

The Evolution of God

3. Fragments of the Apostolic Fathers

By Tim Warner © Copyright www.4windsfellowships.net

The very earliest Christian writers after the Apostles are called the “Apostolic Fathers” because of their known connections to at least one of the Apostles. Only three of them wrote works which have survived. All three were bishops (pastors). Their works were pastoral in nature, addressed to fellow believers or churches. They did not attempt to dive deep into theology since commonality of doctrine was assumed between writer and his audience. They were intended to be read and digested by Christians alone who all shared the same beliefs.

I. Clement of Rome: (AD 30-100)

Clement of Rome¹ was a disciple of Paul’s, the second bishop of the church in Rome during the late first century. Early tradition claimed that he was the Clement whom Paul mentioned as a “*fellow-worker in the Gospel.*”²

In his epistle to the Corinthians, Clement of Rome referred to Jesus Christ as the speaker in Psalm 118:18, calling Him the “Word.” Clement writes:

*“... being especially mindful of **the words of the Lord Jesus which He spake**, teaching us meekness and long-suffering. For thus He spoke: ‘Be ye merciful, that ye may obtain mercy; forgive, that it may be forgiven to you; as ye do, so shall it be done unto you; as ye judge, so shall ye be judged; as ye are kind, so shall kindness be shown to you; with what measure ye mete, with the same it shall be measured to you.’ By this precept and by these rules let us stablish ourselves, that we **walk with all humility in obedience to His holy words. For the holy Word saith**, ‘On whom shall I look, but on him that is meek and peaceable, and that trembleth at My words?’”³*

Clement appears to refer to Jesus Christ as “*the holy Word,*” using the Johannine title. He then quoted from Isaiah 66:2 as being the words of Christ. This should not be surprising since Peter stated that “the Breath of Christ” spoke through the prophets⁴ and the early

¹ AD ?-99

² Phil. 4:3

³ 1 Clement, ch. xiii

⁴ 1 Pet. 1:10-11

The Evolution of God – 3. Fragments of the Apostolic Fathers

writers claimed that the pre-human Son of God spoke many times in the Old Testament.⁵ Again Clement writes:

*“For thus **saieth the holy Word**: ‘The Lord hath severely chastened me, yet hath not given me over to death.’”⁶*

The words of Psalm 118 are indisputably the words of the Son of God, since the New Testament makes this connection. *“The LORD has chastened me severely, But He has not given me over to death. Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, And I will praise the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD, Through which the righteous shall enter. I will praise You, For You have answered me, And have become my salvation. The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone.”*⁷ Jesus applied this Psalm to Himself,⁸ and Peter also applied it to Christ.⁹ Clement referred to Christ as *“the holy Word,”* showing that the Logos (Word) in John’s prologue was a common title for Christ which his readers would understand.

In both of these statements, *“the holy Word”* spoke in the first person. Some might argue that *“the holy Word”* in the above two quotes refers to Holy Scripture and not to the Son of God. However, whenever referring to Scripture, Clement always used statements such as *“for thus it is written.”*¹⁰ Nowhere else did he use the term *“Word”* for the written text of Scripture.

Clement also referred to the Son as *“Wisdom”* and *“Power”* of God, which will be shown later were widely used titles for God’s pre-human Son, especially when speaking about His role in creation as described in Proverbs 8.

*“For the Creator and Lord of all Himself rejoices in His works. For by His infinitely great **Power** He established the heavens, and by His incomprehensible **Wisdom** He adorned them. He also divided the earth from the water which surrounds it, and fixed it upon the immovable foundation of His own will. The animals also which are upon it He commanded by His own **Word** into existence. So likewise, when He had formed the sea, and the living creatures which are in it, He enclosed them [within their proper bounds] by His own Power. Above all, with His holy and undefiled hands He formed man, the most excellent [of His creatures], and truly great through the understanding given him — the express*

⁵ This will be shown in later quotes.

⁶ 1 Clement, ch. lvi quoting Psalm 118:18

⁷ Psalm 118:18-22 Jesus applied this Psalm to Himself (Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17), as did Peter (1 Pe. 2:7).

⁸ Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17

⁹ 1 Peter 2:7

¹⁰ Chs, 2, 3, 4, 13, 14, 17, 23, 29, 38, 39, 42, 46, 48, 50,

The Evolution of God – 3. Fragments of the Apostolic Fathers

likeness of His own image. For thus says God: ‘Let us make man in Our image, and after Our likeness. So God made man; male and female He created them.’ Having thus finished all these things, He approved them, and blessed them, and said, ‘Increase and multiply.’”¹¹

This paragraph, if taken in isolation from the common jargon of the earliest writers, may not appear to indicate the pre-human existence of the Son and His role in creation. However, as will be shown by many quotes from other early writers, referring to the pre-human Son as God’s Power, Wisdom, and Word, was commonplace.

A second ancient transcript of a sermon bearing the name “2 Clement” most likely originated in Corinth. Early tradition attributes it to Clement of Rome, but this is disputed by some.¹² Yet 2 Clement ch. 11 quotes 1 Clement ch. 23, showing at least some relationship. Also, 2 Clement is found in three manuscripts, two in Greek and one in Syriac, and in all three it is attached to 1 Clement. Regardless of author, its very early date places it virtually contiguous with the time of John’s death. This document affirms three critical points of interest to our inquiry:

1. The Son of God as agent of creation:

“... Jesus Christ submitted to suffer for our sakes. What return, then, shall we make to Him, or what fruit that shall be worthy of that which He has given to us? ... For He had compassion on us, and mercifully saved us, observing the many errors in which we were entangled, as well as the destruction to which we were exposed, and that we had no hope of salvation except it came to us from Him. For He called us when we were not, and willed that out of nothing we should attain a real existence.”¹³

2. The Son of God was first “Spirit,” but then “became flesh”

“We must therefore preserve the flesh as the temple of God. For as ye were called in the flesh, ye shall also come [to be judged] in the flesh. As Christ the Lord who saved

¹¹ 1 Clement, ch. xxxiii

¹² 2 Clement is dated to between AD 95-140, shortly after 1 Clement (Holmes, Michael, Apostolic Fathers, The: Greek Texts and English Translations 2007, pp. 132-35, ISBN 978-0-8010-3468-8. Eusebius noted that there was a second work of Clement, but questioned its authorship. A manuscript (circa AD 1056) contains both works together labeled “Clement to the Corinthians I” and “Clement to the Corinthians II.” “The view of Bishop Lightfoot seems, on the whole, most tenable. He regards the homily as of Corinthian origin, delivered, in all probability, between A.D. 120 and 140, but the work of an unknown author, who seems to have been one of the presbyters of the church, — possibly the bishop.” (Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. VII, p. 513, Hendrickson, 1994)

¹³ 2 Clement, ch. i

The Evolution of God – 3. Fragments of the Apostolic Fathers

us, though He was first a Spirit, became flesh, and thus called us so shall we also receive the reward in this flesh.”¹⁴

The underlined portion above shows that he was commenting on John 1:14 which states that “*the Word became flesh and dwelled among us.*” It is clear that the Word (Logos) was the Son.

3. The “church”¹⁵ began before the sun and moon were created in the person of the Son and includes all who have been joined to Him since creation:

“So, then, brethren, if we do the will of our Father God, we shall be members of the first church, the spiritual, — that which was created before sun and moon; ... So, then, let us elect to belong to the church of life, that we may be saved. I think not that ye are ignorant that the living church is the body of Christ (for the Scripture, saith, “God created man male and female;” the male is Christ, the female the church,)¹⁶ and that the Books and the Apostles teach that the church is not of the present, but from the beginning. For it was spiritual, as was also our Jesus, and was made manifest at the end of the days in order to save us.¹⁷ The church being spiritual, was made manifest in the flesh of Christ, signifying to us that if any one of us shall preserve it in the flesh and corrupt it not, he shall receive it in the Holy Spirit.”¹⁸

This extremely early sermon indicates not only the pre-human existence of the Son of God, but also **the real transmutation of the Son of God** from “Spirit” to “flesh,” from full divinity to full humanity.¹⁹ This is in contrast to certain later writers, beginning with Melito of Sardis, who insisted that He added flesh to His Spirit Person (which remained unchanged) after the manner of the Platonic doctrine of the flesh being the prison of a spirit person (immortality of the soul).

¹⁴ 2 Clement, ch. ix

¹⁵ The word translated “assembly” or “church” means a gathering, and requires two or more. When the Son was begotten by God, there were two, and we are added to the only-begotten Son as adopted sons.

¹⁶ This analogy was drawn from Paul’s statements concerning the great mystery in Eph. 5:22-32.

¹⁷ 1 Pet. 1:20 see: <http://www.4windsfellowships.net/articles/God/foreknowledge.pdf>

¹⁸ 2 Clement, ch. xiv

¹⁹ This was contrary to the development of the doctrine of incarnation later, which was based on Platonism, which supposed that change was impossible for the divine nature, and so substituted the biblical transformation to humanity (the Word became flesh) with a Platonic dualistic view of Christ, as a divine Spirit housed in a body of flesh. This view became known as “hypostatic union” in Roman Catholic Trinitarian dogma.

II. Ignatius of Antioch [AD 30-107]:

The next apostolic father was Ignatius of Antioch. He was born about the year of Jesus' crucifixion and became a Christian at an early age. He was a student of John's along with his close friend Polycarp. Ignatius was appointed bishop of the church at Antioch, Syria during the latter part of the first century, the church which sent out Paul and Barnabas.²⁰ According to early tradition, Ignatius was recommended for that position by the Apostle Peter just before his martyrdom in AD 67.²¹ He was martyred for the Faith in AD 107, less than a decade after John's death at Ephesus. Consequently, his testimony to the pristine apostolic Faith is extremely valuable.

Ignatius' genuine letters²² have been preserved in two versions in Greek, and some in Latin. The shorter Greek version is considered the original by the consensus of scholarship. The longer Greek version has been somewhat embellished by a later editor. While the longer version contains many statements concerning the Son's pre-human origin, we will focus on the evidence from the shorter version since it carries more weight. In each of the quotes below from the short version, the longer version agrees completely in sense, albeit adding more extensive statements of the Son's pre-human origin and existence. A Syriac (Aramaic) translation of Ignatius' writings have also been discovered and translated into English. This version is believed to be an abbreviated version, and only represents a small part of the original Greek version. However, what does exist in Syriac lends support for the conclusion that the shorter Greek version is the original. The Syriac also supports the statements in the Greek version concerning the Son's pre-human origin and will be quoted below where a parallel exists in the Syriac.

Ignatius was a firm believer in the pre-human origin and existence of the Son of God, that He was begotten out of God at the beginning of creation. He held firmly to what has been called the "Logos doctrine" – the Son as the pre-human "Word" coming down from heaven and becoming flesh.

To the Ephesians: *"There is one Physician who is possessed both of flesh and spirit; both made and not made; God existing in flesh; true life in death; both of Mary and of God; first possible and then impossible, even Jesus Christ our Lord."*²³

²⁰ Acts 13:1-3

²¹ St. Ignatius of Antioch, Lives of Saints, John J. Crawley & Co.

²² The genuine letters of Ignatius are considered those listed by Eusebius (4th cent. Christian historian) as genuine, and have the consensus of biblical scholarship as being genuine.

²³ Ignatius, Epistle to the Ephesians, ch. vii (short {original} version). Chapters 4-7 are missing in the Syriac translation manuscripts.

The Evolution of God – 3. Fragments of the Apostolic Fathers

To the Magnesians: “[Y]our bishop presides in the place of God, and your presbyters in the place of the assembly of the apostles, along with your deacons, who are most dear to me, and are entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father before the beginning of time, and in the end was revealed.”²⁴

“[T]here is one God, who has manifested Himself by Jesus Christ His Son, who is His eternal Word, not proceeding forth from silence, and who in all things pleased Him that sent Him.”²⁵

These statements have John’s prologue to his Gospel in view. The statement “Jesus Christ, who was with the Father before the beginning of time” was derived from John 1:1-2, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” The clause “and in the end was revealed” was taken from 1 Peter 1:19-20, “but with the precious blood of the Anointed, as a Lamb without flaw and without spot, having been known formerly, indeed even before the casting down of the world, yet made apparent in the last times for you.”²⁶ As a contemporary and former student of John’s it is virtually impossible that Ignatius would misunderstand John’s prologue to his Gospel.

To the Romans: “... Jesus Christ, the Son of God who became afterwards of the seed of David and Abraham.”²⁷

To Polycarp: “Look for Him who is above all time, eternal²⁸ and invisible, yet who became visible for our sakes; impalpable and impassible, yet who became passible on our account; and who in every kind of way suffered for our sakes.”²⁹

Syriac Version: “Look for Him that is above the times, Him who has no times, Him who is invisible, Him who for our sakes became visible, Him who is impalpable, Him who is impassible, Him who for our sakes suffered, Him who endured everything in every form for our sakes.”

²⁴ Ignatius, Epistle to the Magnesians, ch. vi (short {original} version).

²⁵ Ignatius, Epistle to the Magnesians, ch. viii (short {original} version). The longer version of this passage explains what was meant by the clause “not proceeding forth from silence.” It reads: “[T]here is one God, the Almighty, who has manifested Himself by Jesus Christ His Son, who is His Word, not spoken, but essential. For He is not the voice of an articulate utterance, but a substance begotten by divine power, who has in all things pleased Him that sent Him.” The Syriac does not include this epistle.

²⁶ LGV https://4windsfellowships.net/LGV/LGV_1Peter.pdf

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

²⁸ Lit. “age-enduring” without reference to eternity prior to the 6 days of creation. This term in both Scripture and early Christian writings refers to indefinite time, not necessarily infinite time.

²⁹ Ignatius, Epistle to Polycarp, ch. iii

The Evolution of God – 3. Fragments of the Apostolic Fathers

Long Greek version: *“Look for Christ, the Son of God; who was before time, yet appeared in time; who was invisible by nature, yet visible in the flesh; who was impalpable, and could not be touched, as being without a body, but for our sakes became such, might be touched and handled in the body; who was impassable as God, but became passable for our sakes as man; and who in every kind of way suffered for our sakes.”*

The term “impalpable” means unable to be felt by touch. “Impassible” means incapable of suffering. Ignatius applied the terms invisible, impalpable, and impassible to the pre-human Son of God who afterward became visible, capable of being handled, capable of suffering and death. **This statement appears in all three versions of Ignatius epistle, and is unquestionably original to him.**

This statement also shows that Ignatius did not hold to “hypostatic union” (the Platonic view of incarnation which developed later)³⁰ which casts the Son of God as remaining a divine being while merely cloaking Himself in human flesh. Rather, **Ignatius believed in the complete transformation of the Son of God to Son of Man.** The Son emptied Himself of His divine nature in order to become completely human.³¹ Several times Ignatius also warned Christians against the proto-gnostic teachers who claimed that the divine Son of God only appeared to become flesh when He came down from heaven. Ignatius did not in any way challenge that He was the divine Son of God prior to becoming flesh or that He came down from heaven. Rather, he rebuked the gnostic heresy **that the Son did not truly become flesh** and truly die as a man when He came down from heaven. For example:

“For what does anyone profit me, if he commends me, but blasphemes my Lord, not confessing that He was [truly] possessed of a body? But he who does not acknowledge this, has in fact altogether denied Him, being enveloped in death.”³²

Notice that the question of whether the Son from heaven really possessed a body of flesh was the major point of disagreement between the Gnostics and the Christians. John himself emphasized the same point when he wrote against the Gnostics, *“Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist.”³³* To

³⁰ This will be discussed later in detail

³¹ Phil. 2:5-8

³² Ignatius, Epistle to the Smyrnaeans, ch. v

³³ 1 Jn. 4:2-3

The Evolution of God – 3. Fragments of the Apostolic Fathers

deny (Gnostics) or affirm (Christians) “*that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh*” presupposes that He came down from heaven as both Paul³⁴ and John³⁵ explicitly stated.

Similar quotes from the longer (edited) version of Ignatius’ works could be multiplied here, but their value is secondary because the identity of the later editor(s) or when the additions were made cannot be ascertained with certainty.³⁶ Yet these statements are consistent with those above from the unedited versions. For example: “...*but that you may rather attain to the full assurance in Christ, who was begotten by the Father before all ages, but was afterwards born of the virgin Mary without any intercourse with man.*”³⁷ Again, “...*who was truly begotten of God and of the virgin, but not after the same manner. For indeed God and man are not the same. He truly assumed a body; for ‘the Word was made flesh,’ and lived upon earth without sin.*”³⁸ Statements of this kind are abundant in the longer embellished version of Ignatius’ works.

III. Polycarp of Smyrna: [AD 65 - 155]

Polycarp³⁹ was a fellow student of John’s along with Ignatius. He was appointed by John as bishop of the church in Smyrna prior to his imprisonment on Patmos where he wrote Revelation. Jesus’ letter to Smyrna⁴⁰ was addressed to Polycarp as “*the messenger of the church of Smyrna*” in which He had nothing negative to say. As a fellow disciple of John along with Ignatius, Polycarp has only one short letter which has survived, written to the Philippians. In it he offers nothing concerning the questions before us except his praise for the letters of Ignatius, his faithful friend and fellow student of John. From this it should be inferred that Polycarp was in complete agreement with Ignatius regarding the pre-human origin and existence of the Son of God.

“Both you and Ignatius wrote to me, that if any one went [from this] into Syria, he should carry your letter with him; which request I will attend to if I find a fitting opportunity, either personally, or through some other acting for me, that your desire may be fulfilled. The Epistles of Ignatius written by him to us, and all the rest [of his Epistles] which we have by us, we have sent to you, as you requested. They are subjoined to this Epistle, and by them ye may be greatly profited; for they treat of faith and patience, and all things that

³⁴ 1 Cor. 15:47; Eph. 4:8-10

³⁵ John 3:13; John 6:38,62

³⁶ That Ignatius’ works were edited at least a half century after his death is evident by the fact that the longer embellished version supports the later doctrine of the incarnation that was first articulated by Melito of Sardis as a reaction to Celsus’ attack on primitive Christianity. However, the short (unedited) version does not support the later development of the incarnation in conformity to Platonism. See the 6th article in this series for a fuller explanation.

³⁷ Ignatius, Epistle to the Magnesians, ch. xi

³⁸ Ignatius, Epistle to the Trallians, ch. ix

³⁹ AD 69-155

⁴⁰ Rev. 2:8-11

The Evolution of God – 3. Fragments of the Apostolic Fathers

tend to edification in our Lord. Any more certain information you may have obtained respecting both Ignatius himself, and those that were with him, have the goodness to make known to us."⁴¹

IV. Mathetes [AD ?]

An anonymous author penned a very early apologetic epistle to someone he called "most excellent Diognetus," most likely a high-ranking government official. He is called "Mathetes" (Greek for "disciple") because of his following statement: "I do not speak of things strange to me, nor do I aim at anything inconsistent with right reason; but having been a **disciple of the Apostles**, I am become a teacher of the Gentiles. I minister the things delivered to me to those that are disciples worthy of the truth."⁴² The introduction to his epistle states: "Mathetes was possibly a catechumen of St. Paul or of one of the apostle's associates."⁴³

*"[T]ruly God Himself, who is almighty, the Creator of all things, and invisible, has sent from heaven, and placed among men, [Him who is] the truth, and the holy and incomprehensible Word, and has firmly established Him in their hearts. He did not, as one might have imagined, send to men any servant, or angel, or ruler, or any one of those who bear sway over earthly things, or one of those to whom the government of things in the heavens has been entrusted, but the very Creator and Fashioner of all things — by whom He made the heavens — by whom he enclosed the sea within its proper bounds — whose ordinances all the stars faithfully observe — from whom the sun has received the measure of his daily course to be observed — whom the moon obeys, ... This [messenger] He sent to them. Was it then, as one might conceive, for the purpose of exercising tyranny, or of inspiring fear and terror? By no means, but under the influence of clemency and meekness. As a king sends his son, who is also a king, so sent He Him; as God He sent Him; as to men He sent Him; as a Savior He sent Him, and as seeking to persuade, not to compel us; for violence has no place in the character of God. As calling us He sent Him, not as vengefully pursuing us; as loving us He sent Him, not as judging us. ... This does not seem to be the work of man: **this is the Power of God**; these are the evidences of His manifestation."⁴⁴*

"I do not speak of things strange to me, nor do I aim at anything inconsistent with right reason; but having been a disciple of the Apostles, I am become a teacher of the Gentiles. I minister the things delivered to me to those that are disciples worthy of the truth. For who that is rightly taught and begotten by the loving Word, would not seek to learn

⁴¹ Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, ch. xiii

⁴² Mathetes to Diognetus, ch. xi

⁴³ The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I, Roberts & Donaldson, p. 23, Hendrickson Pub., (1994)

⁴⁴ Mathetes, ch. vii

The Evolution of God – 3. Fragments of the Apostolic Fathers

*accurately the things which have been clearly shown **by the Word to His disciples**, to whom **the Word being manifested** has revealed them, speaking plainly [to them], not understood indeed by the unbelieving, but conversing with the disciples, who, being esteemed faithful by Him, acquired a knowledge of the mysteries of the Father? For which reason **He sent the Word**, that He might be manifested to the world; and He, being despised by the people [of the Jews], was, when preached by the Apostles, believed on by the Gentiles. **This is He who was from the beginning, who appeared as if new, and was found old**, and yet who is ever born afresh in the hearts of the saints. This is He who, being from everlasting⁴⁵, is to-day called the Son;”⁴⁶*

Other Christian Writers Contiguous to the Apostolic Age:

There are other Christian works known to have been written very close to John’s death, in the first half of the second century. While virtually nothing is known of the authors, and thus no direct link to one of the Apostles can be positively established, they nevertheless provide specimens at the close of the apostolic age from a wide geographical area, from Alexandria, to Athens, to Rome.

Barnabas of Alexandria [AD 70 - 132]:

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

*“And further, my brethren: if the Lord endured to suffer for our soul, He being Lord of all the world, **to whom God said at the foundation of the world, “Let us make man after our image, and after our likeness,”** understand how it was that He endured to suffer at the hand of men.”⁴⁷*

*“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.”⁴⁸*

⁴⁵ The Greek word does not necessarily mean everlasting, only “continuing” (indefinitely).

⁴⁶ Mathetes, ch. xi

⁴⁷ Epistle of Barnabas, ch. V

⁴⁸ Epistle of Barnabas, ch. VI

The Evolution of God – 3. Fragments of the Apostolic Fathers

Aristides of Athens [AD 125]:

Another important very early witness still in the shadow of John's ministry is an apology written by Aristides of Athens and presented to the emperor Hadrian in AD 125.⁴⁹ Unlike the previous specimens which were primarily pastoral, this one was apologetic in nature. Its purpose was to seek relief for Christians from the Roman persecution by explaining the benign nature of Christianity, that it was no threat to Rome.

*“Now the Christians trace their origin from the Lord Jesus Christ. And He is acknowledged by the Holy Spirit to be **the son of the most high God, who came down from heaven for the salvation of men.** And being born of a pure virgin, unbegotten and immaculate **He assumed flesh** and revealed himself among men that He might recall them to Himself from their wander-lug after many gods. And having accomplished His wonderful dispensation, by a voluntary choice He tasted death on the cross, fulfilling an august dispensation. And after three days He came to life again and ascended into heaven. And if you would read, O King, you may judge the glory of His presence from the holy gospel writing, as it is called among themselves. He had twelve disciples, who after His ascension to heaven went forth into the provinces of the whole world, and declared His greatness. As for instance, **one of them traversed the countries about us, proclaiming the doctrine of the truth.** From this it is, that they who still observe the righteousness enjoined by their preaching are called Christians.”⁵⁰*

From this statement it is clear that Christians around Athens, of which Corinth was nearby, also held to the pre-human existence of Christ as the only-begotten Son of God, having come down from heaven to partake of full humanity. His subordinate position to the Father is noted by calling Him “*Son of the most high God.*” Notice also that Aristides claimed that this was apostolic tradition from Paul⁵¹ when he preached and taught in Greece (both Athens and Corinth), and he included Paul among the Twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ.

⁴⁹ Eusebius, has a chapter (Ecclesiastical History, Bk. IV., ch iii) titled, “*The authors that wrote in defense of the faith in the reign of Hadrian, A.D. 117-138.*” He writes: “*Aristides also, a man faithfully devoted to the religion we profess, like Quadratus, has left to posterity a defense of the faith, addressed to Hadrian. This work is also preserved by a great number, even to the present day.*” Eusebius in his Chronicon states that the Emperor Hadrian visited Athens in the eighth year of his reign (i.e., A.D. 125) and took part in the Eleusinian mysteries. In the same connection the historian mentions the presentation of Apologies to the Emperor by Quadratus and Aristides, “*an Athenian philosopher;*” and implies that Hadrian was induced by these appeals, coupled with a letter from Serenius Granianus, proconsul of Asia, to issue an Imperial rescript forbidding the punishment of Christians without careful investigation and trial.

⁵⁰ Aristides, Apology, ch. XV

⁵¹ Notice that Aristides believed that Paul was the 12th Apostle, not a 13th.

The Evolution of God – 3. Fragments of the Apostolic Fathers

The Shepherd of Hermas [circa AD 150]:

The “Shepherd” was written from Rome by the brother of the bishop of the church at Rome. It contains a series of parables and allegories meant to illustrate Christian truths in an allegorical manner similar to John Bunyan’s 1678 classic, *Pilgrim’s Progress*.

*“And in the middle of the plain he showed me a large white rock that had arisen out of the plain. And the rock was more lofty than the mountains, rectangular in shape, so as to be capable of containing the whole world: and **that rock Was old**, having a gate cut out of it; and the cutting out of **the gate seemed to me as if recently done**. And the gate glittered to such a degree under the sunbeams, that I marveled at the splendor of the gate; and round about the gate were standing twelve virgins.”⁵²*

*“First of all, sir,” I said, “explain this to me: What is the meaning of the rock and the gate?”
“**This rock,**” he answered, **“and this gate are the Son of God.”** “How, sir?” I said; “the rock is old, and the gate is new.” “Listen,” he said, “and understand, O ignorant man. **The Son of God is older than all His creatures, so that He was a fellow-councilor with the Father in His work of creation:**⁵³ for this reason is He old.” “And why is the gate new, sir?” I said. “Because,” he answered, **“He became manifest in the last days of the dispensation:**⁵⁴ for this reason the gate was made new, that they who are to be saved by it might enter into the kingdom of God.”⁵⁵*

These primitive quotes from the half century following John’s death are sufficient to show that the Apostles themselves handed down to their students the teachings concerning the pre-human origin of the Son of God, His role as God’s Agent in creation, and His transmutation to become fully human. These primitive documents were in circulation among the churches and demonstrate the accepted Christian teachings among the apostolic Christian churches at about the time of John’s death. As we now move beyond the shadow of John and his apostolic authority into the latter half of the second century, we will see that post-apostolic Christians remained fairly consistent for at least a century after John’s death, with a few exceptions.

Part 4, The Early Christian Apologists

www.4windsfellowships.net/articles/God/Evolution_004.pdf

⁵² Shepherd of Hermas, Bk. III, Similitudes IX, ch. ii

⁵³ Prov. 8:22-31 LXX

⁵⁴ 1 Pet. 1:20, see: <http://www.4windsfellowships.net/articles/God/foreknowledge.pdf>

⁵⁵ Ibid, ch. xii