gospels, Tatian began with John 1:1-5 which speaks of Logos being in the beginning with God, and the agent of creation. He then included Luke's account of the birth of John the Baptist, followed by the birth of Jesus from Matthew and Luke, and then picked up John's prologue, that "*Logos became flesh and dwelled among us.*" This arrangement shows that Tatian viewed the Son as preexisting "*in the beginning,*" prior to His birth in Bethlehem.

⁶⁸ Unitarians sometimes claim that Justin's view was shaped by his former studies in Greek philosophy. However, he claimed just the opposite in the introduction to his Dialogue, and the arguments that he used in opposition to Trypho were exclusively drawn from the Old Testament Scriptures.

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Tatian's only other surviving work is his "Address to the Greeks." In that work, Tatian attacked and ridiculed polytheism and defended Christianity's monotheism.⁶⁹ His views are identical with Justin's on every major point. Of the Christian's God, Tatian wrote:

*"Our **God did not begin to be in time**: He alone is without beginning, and **He Himself is the beginning of all things**. **God is a Spirit**, not pervading matter, but the Maker of material spirits, and of the forms that are in matter; **He is invisible**, impalpable, being Himself the Father of both sensible and invisible things. Him we know from His creation, and apprehend His invisible power by His works."⁷⁰*

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

*"God was in the beginning; but **the Beginning, we have been taught, is the power of the Logos**. For the Lord of the universe, who is Himself the necessary ground of all being, inasmuch as no creature was yet in existence, was alone; but inasmuch as He was all power, Himself the necessary ground of things visible and invisible, with Him were all things; with Him, by Logos-power, the Logos Himself also, who was in Him, subsists. And **by His simple will the Logos springs forth**; and the Logos, not coming forth in vain, **becomes the first-begotten work of the Father**. **Him (the Logos) we know to be the beginning of the world**. ... And as **the Logos begotten in the beginning**, begat in turn our world, having first created for Himself the necessary matter, ..." ⁷¹*

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

⁶⁹ Tatian was called a heretic by some later writers. But his surviving work does not display any reason for this charge. Neither does the later discovery of copies of his Diatessaron in Arabic support the false charges against it. Tatian argued against the Platonic "immortality of the soul" which could be part of the real reason for his being denounced by later writers who supported that doctrine.

⁷⁰ Tatian's Address to the Greeks, ch. iv

⁷¹ Tatian, Address to the Greeks, ch. v

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Theophilus of Antioch:

Theophilus⁷² was a contemporary of both Justin and Tatian. Theophilus became pastor of the Christian assembly of Antioch, Syria (Paul's own home assembly), which had been pastored previously by Ignatius the martyr. Theophilus was a scholar and the first Christian chronologist.⁷³ His view of the preincarnate Son was identical to that of Barnabas of Alexandria, Aristides of Athens, Justin of Rome, and Tatian the Syrian.

“God, then, having His own Word internal within His own bowels, begat Him, emitting Him⁷⁴ along with His own wisdom before all things. He had this Word as a helper in the things that were created by Him, and by Him He made all things. He is called “governing principle,” because He rules, and is Lord of all things fashioned by Him. He, then, being Spirit of God, and governing principle, and Wisdom, and Power of the highest,⁷⁵ came down upon the prophets, and through them spoke of the creation of the world and of all other things. For the prophets were not when the world came into existence, but the Wisdom of God which was in Him, and His holy Word which was always present with Him. Wherefore He speaks thus by the prophet Solomon: “When He prepared the heavens I was there, and when He appointed the foundations of the earth I was by Him as one brought up with Him.”⁷⁶

Notice carefully in the above quotation that the “Word” is the same Person referred to as “Wisdom.” This is proven by the underlined statement, “He then, being Spirit of God and governing principle, and Wisdom...” Note that the pronouns “He” and “Him,” when not referring to the Father, are singular and have “the Word” as their antecedent. Consequently, by using the terms “Word” and “Wisdom,” as a Person “emitted” and “begotten” by the Father, Theophilus was drawing on two aspects of God’s qualities which became two titles for the same Person. The name “Word” was borrowed from John’s Gospel prologue and the name “Wisdom” was taken from Solomon’s famous statement in Proverbs 8. Then the term “begotten” is used of both.⁷⁷ Theophilus then

⁷² Theophilus was born around AD 115 in the area of Iraq. He was originally a pagan, but was converted by reading the prophets. Late in life he became bishop of the church in Antioch around AD 168 and held that post until his death around AD 183. It is uncertain as to whether his treatise quoted here was written before or after he held the episcopate of Antioch.

⁷³ In his third book, Theophilus offered his own detailed chronology from Scripture from the creation to the beginning of the reign of Marcus Aurelius, the current Roman Emperor. According to his calculations, 5,698 years had passed. His much too long chronology was in large part due to his use of the LXX for the ages of the patriarchs. These are 100 years longer per generation in the LXX than in the Hebrew text, incorrectly adding almost 1500 years to the biblical chronology.

⁷⁴ In John 8:42 Jesus said, ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθον (“For I have issued forth out of God.”)

⁷⁵ As with the other earliest writers, Theophilus took the statement in Luke 1:35 that “the Power of the Highest” would overshadow Mary, to mean that Logos Himself would become flesh in her womb.

⁷⁶ Theophilus, *To Autolycus*, Bk. I, ch. x

⁷⁷ Prov. 8:24 & 25 - Heb. יָלְדָהּ (begotten, born), LXX. γεννᾶ (begat); John 1:14,18 μονογενῆς (only-begotten)

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explained how it was that “God” is said to have walked in the Garden of Eden with Adam, using John’s prologue as his proof that it was the Son who became flesh.

*“You will say, then, to me: ‘You said that God ought not to be contained in a place, and how do you now say that He walked in Paradise?’ Hear what I say. The God and Father, indeed, of all cannot be contained, and is not found in a place, for there is no place of His rest; but **His Word, through whom He made all things, being His Power and His Wisdom**, assuming the person of the Father and Lord of all, **went to the garden in the person of God**, and conversed with Adam. For the divine writing itself teaches us that Adam said that he had heard the voice. But what else is this voice but **the Word of God, who is also His Son**? Not as the poets and writers of myths talk of the sons of gods begotten from intercourse [with women], but as truth expounds, the Word, that always exists, residing within the heart of God. For before anything came into being He had Him as a counselor, being His own mind and thought. **But when God wished to make all that He determined on, He begot this Word, uttered, the first-born of all creation**, not Himself being emptied of the Word [Reason], but **having begotten Reason**, and always conversing with His Reason. And hence the holy writings teach us, and all the spirit-hearing [inspired] men, one of whom, John, says, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,”** showing that at first God was alone, and the Word in Him. Then he says, “The Word was God; all things came into existence through Him; and apart from Him not one thing came into existence.” **The Word, then, being God, and being naturally produced from God**, whenever the Father of the universe wills, He sends Him to any place; and He, coming, is both heard and seen, being sent by Him, and is found in a place.”⁷⁸*

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

Carefully noting the above particulars in Theophilus’ treatise is very important in debunking what has been traditionally claimed by Roman Catholics concerning Theophilus – that he was a “Trinitarian.”⁷⁹ This false claim is based on one statement. Our English translation reads as follows: “*In like manner also **the three days** which were before the luminaries, **are types of the Trinity**, of God, and His Word, and His wisdom. And the fourth is the type of man, who needs light, that so there may be **God, the Word, wisdom, man.***”

⁷⁸ Theophilus, To Autolytus, Bk. II, ch. xxii

⁷⁹ Catholic Encyclopedia article on The Blessed Trinity:
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15047a.htm>

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Wherefore also on the fourth day the lights were made."⁸⁰ In this section Theophilus was drawing types or allegories from the things that God created during creation week. There are serious enough problems with this quote that it cannot be used as evidence for early belief in any form of the Trinity doctrine for the following reasons.

1. The word "Trinity" does not appear in the text. The Greek word is τριάς, which was the common Greek word for a group of any three things,⁸¹ similar to "trio" in English. Translator bias has read "Trinity" into this term. It should be translated as follows: *"In like manner also the three days which were before the luminaries, are types of the trio – of God, and His Word, and His Wisdom."* Theophilus was speaking only of a group of three things, the latter two being contained in the first – God, in whom was both His Word and His Wisdom. Both of these aspects of God's essence were "begotten" to produce His "Son" according to Theophilus.⁸²
2. Theophilus did not consider the Spirit to be a third Divine Person. The third thing listed is Wisdom, not the Spirit. The use of "Wisdom" is a clear reference to Proverbs 8:22-31, which Theophilus already applied to the begetting of the Son.
3. Theophilus already defined the "Spirit" in the creation account as non-personal. In this section, he was giving metaphorical or allegorical meaning to the things God created in Genesis 1. He already defined the "Spirit" concerning the expression *"the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters."*⁸³ Theophilus remarked: *"And by the Spirit which is borne above the waters, he means **that which** [neuter, not masculine] God gave for animating the creation, as he gave life to man, mixing what is fine with what is fine. For the Spirit is fine, and the water is fine, that the Spirit may nourish the water, and the water penetrating everywhere along with the Spirit, may nourish creation."* Far from being a third divine Person, Theophilus considered the Spirit to be an impersonal, non-material divine substance, something of God's own essence. He compared the Holy Spirit to the breath of life that animated Adam. And he referred to the prophetic Spirit which spoke through the prophets as the Son speaking through them.⁸⁴

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

⁸⁰ Theophilus, To Autolytus, Bk. II, ch. xv

⁸¹ <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/τριάς>

⁸² Theophilus, To Autolytus, Bk. I, ch. x

⁸³ Gen. 1:2

⁸⁴ Cf. 1 Peter 1:11

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Irenaeus of Lyon:

Having observed the basic Christian doctrines in Rome and Syria, we now turn to the far west, to the town of Lyon of Gaul (France). Irenaeus grew up in Smyrna under the teaching of Polycarp, who had been appointed bishop of Smyrna under John's supervision, and who was the one (messenger) to which Jesus' letter to the assembly at Smyrna was addressed,⁸⁵ having nothing critical to say about that assembly. Irenaeus later became bishop of the assembly in Lyon and was eventually martyred along with several members of that assembly.

Irenaeus' five-volume work, "Against Heresies," set out to document and refute the many Gnostic teachers, most of which attacked the foundational doctrine of Christ. Many quotes could easily be provided from this massive work, all of which prove that the Logos doctrine of Paul and John was just as prevalent in the west as it was in the east and in Rome. For the sake of brevity, a few brief quotes will suffice.

"For when John, proclaiming one God, the Almighty, and one Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten, by whom all things were made, declares that this was the Son of God, this the Only-begotten, this the Former of all things, this the true Light who enlighteneth every man this the Creator of the world, this He that came to His own, this He that became flesh and dwelt among us."⁸⁶

"Learn then, ye foolish men, that Jesus who suffered for us, and who dwelt among us, is Himself the Word of God. For if any other of the Aeons had become flesh for our salvation, it would have been probable that the apostle spoke of another. But if the Word of the Father who descended is the same also that ascended, He, namely, the Only-begotten Son of the only God, who, according to the good pleasure of the Father, became flesh for the sake of men, the apostle certainly does not speak regarding any other, or concerning any Ogdoad, but respecting our Lord Jesus Christ. For, according to them, the Word did not originally become flesh. For they maintain that the Savior assumed an animal body, formed in accordance with a special dispensation by an unspeakable providence, so as to become visible and palpable. But flesh is that which was of old formed for Adam by God out of the dust, and it is this that John has declared the Word of God became."⁸⁷

"He speaks undoubtedly these words to those who have not received the gift of adoption, but who despise the incarnation of the pure generation of the Word of God, defraud human nature of promotion into God, and prove themselves ungrateful to the Word of God, who

⁸⁵ Rev. 2:8-11

⁸⁶ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. I, ch. ix

⁸⁷ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. I, ch.

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became flesh for them. For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God. For by no other means could we have attained to incorruptibility and immortality, unless we had been united to incorruptibility and immortality. But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that might receive the adoption of sons? For this reason [it is, said], 'Who shall declare His generation?' since 'He is a man, and who shall recognize Him?' But he to whom the Father which is in heaven has revealed Him, knows Him, so that he understands that He who 'was not born either by the will of the flesh, or by the will of man' is the Son of man, this is Christ, the Son of the living God."

Concerning the fact that the Son was "the Spirit of God" which came upon Mary, Irenaeus explained as he was commenting on the clause "Who shall declare His generation" in Isaiah 53:8.

"Then he says: His generation who shall declare? This was said to warn us, lest on account of His enemies and the outrage of His sufferings we should despise Him as a mean and contemptible man. For He who endured all this has an undeclarable generation; for by generation He means descent; (for) He who is His Father is undeclarable and unspeakable. Know therefore that such descent was His who endured these sufferings; and despise Him not because of the sufferings which for thy sake He of purpose endured, but fear Him because of His descent.

*"And in another place Jeremiah says: 'The Spirit of our face, the Lord Christ;'⁸⁸ and how He was taken in their snares, of whom we said, 'Under his shadow we shall live among the Gentiles.' **That, being (the) Spirit of God, Christ was to become a suffering man** the Scripture declares; and is, as it were, amazed and astonished at His sufferings, that in such manner He was to endure sufferings, under whose shadow we said that we should live. And by shadow he means His body. For just as a shadow is made by a body, **so also Christ's body was made by His Spirit.**"⁸⁹*

⁸⁸ This is a quote of Lamentations 4:20 LXX, which reads: πνεῦμα προσώπου ἡμῶν χριστός κυρίου (the Spirit of our face, the Lord's Christ). Jeremiah's Lamentations are usually regarded as merely mourning the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. Yet, a good case can be made that this book is equally prophetic of the second destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. As such, this verse in its context could very well be a prophecy of Christ, who was taken and crucified in the snares that were laid for Him. Thus Irenaeus' interpretation of this passage very well may have been very insightful.

⁸⁹ Irenaeus, Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching, lxx-lxxi

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

Anyone who actually believes the Bible to be the inspired Word of God, yet claims that all of these earliest pastors, apologists, and martyrs were completely wrong concerning either (1) the fact of the preexistence of the Son since creation, (2) His agency in creating all things, (3) or that the Son had an origin out of God as *“the Beginning”* of God’s works, such persons who deny these things are essentially claiming an absurdity. They are implicitly claiming that the Christian assemblies established by the Apostles, along with the men ordained to lead them, defected from the original apostolic Faith within a single generation, and that the various alleged defections led them all to the very same heresy, and no one put up a challenge as this alleged mass-defection took place! If this is true, if the Apostles could not even cement the most basic and fundamental doctrine in the minds of their ordained protégés, then it follows that the Apostles themselves were miserable failures in the mission Jesus Christ gave them and in which the holy Breath of God continued to guide them until their deaths. If that is so, then it also follows that Jesus Himself was a failure in choosing such incompetent men. The failure can also be traced to the Breath of Truth which came upon the Apostles at Pentecost, and was the conduit through which they were continually shepherded *“into all truth.”* That is the logical implication of all of the challenges to the earliest post-apostolic teaching on the nature of God and pristine Christian monotheism, whether from Trinitarianism, Unitarianism, Modalism, or Arianism.

Consider the words of Irenaeus, student of Polycarp of Smyrna, who was a student of John the Apostle.

*“Rightly, then, did our Lord bear witness to him, saying, ‘**Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad.**’⁹⁰ For not alone upon Abraham’s account did He say these things, but also that He might point out how **all who have known God***

⁹⁰ John 8:56

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from the beginning, and have foretold the advent of Christ, have received the revelation from the Son Himself; who also in the last times was made visible⁹¹ and passable, and spake with the human race, that He might from the stones raise up children unto Abraham, and fulfill the promise which God had given him, and that He might make his seed as the stars of heaven, as John the Baptist says: 'For God is able from these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.' Now, this Jesus did by drawing us off from the religion of stones, and bringing us over from hard and fruitless cogitations, and establishing in us a faith like to Abraham. As Paul does also testify, saying that we are children of Abraham because of the similarity of our faith, and the promise of inheritance."⁹²

Part 5, The Intrusion of Pseudo-Revelation

www.4windsfellowships.net/articles/God/Evolution_005.pdf

⁹¹ 1 Pet. 1:20

⁹² Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. IV, ch. vii