

*EVEN AS WE ARE ONE: A STUDY ON THE QUESTION OF WILL IN
TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY UNTIL 381*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 343, the town of Sardica,¹ in the northwestern reaches of the imperial province of Thrace, was host to a synod of bishops who had assembled to address a number of questions that had arisen in the troubled wake of the Council of Nicaea. This was not out of the ordinary. That great council which had gathered in Bithynian Nicaea in 325 to condemn Arius² had proved something of a stumbling block in the life of the Church. In its effort to describe the ontological status of the Son relative to the Father it had included in its doctrinal statement a term, the *homoousios*, which had not to that point enjoyed universal usage and was open to a variety of interpretations. This move had been met with great reservation from a significant sector in the Church, and thus many local councils, assemblies, synods, and state interventions would be required in the fifty or so years that followed Nicaea before a broad consensus on its precise meaning could be won and peace finally be restored in the Church. Sardica simply was one of these councils. What makes it special for this study, however, is that, in affirming Nicaea and rebuking the “madness of the Arians,”³ it also issued statements that bitterly denounced the “blasphemous and perverse” opinion that the Gospel passage, “I and My Father are

¹ Today’s Sofia, Bulgaria.

² The matter of Arius was the chief but not the only question on the agenda at Nicaea. Other items had included the issue of the Melitian schism in Alexandria, a common timing of the Christian Pascha, and certain administrative and disciplinary matters.

³ What had sharpened the hostility was the fact that the Sardican council had initially been intended to be a more all-encompassing assembly comprising both Nicaea advocates and skeptics. But the tension between the two camps was such that the anti-Nicene party quickly withdrew, even before the council had commenced, and held its own separate meeting in nearby Philippoupolis.

one,”⁴ really referred to the oneness of “concord and harmony”⁵ that supposedly united the Father and the Son.⁶ In the same vein, the council went on to upbraid the “ignorance and mental darkness” of those who took the words of Jesus’ prayer to the Father—viz. “As Thou and I are one, that they may be one in us”⁷—as evidence that people could be one “in the same way” that the Son and the Father are one.⁸ Thus Sardica denounced the view that there was an analogy between the oneness that could be achieved among humans, which inevitably was volitional, and that between the divine Persons in the Trinity.

Sardica attributed these offending views that it condemned to a certain Valens and Ursacius.⁹ However, there is little doubt that they saw the real origin of these opinions in something that yet another council, this one held in Antioch but two years earlier (341), had articulated in its second epistle to describe the relationship between what it termed the three *hypostases* of the Trinity. This council had promulgated the formula: *three according to hypostasis, one according to concord*.¹⁰ Antioch had not been the first to use the language of *concord*,¹¹ but its statement marked the first time it had been put forward by a synod. Its hope had been to gain support for a method of describing the unity of the Father and the Son (and, of course, the Holy Spirit)¹² that avoided the language of

⁴ John 10:30.

⁵ *Apud* Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 2.6 (NPNF² 3:71 [PG 82:1016A]): “...διὰ τὴν συμφωνίαν καὶ τὴν ὁμόνοιαν...”

⁶ *Apud* Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 2.6 (NPNF² 3:71).

⁷ John 17:21.

⁸ *Apud* Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 2.6 (NPNF² 3:72).

⁹ Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 2.6 (NPNF² 3:71).

¹⁰ As preserved in Athanasius’ *Syn.* 23 (NPNF² 4:461 [PG 26:724A]): “ὡς εἶναι τῇ μὲν ὑποστάσει τρία, τῇ δὲ συμφωνίᾳ ἓν.” The fact that Antioch used the term *hypostasis* to describe each of the divine persons would itself be cause for confusion given that Sardica would choose to speak only of one hypostasis.

¹¹ We find it also, for example, in Asterius the Sophist. See, e.g., Fr. 39 (in Markus Vinzent, *Asterius von Kappadokien: die Theologischen Fragmente* [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993]): “διὰ τὴν ἐν ἅπασιν οὖν λόγοις τε καὶ ἔργοις ἀκριβοῦς συμφωνίαν ὁ σωτὴρ λέγει, <<ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἓν ἔσμεν>> (Jn. 10:30).”

¹² The fact that Antioch talked of the *three* hypostases in its formulations, i.e. including the Holy Spirit, put it very much ahead of developments. In most instances at this early point, most efforts were concerned with

coessentiality (*homoousion*) that Nicaea had insisted on but which had provoked such confusion and alarm in many, especially in the Church in the eastern parts of the Empire.¹³ Antioch's step back from the *homoousios* was seen by those at Sardica as an attempt to subvert the good work of Nicaea and surreptitiously to reintroduce the poisonous doctrines of Arius which it had condemned. Ironically, to its own bemusement and frustration, Antioch itself had had to respond to an earlier charge of Arianism that had been made against many of its own members,¹⁴ and it took great care to declare, from the very opening lines of its statements, that it had nothing to do with Arius.¹⁵ But this was not enough to convince the Sardican fathers of its good intentions. For not only had it cast doubt on Nicaea by attempting to revise its formulations, now it had begun to talk of the will in connection with the oneness between the persons in the Trinity, which was, as far as Sardica could see, exactly what Arius had done.

It was true, as we shall see in the fifth chapter of this study, that one particular strand of Arius' early thought, quite possibly an unchecked statement made in the heat of

establishing the nature of the relationship between Father and Son. Only once this was resolved was the ontological status of the Holy Spirit clarified fairly quickly.

¹³ G.L. Prestige (*St. Basil the Great and Apollinaris of Laodicea* [London: SPCK, 1956] 3) makes the point, very relevant to our times, that part of the opposition to the *homoousios* was an unwillingness among many to allow its supporters "to employ the language of the scientific thought of their age to explain or defend their convictions."

¹⁴ The synodal history here is quite complicated. Antioch had been the epicenter of the counterattack of the anti-Nicene camp following its humiliation at Nicaea. A local synod in 328 managed to dismiss the fervent Nicene, Eustathius, as bishop of the city (Socrates, *Hist eccl.* 1:24). This was followed by a council in Tyre (335) which removed Athanasius from Alexandria (*ibid.* 1.28), and one in Constantinople (336) which expelled Marcellus from Ancyra (*ibid.* 1.36). Constantine died in 337 and, following a brief period of instability with the deaths of some of his appointed successors, the realm eventually fell to his sons Constantius, who was unsympathetic to Nicaea, in the East, and Constans, a supporter of the great Council, who took the West. Following his banishment from Alexandria, Athanasius eventually took refuge in the West, where imperial sympathy for Nicaea was high, and he presented his opponents to Julius, the bishop of Rome, as partisans of Arius. Julius then sent an epistle to those close to Eusebius (apud Athanasius, *Apol. sec.* [*Apol. c. Ar.*] 20-35) who had been behind Athanasius' expulsion, protesting their actions and insinuating that they were supporters of Arius. These were the accusations to which Antioch (341) displayed such sensitivity.

¹⁵ Athanasius, *Syn.* 22 (*NPNF*² 4:461): "We have not been followers of Arius—how could Bishops, such as we, follow a Presbyter?..."

debate, had indeed presented the oneness of Father and Son as a theoretically contingent union between two discrete volitive agents.¹⁶ It brought together a Christology that lacked a conception of a human soul in Christ—and thus attributed all signs in Scripture of his frailty and finitude back to the Son’s pre-incarnate nature—with an inherently stratified cosmology that perceived reality as an ontologically graded hierarchy at whose summit rested the transcendent and unoriginate Father. This was but a facet of a broader theology that had the will as its motor. All creatures existed at the will of the Father, and hence, as created from nothingness and therefore mutable, related back to the Father through a relationship of volition. Thus, Arius viewed the Son’s sonship to the Father in a way that laid all emphasis on perceptions of fairness, meritocracy, and exemplariness because, at bottom, it assumed the Son’s ontological non-parity with the Father. As kin to the creatures, this theory ran, the Son’s sonship became paradigmatic of the kind of relationship with God that humans could aspire to as well. Thus, Arius began to link the exemplariness and meritoriousness of Christ’s work with the supposed contingency of the Son’s virtue. All parties agreed that Christ’s life was exemplary and meritorious, but for Arius this merit lay specifically in the fact that the pre-existent Son, as the intellective principle in this Arian Christ bereft of a human soul, supposedly could have lapsed from the path of virtue but chose not to. To be sure, this was Arius at his most extreme, articulating positions that he would distance himself from. But Sardica would view all talk of will in this context with horror and as on a par with this extreme

¹⁶ See, for example, Alexander of Alexandria’s testimony in his *Epistle to the Hierarchs Everywhere* that “Some one accordingly asked them [Arius and his cohort] whether the Word of God could be changed, as the devil had been? And they feared not to say, ‘Yes, he could; for being begotten, he is susceptible of change.’” (Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.6 [NPNF² 2:4]). In his *Epistle to Alexander* (*apud* Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 1.3 [NPNF² 3:36]), Alexander stated that of Christ that “though mutable by nature, his painstaking character suffered no deterioration.” If a Peter or Paul did the same thing, he added, their sonship would have been the same as the Son’s.

Arius. It was unable to see the inclusion of will in the intra-Trinitarian discussion as anything other than a pole of contingency and instability:

“We, as Catholics, unanimously condemned this foolish and lamentable opinion: for just as mortal men on a difference having arisen between them quarrel and afterwards are reconciled, so do such interpreters say that disputes and dissension are liable to arise between God the Father Almighty and His Son; a supposition which is altogether absurd and untenable. But we believe and maintain that those holy words, ‘I and My Father are one,’ point out the oneness of hypostasis (*ὑπόστασις*) which is one and the same in the Father and in the Son.”¹⁷

Sardica was acting on the strong impulse automatically to correlate the will with *inherent* contingency, and thus to position the concept of volitive oneness as antipodal to *oneness according to essence*, which was seen by many as the only safe way of talking of the Trinity without being led to a concept of potential conflict within it. Conflict in the divine sphere was what characterized the religion of the pagans, and this specter of incipient polytheism had struck fear in those gathered at Sardica.

THE PROBLEM

We cannot help but note that Sardica also condemned articles of belief that had not been articulated by Antioch. To what degree these were the embellishments made by Valens and Ursacius, or what Sardica viewed were fair extrapolations from the premises laid out by Antioch, is difficult to gauge. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to imagine that some disputants, taking their inspiration from such passages as John 17:22b (“...that they may be one, even as we are one”) and Antioch’s references to a oneness according to

¹⁷ Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 2.6 (NPNF² 3:71).

concord, remained wedded to the kerygmatic power of Arius' early line of thinking. Even in our time, the conviction that the Trinity can serve as a model to which human interactions should aspire has been the inspiration behind a whole body of theology known as Social Trinitarianism.¹⁸ According to how Sardica saw the issue, however, such a social reading of the Trinity, that was based on a sense of concord and volitive harmonization, and understood the relations between the divine Persons as analogous to interpersonal ties in the human sphere, could not be applied to the Godhead. Human relations, it argued, were too erratic and prone to conflict to be a true reflection of the inner life of the Trinity. To be sure, although it is not clear that this is what Antioch was preaching—I will argue it was not—this *social* question that had so discomfited Sardica was but one aspect of a larger and very basic matter that lay at the heart of the Trinitarian disputes of the fourth century: whether and how one could refer to the will *at all* when talking of the internal relations in the Trinity.

This was a particularly important question, for the issue of the will made Christianity stand apart from its pagan-philosophical surroundings, and it made appeal to it in a number of ways. On the one hand, it had inherited the Hebraic vision of the supreme principle as a personal deity possessed of will, in accordance with which it created the universe and invested it with purposeful direction. Again, as a matter of its own inscrutable will, this deity chose to make itself known to humans through a process of revelation. Thus, the Church, in line with this revelation, also propounded a belief in the end of the world, the return of the Messiah, and a final reckoning by which the degree

¹⁸ A study that highlights the centrality of will to theories of Social Trinitarianism is Peter Forrest's "Divine Fission: A New Way of Moderating Social Trinitarianism," in *RelS*. 34: 281-297. Also important is the work of Sarah Coakley ("Re-thinking Gregory of Nyssa: Introduction—Gender, Trinitarian Analogies, and the Pedagogy of *The Song*" [*Modern Theology* 18(4):431-443]) and others in this volume, who take on the question of personhood, substance, and will in light of modern claims to a social Trinitarianism.

of conformity of each person's deeds to the absolute, good, and just will of God would be judged. Such was the centrality of the will to the basic theological architecture of Christianity that modern studies like those of Albrecht Dihle¹⁹ and especially Michael Frede²⁰ have argued that the question of will, particularly that of *free* will, became a major issue in the philosophical circles of late antiquity, and that the rapid spread of Christianity beyond the ethnic confines of Judaism was a major contributing factor. As Michael Frede states, late antiquity became a time when there was a general concern for justice and the intentionality by which the virtue or not of one's actions could be appraised.²¹ In the past, scholars tended to assume the acceptance of free will among even the earliest of theorists.²² Dihle and Frede, however, saw it as a much later phenomenon. Dihle dated it to Augustine, but Frede, crucially, rejected this and put it much earlier, to the Stoics. The matter for Frede became very delicate, and the question hinged on whether the will was understood as a purposeful movement of mind that necessarily was the consequence of cognizance—and whether there was an attendant act of actual assent here would determine whether we were talking of *free* will—or an act of mind that was theoretically independent of anything, even of cognizance. This latter instance would probably coincide with most popular perceptions of free will, which Frede considered a disastrous misconception first codified by Alexander of Aphrodisias. In the Christian sphere, at least in this period and especially as it is applied to describing the inner life of the Trinity, the *will* will remain a fairly straightforward category, namely a purposive

¹⁹ Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

²⁰ Michael Frede, *A Free Will: Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

²¹ Frede, *A Free Will*, 98.

²² See, e.g., W.D. Ross (*Aristotle* [London; New York: Routledge, 1995], 209), who believed that, “on the whole,” Aristotle “shared the plain man’s belief in free will but that he did not examine the problem very thoroughly, and did not express himself with great consistency.”

movement of mind informed by understanding. Only in Origen will we see the inklings of a more autonomous will, though only as it pertained to created beings, and not to the life in the Godhead. We will, of course, have sufficient opportunity to examine these questions in the pages below. What we will note for now, however, is that the importance of this shift in dominant worldview which begins to take hold in late antiquity, from one that accepted the logical necessity of the unchanging “way that things are” to one calling for the transformation of the self in light of the coming eschaton, cannot be underestimated, and it is in this light that the will, as a buttress against necessity, became a key element in how one understood freedom, compulsion, and justice.

The focus in this study, though germane in a broad sense to the work of Dihle and Frede on free will, will be quite different. What drives this investigation is how this wider concern with the will was integrated into the Christian doctrine of a Triune God, which itself was complicated further by the attendant belief that one of the Persons in this deity became human and lived a life of obedience “unto death, even the death of the Cross.”²³ The scenario at Sardica that I presented in my opening sketch was simply one aspect of the problem. The more basic difficulty lay in the fact that natural to the notion of the Trinity was the need among the theologians and hermeneutes for a sense of proper order among the divine Persons. The revelation of a Father, and of a Son *begotten* of the Father, gave rise to a host of perceptions and questions, some of which instinctively saw this article of doctrine in subordinate or ontologically gradated terms.

One such question, key to our purposes, was the crucial matter of whether there existed an act of volition in the Father that was precedent to and causative of this begetting of the Son. Certain passages in Scripture were vaguely patient of such an

²³ Phil. 2:8.

interpretation,²⁴ but the question was chiefly philosophical: in line with this emergent appreciation of the will as bulwark against compulsion, the proponents of precedent will saw it as a statement of divine freedom and a vital check against the kinds of notions of necessity in the Father's begetting of the Son that one might find in certain philosophical schools such as that of the late Plotinus.²⁵ However, to its detractors, who in the fourth century came mainly from the Nicene camp, besides the fact that the mere notion of an act of will *prior* to the begetting framed the conversation in temporal terms that were unacceptable when talking of the Godhead, the idea of *precedent* will came to be viewed as the premise that enabled the relation between Father and Son to be understood in solely volitional terms. Arius' insistence that the Son existed at the will of the Father was proof in point. They understood the will instinctively as the mode by which God acted outside of, and not within, the Godhead. To be sure, by making the cosmos the product of an act of God's will, which he could have chosen not to exercise, Christian thinkers were able to affirm the sovereignty of God and head off claims of the necessity and eternity of creation. But by contending that the Son, too, was begotten by the will of God, the result was automatically to assume ontological parity between the Son and creation.²⁶ This may have been a source of delight to certain of the more extreme elements in the anti-Nicene party that believed in the Father's ontological superiority over the Son, but it struck fear in the Nicene party. The will had emerged as the bulwark against necessity, but in the process it had come to be branded by some as the pole of a dangerous contingency. By

²⁴ E.g. Prov. 8:22 (LXX), although this rested more on the verbal construction “ἐκτισέ με,” which was taken to imply the Son's kinship with the κτίσματα and thus was suggestive of a precedent volitive act only in a secondary sense. Williams' remark (*Arius*, 111) that this passage “affirm[ed] that the mediator is created by God's will,” is too strong a characterization, given that the passage makes no mention of the will.

²⁵ Cf. Arius' view that the Son “existed at the will of the Father” (Apud Athanasius, *Syn.* 15 [NPNF² 4:457]).

²⁶ We note Athanasius: “He who says, ‘The Son came to be at the divine will,’ has the same meaning as another who says, ‘Once he was not,’ and ‘He is a creature’” (*C. Ar.* 3.59 [NPNF² 4:426]).

talking of the Father's willing to beget the Son, or of volitional harmony between Father and Son, both the Son's existence and his continued closeness to the Father became for this party matters of choice. In the worst instance, Christian Trinitarianism would be reduced to the polytheism of old, characterized by strife and discord in the divine realm.

It was in this light that Sardica rejected the will, and this would be the theological line that many in the pro-Nicaea camp would uphold throughout the conflict that followed the great Council. They could not forget Arius' claim that the Son's sonship to the Father was a matter of continued obedience and volitive effort against potential lapse. Yet Antioch, with its doctrine of three hypostases that were *one according to symphonia*, clearly had no reservations about invoking concord and the harmony of wills between the divine Persons. Was it preaching an hypothetical chance of discord in the Godhead? Prima facie, the fact that even Arius himself had jettisoned that offending view at least gave an air of implausibility to Sardica's claim that Antioch aimed to reintroduce a theory of potential conflict. It would be hard to imagine Antioch casting itself as more Arian than Arius when it had made such an effort to distance itself from him. Yet, while we dare here to suggest what Antioch's formula could not have meant, expatiating positively on how the Antiochene fathers did imagine the place of the will in an *oneness according to symphonia* was uncertain and will require examination.

On the other hand, Sardica's views were not without their problems. Her references to a single *hypostasis*—which she no doubt intended as a synonym for *ousia*, but which, in the general confusion over terminology that racked the period, the Antiochenes would have read as *person*—must have been taken as confirmation of

Antioch's worst phobias regarding Nicaea's latent Sabellianism (i.e. Modalism).²⁷ After all, Sardica was simply repeating the conventions laid out at Nicaea,²⁸ and her rejection of the will would have been interpreted in this light, with the notion of symphonia being perceived as offensive only to those who held that the Trinity was in fact three manifestations of one and the same divine Person. We know from later conciliar history that it would be the language of three hypostases that would be accepted by the Church at large and that on this point Antioch seemed to be vindicated over Sardica, at least lexically.²⁹ Moreover, the indications are that over time the question of the will in the Trinity came also to be talked of, at least among individual commentators of undisputed orthodoxy who were central to the proceedings of the Council of Constantinople, in a way that again stood at variance from Sardica's hostility. However, a final statement on the question of will in the Trinity was never enshrined in the doctrinal statement of that same council, which conventionally is seen as bringing to a close the Trinitarian disputes of the fourth century. Finally, in considering the implications of both Antioch and Sardica's positions, our curiosity cannot but be piqued as to how the question of the will in the tri-hypostatic Godhead was eventually resolved, and where, in the theological whole that would emerge, the matter of the will would fit relative to those other categories, such as hypostasis and nature and ousia etc., whose precise meaning was also still fluid. Of course, the next great difficulty that the Church would wrestle with, in the

²⁷ We must also note that one of Sardica's first complaints against Valens and Ursacius was that "they pertinaciously maintain, like the heretics, that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are of diverse and distinct hypostases" (*Apud Theodoret, Hist. eccl.* 2.6 [*NPNF*² 3:71]).

²⁸ In its doctrinal statement, Nicaea used *ousia* and *hypostasis* as synonyms: "Τοὺς δὲ λέγοντας ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν' καὶ 'πρὶν γεννηθῆναι οὐκ ἦν' καὶ ὅτι ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων ἐγένετο, ἢ ἐξ ἑτέρας ὑποστάσεως ἢ οὐσίας, φάσκοντας εἶναι ἢ τρεπτὸν ἢ ἀλλοιωτὸν τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, τούτους ἀναθεματίζει ἡ καθολικὴ καὶ ἀποστολικὴ ἐκκλησία" (see Norman P. Tanner, S.J. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* [London & Washington D.C.: Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990], 5:20-27). Sardica followed the same convention

²⁹ In its doctrinal epistle to the Church in the West, the Council of Constantinople (381) would state: "ἐν τρισὶ τελειοτάταις ὑποστάσεσιν, ἡγουν τρισὶ τελείοις προσώποις" (See Tanner, *Decrees*, 28:25-27).

5th century and for two centuries following, would have to do with the two natures, and famously the two wills, of the singular hypostasis of the incarnate Son of God.³⁰ It simply behooves us then to see how this first great dispute on the will was settled.

PROPOSAL AND THESIS

The very fact that this dispute on the will even arose—as an important aspect of the wider dispute on the ontological status of the Son that was provoked by Arius—prompts me to turn to the doctrinal tradition of the Church itself, as it had manifested itself to that point, in order to gauge to what extent the disputants were working within doctrinal precedent on the matter of the will in the theology of the Trinity. Unfortunately, little systematic work has been done in this direction, and it is in this light that the purpose of this study begins to take form. I propose to develop a general picture of this doctrinal patrimony by examining in depth the Trinitarian theology of a selection of early Christian authors starting from Justin. This will be complemented by a concomitant focus on selected non-Christian authors as well, specifically the Valentinians and Plotinus, which will serve as helpful points of contrast with the exponents of Christian teaching. This will be a diachronic study, which means that the selected authors will be arranged in roughly, though not strictly, chronological order. Chronological order will be broken only if certain authors need to be grouped together according to theological type. I am loath to call this a study that traces the *development* of the doctrine of the will in the Trinity only

³⁰ Of course, we know that the question of Monotheletism in the seventh century would be resolved through appeal to a correlation between *will* and *nature* (which itself had come to correlate with *essence*). Thus the affirmation of the doctrine of Christ's two wills at the Sixth Council (681)—along with the clarifications from Maximus that Christ's human will was never gnostic, or deliberative, and from John Damascene, that, although there were two wills, there remained but one and the same willer, viz. the Incarnate Son, thus precluding any conflict between the two wills—was simply an extension of the doctrine of his two natures which had been expounded at Chalcedon (451).

because it is not possible to talk of a clearly discernible, linear, and causally consecutive progression in the matter of will in the Trinity over the first three centuries of the Church's doctrinal tradition. At this point, I will prefer to present this study as a selection of theological vignettes that help us to approximate the allowable bounds of theological discourse on our question, and thus to appraise the origins of the various streams that emerged in the fourth century within the theological patrimony of previous centuries as we have mapped it out.

I believe that this kind of study is required primarily because I have yet to find a satisfactory account of the question of will in the Trinitarian theology of this period. Apart from the lacuna in our knowledge and the general in clarity on this central doctrinal question that this has created, this lack has also contributed, I believe, to the overly-polarized understanding of the disputes in the fourth century which has traditionally characterized scholarship on this matter, and which unwittingly has reinforced the, to my mind, skewed perception of a Christianity that was so confused over its own beliefs that it found itself quarreling over even the most basic of its tenets, namely the true divinity or not of its object of worship. Moreover, the fact that there has been little critical focus on the will in the Trinity cultivates the presumption that Sardica's criticism is automatically true, and that the parties who invoked the will did so with the understanding that these volitive actions were contingent. Thanks to modern scholarship, the overly simplified view of the fourth century disputes in general has begun to recede, and it is among the academic efforts in this direction that this study hopes to take its place, focusing on one particular aspect thereof.

I also must mention that the fact that the disputes were largely though not completely brought to a close with the Council of Constantinople, which articulated the faith using the language of three *hypostases*, has in certain modern theological circles given birth to a supposedly patristic social Trinitarianism whose assertiveness has been met with both enthusiasm and frustration.³¹ By focusing on the question of will, including Sardica's negative reaction to what it thought was a theory of social Trinitarianism, I believe that this study can thus also shed some light on this question as well.

This study takes much of its initial inspiration from the more recent scholarship on Arius and Arianism that has helped us to discern the degree of polyphony that existed within what traditionally were perceived as the two main camps in the Trinitarian disputes of the fourth century. The work of Rowan Williams has been monumental in this direction, and has done much to dismantle the perception of Arianism as a monolithic movement of clergy and laity who were under the spell of the heresiarch Arius, whose individual teaching supposedly had come to dominate the eastern Church in the mid-fourth century. On the contrary, what came to be known as "Arianism" throughout most of that century "was in fact a loose and uneasy coalition of those hostile to Nicaea in general and the *homoousios* in particular."³² This allows us to see that not all the accusations of Arianism were being applied accurately, and it prompts us, in the same vein, to question whether all mention of the will in the Trinity had ultimately to be

³¹ I am referring to the work of Metropolitan John Zizioulas (*Being as Communion* [London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985]). Whether Zizioulas' account is a true reflection of the Patristic mind, and not a projection of much later thought, has been a sharp point of contention. Illustrative is Sarah Coakley's ("Re-thinking Gregory of Nyssa: Introduction—Gender, Trinitarian Analogies, and the Pedagogy of *The Song*," in *Modern Theology* 18:4 [Oct 2002], 434) criticism of what she call this "so-called 'social Trinity of the East,'" where she remarks that "to have the 'West' attacked by the 'East' on a reading of the Cappadocians that was ultimately spawned by a French Jesuit is a strange irony." One of the fullest treatments of Zizioulas' thought is the collection of essays to be found in *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church* (ed. Douglas H. Knight [Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2007]).

³² Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001 [rev. ed.]), 165-6.

sourced back to Arius and reduced to the kind of unavoidable contingency that he had preached. For, as R.P.C. Hanson has observed, Arius theologically was quite the loner, a thinker of an eclectic pedigree who could not easily be categorized as a devotee of any particular school of thought,³³ and Lewis Ayres has in more recent times gone as far as to declare that “while much revisionary scholarship has focused on Arius himself, Arius’ own theology is of little importance in understanding the major debates of the rest of the century.”³⁴ My general position in the fifth chapter will be that, although it was the actions of Arius—specifically his dispute with his bishop, Alexander of Alexandria—that set off the chain of events that led to the Council of Nicaea, it was Arius himself who would have, ironically, to adjust his theological posture in order to come into closer alignment with the coalition of those who had been disillusioned by the outcome of that council.

On the specific question surrounding the place of the will in the dispute, less significant work has been done, and what little there is has focused most of its attention on the disputes provoked by Arius, not earlier. Among these I include Thomas Kopecek’s important study on the second generation of the extreme anti-Nicene party,³⁵ which could be described as an historical narrative of the disputes that stayed faithful to the chroniclers such as Socrates Scholasticus, Sozomen, and the others. In this context, he made intermittent references, as the sources dictated, to the invocation of the will in the doctrinal statements that were issued by the various anti-Nicene parties among which was Antioch. As a useful overview of the Arian dispute, I must confess that it was this work

³³ R.P.C. Hanson, *Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318-381* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 98.

³⁴ Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 56.

³⁵ Thomas A. Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism* (Philadelphia Patristic Foundation Ltd.: 1979).

that initially sensitized me to the matter of the will in the Trinitarian disputes, not just because it made reference to our particular question but precisely because, as primarily an historical work that did not have the leisure of looking in depth at the theological themes it touched on, it impressed on me the need for this question to be explored further.

In a slightly different direction, Gregg and Groh³⁶ focused on that particular and most controversial aspect of Arius' teaching that he himself eventually jettisoned, namely his contingently volitional relationship with the Father, and they suggested that his early theology was born, in the main, of soteriological concerns: Christ, burdened, in this view, by the same volitive contingencies as were his fellow creatures, assumed the role of their salvific exemplar. While it is a captivating study, the problem with it was that it laid disproportionate emphasis on what was probably a heedless statement of Arius', or of one of his followers, and lost sight of what was really Arius' more crucial concern with preserving what he considered to be proper theological order in the Trinity.³⁷ Besides, because, as we noted, Arius abandoned this line of thought very early in the dispute, after, I suspect, he had established extensive personal contact with other anti-Nicene churchmen, there is no evidence that his views on this point had widespread resonance.³⁸

Joseph Lienhard went in a more constructive direction, piecing together a theory of two divergent theologies that had come to a head in the fourth century. On the one side was the *dyohypostatic* understanding of the Godhead in the anti-Nicene camp, as opposed to the *miahypostatic* thought of its opponents. Lienhard made some mention of the will in the dyohypostatic model, although he limited himself to the Arian disputes without

³⁶ Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981).

³⁷ R.P.C. Hanson (*Search* 97) notes some of the internal difficulties with the thesis of Gregg and Groh.

³⁸ We do see Asterius, who also wrote early in the disputes, espousing something close to a theory of the Son's mutability and contingent virtue. But even he seems to have undergone an evolution.

treating of it in any notable depth.³⁹ Nevertheless, his categories were helpful in gaining a quick grasp of some of the fourth century issues, provided that one did not take his lines of distinction too rigidly. In his subsequent work, however, which was centered on Marcellus of Ancyra,⁴⁰ Lienhard went slightly further with the question of will in the Trinity, especially when he examined how Marcellus' foe, namely the early extreme anti-Nicene, Asterius of Cappadocia, understood it.⁴¹ One of Lienhard's specific claims was that for Asterius the oneness of the Father and the Son, which was talked of in Jn. 10:30,⁴² referred "only to a harmony of wills."⁴³ In this, Lienhard argued, Asterius was supposedly following Origen. To my reading, Asterius was quite fluid on the matter of the will, swinging between a position of contingency and potential conflict as the early Arius had done⁴⁴ to one that talked of an ever-identity of will and absolute agreement between Father and Son.⁴⁵ This might suggest an evolution in his position of the sort that Arius had undergone as well, which would not be unlikely, given that he wrote very early in the dispute, and died in 341, but five years after Arius. However, to suggest that Asterius was somehow "following" Origen on this point was simply not the case. To be

³⁹ Joseph Lienhard, S.J., "The 'Arian' Controversy: Some Categories Reconsidered." *TS* 48 (1987): 429: "...the dyohypostatic tradition sees salvation in the order of will: Christ is essentially a revealer and teacher."

⁴⁰ Joseph Lienhard, S.J., *Contra Marcellum: Marcellus of Ancyra and Fourth Century Theology* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999).

⁴¹ Asterius seemed to teeter between a view of contingent will between Son and Father (Fr. 43) and not (Frs. 39-40) (in Markus Vinzent, *Asterius von Kappadokien: die Theologischen Fragmente* [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993]).

⁴² "I and the Father are one."

⁴³ Joseph Lienhard (*Contra Marcellum*, 94).

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Fr. 43 (in Markus Vinzent, *Asterius von Kappadokien: die Theologischen Fragmente* [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993]): "τῆ μὲν φύσει τρεπτός ἐστι, τῷ δὲ ἰδίῳ αὐτεξουσίῳ ἕως βούλεται μένει καλός· ὅτε μέντοι θέλει, δύναται τρέπεσθαι καὶ αὐτός ὡσπερ καὶ τὰ πάντα. διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ προγινώσκων ὁ Θεὸς ἔσεσθαι καλὸν αὐτόν, προλαβὼν ταύτην αὐτῷ τὴν δόξαν δέδωκεν (cf. Jn. 17:5), ἣν ἂν καὶ ἐκ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἔσχες μετὰ ταῦτα, ὥστε ἐξ ἔργων αὐτοῦ, ὧν προέγνω ὁ Θεός, τοιοῦτον αὐτὸν νῦν γεγονέναι."

⁴⁵ E.g. Fr. 39 (*ibid.*): "διὰ τὴν ἐν ἅπασιν οὖν λόγοις τε καὶ ἔργοις ἀκριβῆ συμφωνίαν ὁ σωτὴρ λέγει, <<ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἐν ἑσμεν>> (Jn. 10:30);" and Fr. 40: "ἐπεὶ ἂ θέλει ὁ πατὴρ ταῦτα θέλει καὶ ὁ υἱὸς καὶ οὔτε τοῖς νοήμασιν οὔτε τοῖς κρίμασιν ἀντίκειται, ἀλλ' ἐν πᾶσιν ἐστι σύμφωνος αὐτῷ τὴν ταυτότητα τῶν δογμάτων καὶ τὸν ἀκόλουθον καὶ συνηρημένον τῆ τοῦ πατρὸς διδασκαλίᾳ ἀποδιδοῦς λόγον· διὰ τοῦτο αὐτὸς καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἐν εἰσί (cf. Jn. 10:30)."

sure, in the *Cels.* 8.12, which Lienhard cited,⁴⁶ Origen took the oneness in Jn 10:30 to refer to oneness “in unity of thought, in harmony and in identity of will.”⁴⁷ But Origen did not talk about a oneness *only* of will between Father and Son but also of a oneness of nature and substance.⁴⁸ And *never* did he suggest the mutability of the Son, qua Son, and the potential for him to lapse if he wanted, in the way that Asterius (Fr. 43) did. To intimate then that Asterius was somehow following Origen on this point is incorrect. In fairness to Fr. Lienhard, whose work I have found most enlightening and useful in this study, the Asterius-Origen connection was quite extraneous to his general thrust. Nevertheless, it impressed on me the need for a study that looks at the matter of the will in Trinitarian theology in the centuries prior to Nicaea in order to gain a fuller insight on this question. Apart from the gap in our knowledge that the absence of such a study has produced, the general silence on the question only encourages the perception of general assent to the Nicene party’s accusation that its opponents were wedded to a notion of contingent volition. This is simply untenable.

In this light, I will argue that, *pace* the early Arius, there are no grounds for accepting that the notion of the contingent will of the Son, qua divine Son, with respect to the Father had any wide acceptance. Not only so, neither was there in any of the fathers from the earlier periods whose theology I will present as much as a hint of such a contingent understanding of the symphonic connection between the Father and the Son. In the earliest writers that we will tackle, the Son is an extension of the will of the Father and in himself he makes known God’s will to creatures, eliciting from them their own volitional response of submission and obedience. Even when the knowledge (and

⁴⁶ Joseph Lienhard, *Contra Marcellum*, 94, n. 100.

⁴⁷ *ANF* (4:644-5).

⁴⁸ *Princ.* 1.2.6.

therefore volition) centered theology of Gnosticism rocked both the Church and the philosophical world with its message of a divine conflict of which the material world was a by-product, the response from both was decidedly damning. In Plotinus we will see his abandonment of an early experimentation with the will as the explanatory device behind the movement from primordial monality to plurality in the divine sphere, and, as a direct result of the danger posed by the Gnostic theology of volitional conflict, a subsequent steering toward the safer and philosophically more traditional waters of a system circumscribed by the dictates of rational necessity. In the Christian sphere, conversely, the reaction will vary between downplaying the question of will altogether, as in the case of Irenaeus, and, in Origen, propounding a theology that, in a quest to fight the determinism posed by both Gnosticism and philosophy, explicitly will embrace the will as none other had ever before done.

In both the above instances, however, there will never be the hint of possibility even of potential conflict between the divine hypostases. This was so because of the way in which the will in the divine sphere had come to be understood among Christian divines simply did not allow for such a possibility. In the fathers that I will examine, I will make the case that the understanding of will was fairly straightforward: a purposeful movement of mind informed by knowledge. This was never defined explicitly, but it was something that can be extrapolated from their works without force. As a theory of will it never reached the kind of depth that we might find in Aristotle's *Eth. nic.* or Alexander of Aphrodisias, who worked with the subtlety of human volition and intentionality. Rather, it will always remain at the level of the ontologically inferior outsider observing the

absoluteness of God in whom there is no place for the fragmentation and complexity of purpose that characterized the psychology of fallen humanity.

The will here was understood as being directly connected to knowledge and degree of rationality, which was in line with the Greek notion of sin, or mis-willing, as a function of ignorance.⁴⁹ Where cognizance was absolute, as in the case of God, there the will, too, was absolute, serving as the standard against which all willing was measured. Where there was cognitive disparity between agents, there could one talk about the potential for volitive conflict. In the Christian framework, the limited cognition of the inferior agents, namely the creatures, was both ontological—i.e. they were finite, created beings that simply could not have infinite knowledge—but also a result of the ravages of the Fall, which clouded their already limited intellective capacity. The exertion of will in this context could go two ways: either toward virtue, if the movement of mind in the inferior agent was founded on a correct extrapolation from its inferior and limited knowledge. This movement, which we might name *faith*, could be aided by revelation. On the other hand, volitive exertion could move one toward sin and disobedience against God if one acted on a misextrapolation from one's limited knowledge. In this scheme, few were they, besides the early Arius, who were willing to say that the Son—the Logos!—had limited knowledge. Even the Arian historian Philostorgius would note that Arius' earliest allies did not accept his claim that the Son knew not the Father. Thus, the possibility of a widespread belief in the Son's being united to the Father solely by contingent will appear remote. In this light, I will argue that Antioch's *oneness according to symphonia* formula can only be taken as pointing to sameness of will, not as a

⁴⁹ For now, we will limit ourselves only to citing the Stoic Zeno, for whom will (*βούλησις*) was nothing other than a “rational appetite” (*εὐλογον ἄρεξιν*) (Diogenes Laertius 7. 106).

statement on the contingent volitional union between Father and Son, but as an index of an underlying oneness that they were prepared to describe phenomenologically only; the absolute oneness of purpose of Father and Son pointed to an oneness between the two that could not otherwise be described, certainly not with what Antioch saw as problematic formulae such as the *homoousion*.⁵⁰

Conversely, the question of the Father's antecedent will in begetting the Son would prove more intractable. It had been both a mainstay in theology even of the earliest Fathers and was deemed logically essential to guard against God the Father's reduction into an impersonal deity who was subject to external dictates. In order to differentiate the Son from the creatures, we will see a concerted effort, from the earliest Fathers onward, to present this precedent will behind the generation of the Son as unlike the will by which God created the world. In the fourth century, although the Nicene party was initially at odds with even the notion of precedent will in the Father, eventually it was integrated even into their theology in a way that ensured that it did not lead to the ontological diminution of the Son (and Spirit) compared to the Father.

Thus, in the earliest fathers whom we will examine in the chapter that will follow this one, namely Justin and Tertullian, we see the will treated as the natural auxiliary to the process of revelation in a basic paradigm of exit from the Godhead and return thereto. Here, a psychological paradigm will be established, in which the Father first wills and then generates the Son as Logos in a way that is analogous to the manner in which the

⁵⁰ The fact that over time these same proponents of a will-only description of the oneness of Father and Son would gradually be won over to include a statement on oneness of ousia is illustrated by Socrates Scholasticus' (*Hist. eccl.* 2.40 [NPNF² 2:70]) description of an internal dispute in the Homoean camp some years after Antioch: "The Acacian party affirmed that the Son was like the Father as it respected his will only, and not his 'substance' or 'essence;' but the rest maintained that the likeness extended to both essence and will."

human mind puts forth a word. This antecedent act of volition on the part of the Father to generate the Son will not, as will happen in Arius, be viewed as evidence of the Son's inferiority, but will be part of an overall scheme whose aim it to stress the uniqueness of the Son's generation and his inimitable closeness to the Father. As the perfect externalization and hypostatization of the wisdom and will of the Father, the Son will become the outward expression of the Godhead whose purpose it will be to make the identity and will of the Father known to a world that is possessed of mere seeds of truth. This will be a passing on of saving knowledge, and it will be up to rational creation to respond to this revelation through its free assent. Though there is a hierarchy and distinct order in their theology, there will never be a sense of the Son's relative ignorance or responsive will back toward the Father in obedience and faith—a paradigm strengthened by the fact that neither Justin nor Tertullian develop a notion of a human mind in Christ that might be misconceived into a scheme of volitional bi-directionality. This would risk violating what Tertullian will call the monarchy in the Godhead. On the contrary, the paragon of submission will be not the Son but the Virgin Mary. Both Justin and Tertullian's theological plan will be one based on knowledge enlightening ignorance. The absolute will of God, as expression of his omniscience, will be made known to creatures, which are naturally possessed of but partial knowledge, so that they might respond in faith and obedience. In Tertullian, who will criticize the Gnostic view of divine begetting as putting the generate hypostases at a distance from their generator—which in turn will lead to volitive conflict—, we will also see a fitting prelude to the next chapter.

In the third chapter we will witness a marked shift from this theological architecture with the emergence of the belief system of the Valentinian Gnostics, which is

highly dependent on a strong sense of will as a function of knowledge. These believers, whose precise connection to Christianity remains enigmatic, will provoke a reaction in both Church and philosophical circles, putting forward a system where the primordial arena of the struggle between ignorance and knowledge was put not in creation but inside the divine sphere itself. Here we will see an account of origins that begins with a primal, supreme hypostasis that wills into existence a host of lesser divine hypostases that, owing to their own ignorance and hubris, create unrest in the primordial realm. From this conflict the material world comes into being. Order is restored only through the final enlightenment of the offending parties of their true, lower status. To be sure, this theory of divine conflict draws bitter criticism from such parties as Plotinus and, famously, Irenaeus, and the telling result is, as we shall see in the same chapter, a de-emphasis of will in their own theologies. In Plotinus the shift is most palpable, and, as a direct result of his polemics with the Gnostics, we will find him moving away from his early theories of *tolma* as the engine of differentiation from the primordial *Hen* to a vision of divine movement born of the necessity of rational dictate. In Irenaeus, one cannot necessarily talk of a discernible shift in his own theology, but one will note that his theology is distinct from that of Justin and Tertullian in that there is little room for a concept of the will in the inner life of the Trinity. Whether this is the direct result of his engagement with Gnosticism can only be a matter of speculation. Plotinus clearly was influenced, so it is not unlikely that Irenaeus was too. In this respect, Irenaeus, whose concern it will be to return the Gnostics back from a theology that has lost its sense of divine unity, will stand in contrast with Tertullian, for whom the main project will be to defend the threeness of the Godhead against Praxeas and other modalists. In this light, we might

look on the reactions of Irenaeus and Tertullian against Gnosticism as precursors to the two general reactions to the theological postulations of Arius.

Chapter Four will deal with Origen. Here, in the wake of the Gnostic challenge based on will and the subsequent contraction of the scope of the same on the part of both Plotinus and Irenaeus, we will see a many-fronted reaffirmation of it on the part of Origen. Clearly frustrated by what he perceived was the encroachment of materialism and metaphysical compulsion in theological discourse, Origen will reiterate the pure non-materiality of the Godhead and reinstate the will as rampart against the forces of necessity both in the divine sphere and creation. His theology will be one that is centered, from top to bottom, on the will. Whom he sees as the culprit behind this turn toward this materialist theology of necessity that he is warring against is more difficult to discern. It could be the generally Stoic milieu of late antiquity, the Gnostics, or even styles of theology akin to that of Tertullian, who had promoted a thoroughgoing materialism. In any case, such will be Origen's embrace of the will that it will reach beyond the Greek norms, which view will as a function of rationality, to a phenomenon of pure volition that in its essence will lie beyond rational modulation. Nevertheless, in all this there is never the suggestion in Origen of a conflict of purposes in the Godhead, namely between Father and Son. On the contrary, even here the notion is that Father and Son are of one will and purpose, a reality anchored in the fact of the commonality of nature between the two. However, in Origen's consideration of the Incarnation, he puts forward the soul of Jesus as possessed of contingent will which never lapses in its devotion to God, and in this respect he will become precursive of Nestorianism. More dangerously, a likely rhetorical flourish that likens the oneness of the soul of Jesus with God and the oneness of the Son

with the Father might be seen as the inspiration behind the early Arius' theory for the contingent will of the Son.

In the fifth chapter we will look at the origins of the dispute surrounding Arius. I will demonstrate the classically volitional character of Arius' early theology, and how it departs from the norms established by the theological tradition. His crucial shift away from his controversial position very early in the piece has to do both with his condemnation at Nicaea but also his contact with parties within the anti-Nicene movement that are more theologically attuned than he. In this context, I will advance the view that the position of symphonia (concord) that Antioch articulated was not one of a contingent ambidirectional volitional movement between Father and Son, but a phenomenological index that, while avoiding the language of the homoousion, seeks to point to an underlying oneness that is *unlike* that between humans. This position will seem to be vindicated as the debates continue, with the commonality of will being correlated to the identity of nature and *ousia*. Similarly, the question of contingent precedent will, which had formed the basis of Arius' volitional theology, is also rejected, and the accent is put on perceiving the Son's begetting as a completely different process from how the creatures were generated. Thus, although the Father will be said still to have willed the Son's begetting, he will be said to have done it without interval, without mediation, without remove, before all ages, and without this in any way implying the Son's ontological inferiority.

We turn now to our first authors: Justin and Tertullian.

CHAPTER II

JUSTIN, TERTULLIAN, KNOWLEDGE, AND WILL

The uniform goal of the Christian exegetes that we will look at throughout this study was to organize the various facets of the received teaching and Scriptural witness into a coherent narrative. In most instances, the fruits of this effort were not highly systematic treatises, but occasional, often polemical writings that were put together to respond to specific questions or provocations that had arisen in the life of the Church, either from without or within. In this mission, the earliest fathers without doubt had the most daunting task before them because, apart from perhaps the hermeneutic corpus of Philo Judaeus, which of course had been written for the benefit of the Hellenized Jewish community of Alexandria and not the Christians, there was little else in the more purely Christian sphere, besides collections of epistles and other intermittent writings, that these pioneers could use as models of the exposition of doctrine. Thus it fell to them to lay down the foundation on which subsequent generations would build. In this respect, Justin (d. 165) stood out as one of those earliest theologians who contributed to the basic framework on which much of the subsequent systematic theology of this period would rest. To what extent later generations were directly dependent on him is difficult to pinpoint, though we know with certainty that Irenaeus (d. 202) had read him and so had Eusebius of Caesarea. Tertullian (c. 160—c. 225), too, although considerably later than Justin, and later than even the celebrated Irenaeus whom, against strictly chronological order, we shall examine in the next chapter, has still come to be known as the father of

Latin theology. More importantly for this study, however, was the fact that both Justin and Tertullian shared a theological method that this study will view as laying down foundational principles that will prove enduring in how later theology would come to view the question of will in Trinitarian discourse, and which I believe warrants Justin and Tertullian being placed together in this early chapter of this inquiry.

The first axiom that these authors will put in place is the imperative of the Father's precedent will in the act of generation of the Son. This will be viewed as a statement on God's sovereignty and freedom from the powers of cosmic compulsion and necessity, and will prove an abiding principle in much of the theology in the centuries that will follow. In attempting to describe this act of generation, both authors, without doubt inspired by the Son's Scriptural status as Logos, will advance the processes of mind as the paradigm. This invocation of the act of intellection will in both authors serve as the basis for a correlation, in very Greek wise, between knowledge and will that will put forward the Son, as Logos of the Father, as the externalized and personalized expression of the Father's perfect knowledge and will. He will be envisioned as the one who comes to enlighten a fallen and benighted world and through education to elicit a penitent and obedient act of will on the part of humans back toward God. In this respect, although both authors will also be champions of the free-will of humans to choose to heed the salvific message of the Christ, there can be no sense of contingency of will in the Son on which one might construct a theory of Christ as soteriological hero who overcomes his own theoretical weaknesses to live a life of paradigmatic and vicarious virtue as fully one of the creatures. For the mission of the incarnate Logos, as a movement outward from the Godhead, into the world, and leading it by elucidation and

free-will back to the divine source, will be, as far as it concerns the divine persons, volitionally unidirectional. This scheme will be reinforced by the fact that neither author will ever articulate a notion of the Son taking on a human mind in the Incarnation that might blur the lines of volitional agency and serve as the seat of contingency and potential opposition to the will of God. In this wise, both authors will instead put forward the Virgin Mary as the exemplar of obedience, and anti-paradigm of the disobedient Eve. To be sure, Tertullian, as the considerably later author, will take this basic scheme that both authors share into more nuanced directions, and even touch on matters that have to do with the threat that the Gnostics would pose, and thus he will act as a fitting bridgehead into the next chapter.

We turn now to our first author, Justin.

JUSTIN

Born in Flavia Neapolis in Palestine of pagan parents,⁵¹ Justin, remembered in history as both the Philosopher and the Martyr, wrote from the perspective of a believer who had spent much of his former life seeking the truth, testing the various philosophical schools of thought of his time. According to his own testimony, he had spent time with the Stoics, the Peripatetics, the Pythagoreans, and the Platonists, before coming finally to Christianity.⁵² Although contemporary evidence indicates that he was a prolific writer, only three of his works have come down to us: his two *Apologies* and his *Dialogue with Trypho*. The first of the Apologies was addressed to the emperor Antoninus Pius, and the second, to judge from its title, to the Roman Senate. These were at once an aggrieved

⁵¹ *I Apol.* 1 (ANF 1:163).

⁵² *Dial.* 2-3 (ANF 1:195-6).

appeal to the justness of the rulers, an exposition of the beliefs of the Christians, and a demonstration of the falsity of the popular accusations made against them, starting with their supposed atheism, which had all lain behind their unfair persecution and maltreatment by the authorities.⁵³ The *Dialogue*, on the other hand, was the record of a long conversation, argumentative in nature, that Justin had had with a Jewish rabbi, Trypho, which according to Eusebius took place in Ephesus.⁵⁴ Unlike the *Apologies*, whose main thrust was to demonstrate to pagans that their beliefs, though in some respects similar to those of the Christians, were the malformed product of demonic disinformation, the *Dialogue* had as its primary focus to prove from Scripture the divinity of the Son, the fulfillment of the Law in his person, the truth of Christian theology, and the succession of Christians as the new Israel.

All these three works were apologetic in character and limited in scope, yet they are comprehensive and systematic enough that we can glean from them enough material to reconstruct Justin's views on our question of the will in Trinitarian discourse. On this matter, I will argue that Justin's work put together theological conventions that were to prove both persistent and formative in the Christian theology of the period. First, he will map the widely accepted Platonic division of reality between the incomprehensible, absolute, invisible, and unchanging nature of the highest principle and the transient and mutable realm of the visible phenomena onto the Christian vision of the omniscient and omnipotent creator who with purpose had brought into existence the ontologically

⁵³ *I Apol.* 1-5 (ANF 1:163-4).

⁵⁴ *Hist. eccl.* 4.18.6 (NPNF² 1:196): "He composed also a dialogue against the Jews, which he held in the city of Ephesus with Trypho, a most distinguished man among the Hebrews of that day. In it he shows how the divine grace urged him on to the doctrine of the faith, and with what earnestness he had formerly pursued philosophical studies, and how ardent a search he had made for the truth." Justin himself reported that at the time of their meeting Trypho had fled the war (probably the insurrection of Bar Cochba) and was spending his days "in Greece, and chiefly at Corinth" (*Dial.* 1 [ANF 1:194]).

inferior world of creatures. The inscrutability of the purposes behind the actions of God the creator will be bound up intimately with the absoluteness of his goodness and omniscience. In line with the Greek precept of evil never being a deliberate course of action but a function of ignorance, human sin and contrariety to the will and purposes of God will in this scheme be conceived of as a matter of a lack of understanding that was exacerbated by the wiles and exhortations of the devil.⁵⁵ Here Justin will lay down a correlation between willing and knowing that will prove a mainstay in the conversation on the will.

Second, Justin will mount the argument that this obvious cognitive disparity between God and creatures was bridged by the work of the Son as mediating revelatory principle between God and creatures. Thus the Son himself will be both the divine progeny of a special act of the Father's precedent will, and, in his movement from the Father, the natural extension of the Father's will outward from the Godhead. Justin will present him as the one who brought the world out of inexistence, and made known the Father in creation so as to elicit the natural volitive response back toward the Father from creatures that had been made privy to the saving knowledge that the Son brings. Third, there will be in Justin no suggestion of a possible conflict between Father and Son—a dictum that will be reinforced by the fact that Justin communicates no theory of a human mind in Christ.⁵⁶ The Son, as we said above, is the perfect expression of the Father's will.

⁵⁵ Poignant in this regard is Justin's description of the persecutors of Christianity: "...yielding to unreasoning passion, and to the instigation of evil demons, you punish us without consideration or judgment" (*I Apol.* 5 [ANF 1:164]).

⁵⁶ As L.W. Barnard (*Justin Martyr: His Life and Thought* [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge at the University Press, 1967] p. 119) observes, "Justin was not worried, as was Apollinaris, by the question how two separate minds, wills, and principles of action could co-exist in a single living being. For him Christ was the one, whole logos—whether in his pre-incarnate or incarnate state—and he does not work out the logical implications of this belief."

The paradigm of perfect, though theoretically contingent, obedience in this divine scheme will be the Virgin Mary, not the Son.

THE DIVINE HIERARCHY

Addressing the well-known charges of atheism in the opening chapters of his first Apology, Justin conceded that Christians did not worship the gods of paganism, whom rather they considered demons,⁵⁷ but held as the object of their adoration the true God who was “the Father of righteousness and temperance and the other virtues, who is free from all impurity,”⁵⁸ and “maker of this universe.”⁵⁹ In their view, God was the unbegotten,⁶⁰ the ineffable,⁶¹ the nameless,⁶² the impassible,⁶³ the immutable,⁶⁴ the omnipotent,⁶⁵ and the utterly transcendent.⁶⁶ This was in close keeping with the

⁵⁷ *I Apol.* 21 (ANF 1:170).

⁵⁸ *I Apol.* 6 (ANF 1:164 [PG 6:336C]): “πατὴρ δίκαιουσύνης καὶ σωφροσύνης, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀρετῶν, ἀνεπιμίκτου τε κακίας Θεοῦ.”

⁵⁹ *I Apol.* 13 (ANF 1:166 [PG 6:345B]): “τὸν δημιουργὸν τοῦδε τοῦ παντός.”

⁶⁰ E.g. *I Apol.* 49 (ANF 1:179 [PG 6:401A]): “τῷ ἀγεννήτῳ Θεῷ.”

⁶¹ *2 Apol.* 12 (ANF 1: 192 [PG 6:464B]): “the unbegotten and ineffable God (Θεὸν τὸν ἀγέννητον καὶ ἄόρητον).”

⁶² *I Apol.* 63 (ANF 1:184 [PG 6:424A]): “τὸν ἀνωνόμαστον Θεόν.”

⁶³ *I Apol.* 25 (ANF 1:171 [PG 6:365B]): “we...have dedicated ourselves to the unbegotten and impassible [ἀγεννήτῳ καὶ ἀπαθεί] God.”

⁶⁴ *I Apol.* 20 (ANF 1:169 [PG 6:357C]): “The Stoics teach that even God Himself shall be resolved into fire...and that the world is to be formed anew by this revolution; but we understand that God, the Creator of all things, is superior to changeable things (τῶν μεταβαλλομένων).”

⁶⁵ *I Apol.* 18 (ANF 1:169 [PG 6:356B]): “For we maintain that with God nothing is impossible (ἀδύνατον μηδὲν εἶναι τῷ Θεῷ).”

⁶⁶ *Dial.* 127 (ANF 1:263 [PG 6:772B-773A]): “For the ineffable Father and Lord of all neither has come to any place, nor walks, nor sleeps, nor rises up, but remains in His own place, wherever that is, quick to behold and quick to hear, having neither eyes nor ears, but being of indescribable might; and He sees all things, and knows all things, and none of us escapes His observation; and He is not moved or confined to a spot in the whole world, for He existed before the world was made. How, then, could He talk with any one, or be seen by any one, or appear on the smallest portion of the earth, when the people at Sinai were not able to look even on the glory of Him who was sent from Him; and Moses himself could not enter into the tabernacle which he had erected, when it was filled with the glory of God; and the priest could not endure to stand before the temple when Solomon conveyed the ark into the house in Jerusalem which he had built for it? Therefore neither Abraham, nor Isaac, nor Jacob, nor any other man, saw the Father and ineffable Lord of all...” (“Ὁ γὰρ ἄρρητος πατὴρ καὶ κύριος τῶν πάντων οὔτε ποι ἀφίχται οὔτε περιπατεῖ οὔτε καθεύδει, οὔτε ἀνίσταται, ἀλλ’ ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ χώρᾳ, ὅπου ποτέ, μένει, ὅξυ ὁρῶν, καὶ ὅξυ ἀκούων, οὐκ ὀφθαλμοῖς οὐδὲ ὠσίν, ἀλλὰ δυνάμει ἀλέκτω· καὶ πάντα ἐφορᾷ καὶ πάντα γινώσκει, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἡμῶν ἐλέηθεν αὐτόν· οὔτε κινούμενος ὁ τόπῳ τε

dominant, largely Platonist views on the inscrutability of the metaphysical first principle.⁶⁷ For Justin, the fact that the Father had no cause on which his existence depended was the underlying reason for his transcendence and ineffability:

ἀχώρητος, καὶ τῷ κόσμῳ ὄλω, ὅς γε ἦν καὶ πρὶν τὸν κόσμον γενέσθαι. Πῶς ἂν οὖν οὗτος ἢ λαλήσειε πρὸς τινα, ἢ ὀφθείη τινί, ἢ ἐν ἐλαχίστῳ μέρει γῆς φανείη; Ὅποτε γε οὐδὲ τὴν δόξαν τοῦ παρ' αὐτοῦ πεμφθέντος ἴσχυεν ὁ λαὸς ἰδεῖν ἐν Σινᾷ, οὐδ' αὐτὸς Μωυσῆς ἴσχυεν εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν σκιηνήν, ἣν ἐποίησεν, εἰ μὲν ἐπληρώθη τῆς παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ δόξης· οὐδὲ μὲν ὁ ἱερεὺς ὑπέμεινε κατενώπιον τοῦ ναοῦ στήναι, ὅτε τὴν κιβωτὸν Σολομὼν εἰσεκόμισεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον τὸν ἐν Ἱερουσαλήμ, ὃν αὐτὸς ὁ Σολομὼν ᾠκοδομήκει. Οὔτε οὖν Ἀβραάμ οὔτε Ἰσαάκ, οὔτε Ἰακώβ, οὔτε ἄλλος ἀνθρώπων εἶδε τὸν Πατέρα καὶ ἄρρητον Κύριον τῶν πάντων ἀπλῶς...”).

⁶⁷ The discussion of the One in Plato's *Parm.* (137c-142a) is most illustrative. Because this question of the privative nature of the knowledge we have of God will be a recurrent theme throughout this study, it behooves us here to examine this Platonic syllogism at length. Here Parmenides argued that the One was not divisible into parts (*μέρη*) nor could it be considered a whole (*ὅλον*—i.e., a collection of parts). Since it had no parts, it had no beginning, middle or end and was therefore without limit (*ἄπειρον*) or shape (*ἄνευ σχήματος*—given that shape is born of limit). Consequently it followed that the One was nowhere (*οὐδαμοῦ*) because its containment would suggest its limitation either by another or itself: in the first case, it would be contained all around (*κύκλω που ἂν περιέχοιτο*) by the thing in which it was, and in the second, it would be its own container, which effectively made the One two—container (*περιέχον*) and contained (*περιεχόμενον*). Neither were categories such as motion (*κινεῖσθαι*) or rest (*ἑστάναι*) applicable to it. If by motion was understood alteration (*ἀλλοίωσις*), then the One would no longer be itself; if taken to mean movement (*φέρεσθαι*), then we would be talking about rotation (*περιφέροιο κύκλω*) or translation (*μεταλλάττοι χώραν*). Rotation would mean motion about its center—an indefensible proposition, requiring the division of the One into its center and non-center—whereas translation would mean its movement to somewhere it was not, which again suggested limit. Rest (*ἀκίνητον*), on the other hand, suggested location and containment, which we saw was untenable. Furthermore the One was neither the same (*ταυτόν*) as itself or another thing, nor different (*ἕτερον*) from itself or another thing. If it were different from itself then it would be many—clearly an unsustainable statement—and if it were the same as another, then it would be that other and not itself. Neither was it different from another, because “the One cannot be other than anything; only Other, and nothing else, can be other than another.” Thus, because the One's oneness formed no reason for it to be different from something, then the One could not be different from anything given that oneness was what the One is [The argument here, though unclear, seems to be that the One's difference from another would suggest that the One is composite, because it would have to contain aspects that make it differ from something else]. Finally, it could not be the same as itself, because something being the same as something does not mean being one with it (rather, sameness implies otherness). Therefore, if the One were the same as itself, the One would become more than one. In similar wise, neither can the One be like (*ὅμοιον*) or unlike (*ἀνόμοιον*), nor equal (*ἴσον*) or unequal (*ἄνισον*), with itself or something else because the properties of likeness and unlikeness, equality and inequality would necessarily compound with the One's property of oneness, making it no longer One. For the same reasons the One could not be older (*πρεσβύτερον*) or younger (*νεώτερον*) than itself or another, and thus lay outside of time. If this were true, then it was impossible to say that “it has at one time come to be, was coming to be, or was; or now has come to be, comes to be, or is; or will hereafter come to be, will be coming to be, or will be.” Since something partook of being in one of the above ways it must follow that the One did not partake of being (*οὐδαμῶς ἄρα τὸ ἐν οὐσίας μετέχει*)—it could not be said to be, or even said to be One. “Therefore,” Parmenides concluded, “no name belongs to it, nor is there an account or any knowledge or perception or opinion of it... It is not named (*ὀνομάζεται*) or spoken of (*λέγεται*), nor is it the object of opinion (*δοξάζεται*) or knowledge (*γιγνώσκεται*), nor does anything that is perceive it (*αἰσθάνεται*),” in which he concluded of the One that “no name belongs to it, nor is there an account or any knowledge or perception or opinion of it... It is not named (*ὀνομάζεται*) or spoken of (*λέγεται*), nor is it the object of opinion (*δοξάζεται*) or knowledge (*γιγνώσκεται*), nor does anything that is perceive it (*αἰσθάνεται*).” Notably, Aristotle (*Metaph.* 1.5 [986^b18-25]) informs us that Parmenides was the first to identify the One with God.

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...“God” is not a name, but an opinion implanted in the nature of men of a thing that can hardly be explained.⁶⁸

The Father was beyond any proper name because humans had no inkling of his nature.⁶⁹ Only that which stood causally above something else could be in a position to name it because it knew its nature.⁷⁰ He was named Father and creator of all⁷¹ and source and principle from which the Son has his existence⁷² only on the basis of the things that revelation told that he had done, and not because one had special insight into his inner being that one might apply names to him properly.

In light of the Father’s ineffable transcendence, the Jewish view that the theophanies in the Hebrew Bible were appearances of the Father was mistaken. For to accept that it was the Father who appeared to Abraham and Sarah at the Oak of Mamre,

⁶⁸ 2 *Apol.* 6 (ANF 1:190 [PG 6:453AB]): “Ὄνομα δὲ τῶ πάντων Πατρὶ δετόν, ἀγεννήτῳ ὄντι, οὐκ ἔστιν. Ὅτι γὰρ ἂν καὶ ὀνόματι προσαγορεύηται, πρεσβύτερον ἔχει τὸ δέμενον τὸ ὄνομα. Τὸ τε Πατήρ, καὶ Θεός, καὶ Κτίστης, καὶ Κύριος, καὶ Δεσπότης, οὐκ ὀνοματὰ ἔστιν, ἀλλ’ ἐκ τῶν εὐποιῶν καὶ τῶν ἔργων προσεργήσεις...καὶ τὸ Θεὸς προσαγόρευμα οὐκ ὀνομά ἔστιν, ἀλλὰ πράγματος δυσεξηγήτου ἔμφυτος τῇ φύσει τῶν ἀνθρώπων δόξα.” Cf. Philo’s *Leg.* 3.73.206: “Who can assert of the First Cause, either that It is without body [ἀσώματος] or that It is a body [σῶμα], that it is of such a quality [ποιόν] or without quality [ἄποιον]? In a word, who can make any positive assertion concerning His essence [οὐσίας] or quality [ποιότητος] or state [σχέσεως] or movement [κινήσεως]?”

⁶⁹ This notion of unnameability was a reflection of the Aristotelian concept of the name of a thing being the verbal definition of its essence. For Aristotle, the definition of a *definition* (ὄρος) was “a phrase signifying a thing’s essence [τὸ τί ἦν]. It is rendered in the form either of a phrase in lieu of a name, or of a phrase in lieu of another phrase; for it is sometimes possible to define the meaning of a phrase as well.” (*Top.* 1.5 [102^a2f.]).

⁷⁰ Cf. e.g., the Gnostic *Apocryphon of John* (4:19) (Berlin Codex): “(It is) the one whose name cannot be spoken because no one exists before It to name It.” In Karen L. King’s *Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), p 30.

⁷¹ 1 *Apol.* 8 (ANF 1:165).

⁷² 1 *Apol.* 59 (ANF 1:182).

or who wrestled with Jacob, or who was seen by Moses at the burning bush, or who came as *archestrategos* to Joshua *inter alia* led to two insurmountable difficulties, the one rational, the other hermeneutical. The first was that it fundamentally misunderstood the transcendent, increate, and unfathomable nature of the Father. Justin remarked at length:

“Wherever God says, ‘God went up from Abraham’ [Gen. 18:22], or, ‘The Lord spake to Moses’ [Ex. 6:29], and ‘The Lord came down to behold the tower which the sons of men had built’ [Gen. 11:5], or when ‘God shut Noah into the ark’ [Gen. 7:16], you must not imagine that the unbegotten God Himself came down or went up from any place.⁷³ For the ineffable Father and Lord of all neither has come to any place, nor walks, nor sleeps, nor rises up, but remains in His own place, wherever that is, quick to behold and quick to hear, having neither eyes nor ears, but being of indescribable might; and He sees all things, and knows all things, and none of us escapes His observation; and He is not moved or confined to a spot in the whole world, for He existed before the world was made. How, then, could He talk with any one, or be seen by anyone, or appear on the smallest portion of the earth, when the people at Sinai were not able to look even on the glory of Him who was sent from Him; and Moses himself could not enter into the tabernacle which he had erected, when it was filled with the glory of God; and the priest could not endure to stand

⁷³ These were, he will argue, manifestations of the Son.

before the temple when Solomon conveyed the ark into the house in Jerusalem which he had built for it?⁷⁴

The Father was by nature beyond any notion of space and time, so the idea that he was seen by or appeared to people was for Justin preposterous. Such an infinite, transcendent being could not have direct contact with the world because the finite nature of the latter made such contact impossible. If there was to be any rapport between God and humans, it was necessary that there be a mediating principle that bridged this ontological and epistemological divide.

The second obstacle was so bound up with the first that it is difficult to determine which of the two was the anterior in Justin's thinking.⁷⁵ This argued that not only was it a rational necessity that there be a mediating principle between God and the world, there was plentiful evidence in Scripture and the Prophets of one who could be such a mediator. Scripture pointed to the existence of a being that was numerically distinct from God yet was at all times with God. It sometimes even referred to this being as God,

⁷⁴ *Dial.* 127 (ANF 1:263 [PG 6:772B-773A]): “ὅταν μου ὁ Θεὸς λέγη· Ἀνέβη ὁ Θεὸς ἀπὸ Ἀβραάμ, ἢ Ἐλάλησε Κύριος πρὸς Μωυσήν, καὶ Κατέβη Κύριος τὸν πύργον ἰδεῖν ὃν ᾠκοδόμησαν οἱ υἱοὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἢ ὅτε Ἐκλείσεν ὁ Θεὸς τὴν κιβωτὸν Νῶε ἐξωθεν, μὴ ἠγείσθε αὐτὸν τὸν ἀγέννητον Θεὸν καταβεβηκέναι ἢ ἀναβεβηκέναι ποτέν. Ὁ γὰρ ἄρρητος Πατήρ καὶ Κύριος τῶν πάντων οὔτε ποι ἀφίεται οὔτε περιπατεῖ οὔτε καθεύδει οὔτε ἀνίσταται, ἀλλ’ ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ χώρᾳ, ὅπου ποτέ, μένει, ὅξυ ὄρων καὶ ὅξυ ἀκούων, οὐκ ὀφθαλμοῖς οὐδὲ ὤσιν ἀλλὰ δυνάμει ἀλέκτω· καὶ πάντα ἐφορᾷ καὶ πάντα γινώσκει, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἡμῶν λέληθεν αὐτόν· οὔτε κινούμενος, ὁ τόπω τε ἀχώρητος καὶ τῷ κόσμῳ ὅλῳ, ὅς γε ἦν καὶ πρὶν τὸν κόσμον γενέσθαι. πῶς ἂν οὖν οὗτος ἢ λαλήσειε πρὸς τινα ἢ ὀφείη τινὶ ἢ ἐν ἐλαχίστῳ μέρει γῆς φανεῖη, ὅποτε γε οὐδὲ τὴν δόξαν τοῦ παρ’ αὐτοῦ πεμφθέντος ἴσχυεν ὁ λαὸς ἰδεῖν ἐν Σινᾷ, οὐδ’ αὐτὸς Μωυσῆς ἴσχυεν εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν σκηνήν, ἣν ἐποίησεν, εἰ μὲν ἐπληρώθη τῆς παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ δόξης, οὐδὲ μὴν ὁ ἱερεὺς ὑπέμεινε κατενώπιον τοῦ ναοῦ στήναι, ὅτε τὴν κιβωτὸν Σολομὸν εἰσεκόμισεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον τὸν ἐν Ἱερουσαλήμ, ὃν αὐτὸς ὁ Σολομὸν ᾠκοδομήκει;” I note that the examples he calls on of Sinai and the Tabernacle, which, as we shall see, are appearances of the Son, are intended to form an *a fortiori* argument: if even the Son, viz. “He who was sent from Him,” cannot in all his glory be comprehended, how much more the Father?

⁷⁵ Because the first criterion expresses a cosmological objection and the second a hermeneutic one, it is not clear whether Justin has been moved to seek this mediator out of a prior philosophical (e.g. a neo-Platonist theory of divine hypostases) conviction that there be one, or whether he is finding a suitable theological place for his prior exegetical discovery that there is another person beside God in the godhead, or a combination of both. It is difficult to make a final judgment from his limited corpus. In support of his theological claims, Justin quotes Scripture only which ostensibly suggests he is working from it first. However, he also attributes any similarity between his conclusions and pagan thought to the philosophers’ borrowing from the Prophets, which leads us back to the circularity of trying to uncover his motives.

which made clear its divine provenance and closeness to God, but at other times it identified it by such titles as God’s Angel, or Word, or Wisdom, which all denoted its role as an intermediary between the un-begotten God and creation.⁷⁶

The conclusion that Justin drew from this was that this necessary mediating principle and the one whom Scripture numbered alongside the Father were one and the same person: the Son. Thus, he argued, it was not God the Father and ineffable Lord of all whom Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or any other human saw, but “Him who was according to His will His Son, being God, and the Angel because He ministered to His will; whom also it pleased Him to be born man by the Virgin; who also was fire when He conversed with Moses from the bush.”⁷⁷

Building from what Scripture revealed, Justin maintained a view of the Son as God’s first-birth (*πρῶτον γέννημα*),⁷⁸ born of God in a manner that was peculiar (*ἰδίως*),⁷⁹ non-sexual (*ἄνευ ἐπιμιξίας*),⁸⁰ ineffable,⁸¹ and different from ordinary generation (*παρὰ τὴν κοινὴν γένεσιν*).⁸² He was with God before creation,⁸³ was the means through which God created the world,⁸⁴ and, as God’s Word and first begotten, was himself God.⁸⁵ As such, Justin had no difficulty in declaring that, along with God, Christians also “worship and adore” the Son, “who came forth from him [the Father] and taught us these things,” and

⁷⁶ *Dial.* 56 (ANF 1:223-5).

⁷⁷ *Dial.* 127 (ANF 1:263).

⁷⁸ *I Apol.* 21 (ANF 1:170).

⁷⁹ *I Apol.* 22 (ANF 1:170).

⁸⁰ *I Apol.* 21 (ANF 1:170).

⁸¹ *I Apol.* 51 (ANF 1:179): “He...has an ineffable origin [*ἀνεκδιήγητον ἔχει τὸ γένος*]... ‘His generation [*γενεάν*] who shall declare?’ [Is. 53: 8; Acts 8:33].”

⁸² *I Apol.* 22 (ANF 1:170).

⁸³ *Dial.* 56 (ANF 1:223): “and who was God, even before the creation of the world”; *Dial.* 100 (ANF 1:249): “we know him to be the first-begotten [*πρωτότοκον*] of God, and to be before all creatures [*πρὸ πάντων τῶν κτισμάτων*]... Since we call him the Son, we have understood that he proceeded [*προεβή*] before all creatures [*πρὸ πάντων ποιημάτων*] from the Father.”

⁸⁴ *I Apol.* 59 (ANF 1:182).

⁸⁵ *I Apol.* 63 (PG 6:425B): “ὁς Λόγος καὶ πρωτότοκος ὢν τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ Θεὸς ὑπάρχει.”

the “prophetic Spirit.”⁸⁶ The primary role of the Son was to act as God’s divine mediator and messenger, whom throughout salvation history the Father would send into the world in order to make God known among humans. The Son always had been God’s point of contact with the world, and as was evident his appearances dotted the whole of salvation history, overcoming, as we shall see in more detail below, human ignorance by stages as they escalated and culminated finally in the fullest possible divine manifestation: the incarnation of God’s Son, in which humans were given the entirety of the revelation of the nature of God and salvation.

We should make clear that the Son’s status as epistemological bridge between the ineffable Father and creation cannot be taken as an indication of his inferiority relative to the Father. To be sure, Justin had no hesitation in arranging the three divine persons into a hierarchy—with God the Father at the pinnacle, the Son of God in the second place, and the prophetic Spirit, of whom Justin barely treats, in the third⁸⁷—but this was more a logical ordering than an ontological one. For never did Justin present the Son as a type of creature, neither as acting in the name of creation as though he were a part of it. On the contrary, Justin implied that the Son was begotten of the Father’s essence⁸⁸ and was in fact God—a point that Justin made repeatedly and explicitly. God’s revelatory *process* therefore consisted simply of the otherwise unknowable Father sending forth the Son into the world to make God known to humans. As we shall see, for Justin the Son was the perfect image of the Father. As only it could have, the revelatory initiative came entirely

⁸⁶ *I Apol.* 6 (ANF 1:164).

⁸⁷ *I Apol.* 13 (ANF 1:166-7); cf. *ibid.* 6 (ANF 1:164). Captivating, too, was Justin’s attempt in *I Apol.* 60 (ANF 1:182) to connect this divine order with Plato’s *Timaeus*.

⁸⁸ Justin says this indirectly in *Dial.* 128 (ANF 1:264): “[The Son] was begotten from the Father, by His power and will, but not by abscission, as if the essence of the Father were divided.”

from the side of the God. That God chose to reveal himself through the Son was a matter of God's own prerogative, which had been revealed in Scripture beforehand.

THE SON AS HYPOSTATIZED WISDOM AND WILL OF GOD

We gain a fuller understanding of the Son's divinity when, in line with the purposes of this study, we draw attention to the centrality of the divine Will in Justin's hierarchical system, and examine how it shaped not only his Trinitarian theology but also his understanding of the divine economy and Christian soteriology. From there, we will be in a position to trace the theological trajectories relating to will that he bequeathed to later theology. To begin with, his Trinitarianism—and I use this term very loosely given his relative silence on the Spirit—was centered on a strong sense of the Father's primacy as expressed in the sovereignty and initiative of his will. The Father was absolutely supreme: he had created the world and continued to govern it by his will; all that happened did so in accordance with his will, and one could never suppose that there was anything that God could not will.⁸⁹ Everything that had existence was contingent on the prior will of God. This included the Son of God, whose generation, too, was an act of the Father's precedent will.⁹⁰ As “a beginning,” he said, and “before all creatures” had come

⁸⁹ *Dial.* 84 (ANF 1:241).

⁹⁰ *Dial.* 61 (ANF 1:227): “He was begotten of the Father by an act of will; just as we see happening among ourselves: for when we give out some kind of word, we beget the word; yet not by abscission, so as to lessen the Word [that is] in us, when we give it out; and just as we see also happening in the case of a fire, which is not lessened when it has kindled [another], but remains the same; and that which has been kindled by it likewise appears to exist by itself, not diminishing that from which it was kindled.” *Dial.* 76: “For the expression ‘it was cut without hands’ signified that it is not a work of man, but of the will of the Father and God of all things, who brought him forth [ἀλλὰ τῆς βουλῆς τοῦ προβάλλοντος αὐτὸν πατρός τῶν ὄλων Θεοῦ].” *Dial.* 100 (ANF 1:249): “we have understood that he proceeded before all creatures from the Father by his power and Will.” *Dial.* 128 (ANF 1:264): “...I asserted that this power was begotten from the Father, by his power and will...”

into being,⁹¹ God by will begot “from himself” [ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ] the Son as like a “certain rational power.”⁹²

To be sure, Justin’s interest in affirming this sense of the Father’s precedent will in all divine action, both in creation but also within the Godhead, was to confirm his sovereignty and freedom from any notion of necessity. At the same time, however, we also see another purpose, namely to put forward a particular understanding of the relation of the Father with the Son that drew its inspiration from human psychology:

“He was begotten of the Father by an act of will; just as we see happening among ourselves: for when we give out some kind of word, we beget the word; yet not by abscission, so as to lessen the Word [that is] in us, when we give it out.”⁹³

The Father generated the Son in a way that Justin likened to the volitional and rational process by which humans articulate a word. In speaking, he explained, one wills to “beget” or to put forth a word that previously has existed only in one’s mind. He stressed, however, that this word is neither cut-off from its generator nor diminished as though produced by a process of abscission [ἀποτομήν]. Rather, after it is put out, the word that the generator “begets” remains of equal standing with that word which has remained in him, “just as we see happening among ourselves.”⁹⁴ We note that Justin’s idea of parity between an idea that exists in the human mind and the closely related form it assumes

⁹¹ *Dial.* 61 (PG 6:613C): “ὅτι ἀρχὴν πρὸ πάντων τῶν κτισμάτων ὁ θεὸς γεγέννηκε δυνάμιν τινα ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ λογικὴν.” This idea that somehow the Son is a beginning, yet before and presumably not a part of creation—a formulation he repeats in *Dial.* 62 (PG 6:617C): “τὸ τῷ ὄντι ἀπὸ τοῦ Πατρὸς προβληθὲν γέννημα πρὸ πάντων τῶν ποιημάτων συνήν τῷ Πατρί...”, and *Dial.* 62 (PG 6:620A): “ἀρχὴ πρὸ πάντων τῶν ποιημάτων τοῦτ’ αὐτὸ καὶ γέννημα ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐγεγέννητο”—displays the delicate tension that is inherited from Prov. 8:22 ff. in which interpreters make every effort to differentiate the Son from creatures, without suggesting the Son is begotten in order for God to create the world.

⁹² *Dial.* 61 (ANF 1:227).

⁹³ *Dial.* 61 (ANF 1:227 [PG 6:613C-616A]): “ἐκ τοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς θελήσει γεγενῆσθαι ἀλλ’ οὐ τοιοῦτον ὅποιον καὶ ἐφ’ ἡμῶν γινόμενον ὀρθῶμεν; λόγον γάρ τινα προβάλλοντες, λόγον γεννώμεν, οὐ κατὰ ἀποτομήν, ὡς ἐλαττωθῆναι τὸν ἐν ἡμῖν λόγον, προβαλλόμενοι.”

⁹⁴ *Dial.* 61 (ANF 1:227).

once one wills to verbalize it⁹⁵ becomes more palpable when we consider that, in the Greek, *logos* can refer both to the act of reasoning and of speaking.

Justin then went on to explicate further this paradoxical notion of a non-abscissive generation, which produced genuine distinction yet without reduction, by invoking his beloved example of the fire that kindles another fire:

“...and just as we see also happening in the case of a fire, which is not lessened when it has kindled [another], but remains the same; and that which has been kindled by it likewise appears to exist by itself, not diminishing that from which it was kindled.”⁹⁶

And again:

“[He] was begotten from the Father, by His power and will, but not by abscission, as if the essence [*οὐσία*] of the Father were divided; as all other things partitioned and divided are not the same after as before they were divided: and, for the sake of example, I took the case of fires kindled from a fire, which we see to be distinct from it, and yet that from which many can be kindled is by no means made less, but remains the same.”⁹⁷

By the sheer power and will of the Father, this was a begetting like no other. It was, as he stated earlier, ineffable and inexplicable. It was not an abscission, yet it engendered individuation and distinction without diminution of either the generator or the generated.

⁹⁵ This, of course, was the distinction between the innate (*endiathetos*) and the uttered (*prophorikos*) Word that was inherited probably from Stoicism, and for the first time used in a Christian context with particular reference to the Godhead by Justin’s near contemporary Theophilus of Antioch (d. c.185) (*Autol.* 2.10).

⁹⁶ *Dial.* 61 (ANF 1:227).

⁹⁷ *Dial.* 128 (ANF 1:264 [PG 6:776BC]): “...εἰπὼν τὴν δύναμιν ταύτην γεγενῆσθαι ἀπὸ τοῦ Πατρὸς, δυνάμει καὶ βουλῇ αὐτοῦ, ἀλλ’ οὐ κατὰ ἀποτομήν, ὡς ἀπομεριζομένης τῆς τοῦ Πατρὸς οὐσίας, ὅποια τὰ ἄλλα πάντα μεριζόμενα καὶ τεμνόμενα οὐ τὰ αὐτὰ ἐστὶν ἂ καὶ πρὶν τμηθῆναι· καὶ παραδείγματος χάριν παρειλήφειν ὡς τὰ ἀπὸ πυρὸς ἀναπτόμενα πυρὰ ἕτερα ὁρῶμεν, οὐδὲν ἐλαττουμένου ἐκείνου, ἐξ ὧ ἀναφθῆναι πολλὰ δύνανται, ἀλλὰ ταῦτοῦ μένοντος.”

The Son was not, as some imagined him, an impersonal extension of the Father that he deployed and withdrew as he saw fit,⁹⁸ but was numerically distinct from the Father, like the flame “exist[ing] by itself,”⁹⁹ without being ontologically the lesser. Something begotten was perforce “numerically distinct from that which begets.”¹⁰⁰ In Trinitarian terms, however, the implication of Justin’s placement of the precedent word in the generator and the spoken word as outside of him was that the Father had his own proper mind, from which the Son, as externalized hypostatic Logos, was distinct; two *Logoi*, as it were. Although it is not clear that Justin really wanted to go this far, the conclusion that there are two Logoi would remain an attractive though not unproblematic chain of reasoning for later theologians who pursued this psychological paradigm.¹⁰¹

Be that as it may, this strong sense of numerical distinctness could never be taken as an indication of a divergence in purpose and will between Father and Son. As we saw above, the Son was the offspring both of the will of the Father and the innate word that was located in him. As externalized and hypostatized Word, the Son, Justin insisted, was equipotent in all ways with that original word that resided primordially inside the Father. On this basis, one might be tempted to take the argument further and posit that, given that the Son was offspring both of God’s own word and God’s will, the Son could also be viewed as the externalized, hypostatized *will* of God as well, which was ever in harmony with its source and ever aligned to it. Justin never put it quite in these terms, but

⁹⁸ *Dial.* 128 (*ANF* 1:264). Here Justin was speaking against those who saw the Son as “indivisible and inseparable from the Father, just as they say that the light of the sun on earth is indivisible and inseparable from the sun in the heavens; as when it sinks, the light sinks along with it; so the Father, when he chooses, say they, causes His power to spring forth, and when He chooses, He makes it return to Himself...[The Son] is not numbered [as different] in name only like the light of the sun but is indeed something numerically distinct.”

⁹⁹ *Dial.* 61 (*ANF* 1:227).

¹⁰⁰ *Dial.* 129 (*ANF* 1:238).

¹⁰¹ We will see it, for example, in Arius.

nevertheless talked unambiguously of the will of the Son being indistinct from that of the Father:

“He who is 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 to do and to engage himself in.”¹⁰²

Elsewhere, he was even more graphic:

“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, then God, and then Lord and Logos; 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.”¹⁰³

Being distinct in number but not will, the fact that the Son always performed God’s will confirmed for Justin why Scripture called this second divine person God’s Glory, Son, Wisdom, an Angel, Lord, Logos and God.¹⁰⁴ The fact that he was begotten of the Father and thus causally secondary, and was even enumerated, as we saw above, in the second

¹⁰² *Dial.* 56 (ANF 1:223-4 [PG 6:600C]): “Οὗτος ὁ τε τῷ Ἀβραάμ καὶ τῷ Ἰακώβ καὶ τῷ Μωυσεῖ ὠφθαί λεγόμενος καὶ γεγραμμένος Θεὸς ἕτερός ἐστι τοῦ τὰ πάντα ποιήσαντος Θεοῦ, ἀριθμῶ λέγω ἀλλὰ οὐ γνώμη· οὐδὲν γὰρ φημι αὐτὸν πεπραχέναι ποτὲ ἢ ἄπερ αὐτὸς ὁ τὸν κόσμον ποιήσας, ὑπὲρ ὃν ἄλλος οὐκ ἔστι Θεός, βεβούληται καὶ πράξει καὶ ὁμιλῆσαι.”

¹⁰³ *Dial.* 61 (ANF 1:227 [PG 6:613C]): “Ὁ Θεὸς γεγέννηκε δυνάμιν τινα ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ λογικὴν, ἣτις καὶ δόξα κυρίου ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου καλεῖται, ποτὲ δὲ Τίος, ποτὲ δὲ Σοφία, ποτὲ δὲ Ἄγγελος, ποτὲ δὲ Θεός, ποτὲ δὲ Κύριος καὶ Λόγος, ποτὲ δὲ ἀρχιστρατήγον ἑαυτὸν λέγει, ἐν ἀνθρώπου μορφῇ φανέντα τῷ τοῦ Ναυῆ Ἰησοῦ· ἔχειν γὰρ πάντα προσονομάζεσθαι ἕκ τε τοῦ ὑπηρετεῖν τῷ πατρικῷ βουλήματι, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ Πατρὸς θελήσει γεγεννησθαι.”

¹⁰⁴ *Dial.* 61 (ANF 1:227-8).

place, did not diminish his ontological status as God. On the contrary, to Justin's mind the fact that the Son had, as Logos, perfect knowledge and understanding and, as a result, ever and so perfectly performed God's will was rather the decisive proof of his divinity. In line with Greek norms, understanding and willing were intimately bound up. For the Son, therefore, who as Logos had no less knowledge than the Father, to be at cross-purposes with the Father would be have been impossible, and as nonsensical as the kindled flame of the example above behaving unlike a flame because he was the hypostatized volitive extension of the Father, possessed of one and the same will as the Father. There was no room for a vision of volitional contingency here, where the Son would act as the kind of paradigm whose moral exemplariness for creatures rested on the possibility of him lapsing. Such a scenario for Justin even conceptually would have been an ontological absurdity. Rather, he envisaged a unidirectional, top-down movement from the Father, in which the Son was the perfect and unique offspring and hypostatized image of the Father's omniscience and will, and ever worked one and the same will as his own. He was begotten before time¹⁰⁵ by a special act of God's will in such a way that he was the personalized and perfect expression of the will, power, and wisdom of God.

THE SON AS REVEALER OF THE DIVINE WILL

The importance of will in Justin's view of the internal relations of the Godhead had important ramifications for how he understood what we would call the divine economy, or God's outward movement from the Godhead. We have already confirmed the Son's mediating role between God and creation, but the specific nature of that mediating role still remains to be clarified. For a start, we see that Justin was not focused

¹⁰⁵ *Dial.* 48 (*ANF* 1:219): "this Christ existed as God before the ages."

on formulating a strong sense of the Son's mediating work in the act of the creation and maintenance of the world. Apart from mentioning that the Son was begotten before all creation, that creation itself was brought into being *Λόγω Θεοῦ*,¹⁰⁶ and that God created and arranged all things by Him,¹⁰⁷ Justin did not otherwise dwell at length on the Son's mediating work in the creative act.¹⁰⁸ There was little expansion on the kind of scientific theology that we find in Philo,¹⁰⁹ in which God's Logos was portrayed as the personification of the complex of cosmic Laws that God externalized from his own mind in order to fashion and govern the world. Similarly, we do not see Justin laboring to construct a sophisticated theology of Christ as vicarious redeemer. While he remarked that Christ partook of our sufferings that he might also bring us healing,¹¹⁰ that our sins were forgiven through his blood,¹¹¹ and, in a revealing passage on early Christian beliefs toward the Eucharist, that Christ had "both flesh and blood for our salvation" so that "the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh,"¹¹² there seemed to be little willingness on Justin's part to move beyond these inherited articles of faith to a more systematic theology of Christ as the one who atoned for human sin. These limitations may well be due to the fact that but a fraction of his work has come

¹⁰⁶ *1 Apol.* 59 (ANF 1:233), though we note that it is unclear here whether the Logos here mentioned is the second Person of the Trinity or God's proper Word. Rather, we note that it is God the Father who repeatedly is presented as the Creator of all.

¹⁰⁷ *2 Apol.* 6 (ANF 1:190).

¹⁰⁸ Denis Minns and Paul Parvis (*Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies* [Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009], p. 64) go as far as to conclude that "Justin does not assign to the Logos the personal, directly mediatorial role in the creation of the world that editors and commentators would like to find in his writings." Their entire argument is contained in *ibid.* 61-65.

¹⁰⁹ See, e.g., *Sacr.* 25.83: "And so the Logos...the rich and manifold union of myriad forms [*ποικίλμα ὡν ἐκ μυρίων ἰδεῶν*]..." cf. *Somn.* 1.11.62: "...the Divine Logos, which God Himself has filled throughout with incorporeal powers."

¹¹⁰ *2 Apol.* 13 (ANF 1:193).

¹¹¹ *Dial.* 13 (ANF 1:200-1).

¹¹² *1 Apol.* 66 (ANF 1:185).

down to us. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the most salient feature in what remains of his writings was the notion of Christ as revealer and educator. Justin seemed to be at his most constructive when he was expatiating on the Son as the one whose mediating work was to show to the world the nature of God, and more specifically God's will for the world, and to lay down the terms of the requisite human response to this revelation. As the Son was the unique offspring of the Father's will, and ever served it, his purpose was to make that will known. To know Christ became the equivalent of knowing the will of God:

“He who knows not Him knows not the will of God; and he who insults and hates Him, insults and hates Him that sent Him. And whoever believes not in Him, believes not the declarations of the prophets, who preached and proclaimed Him to all.”¹¹³

Justin's understanding of human history was a corollary to this primary theological datum of the Son as the revealer of the divine. Until God's disclosure by the Son, the state of the world was one of ignorance and consequent disobedience to God's will. This recalcitrance toward God took root in the world through the unprovoked, primordial apostasy of the devil from the will of God¹¹⁴—in fact, etymologically, his name *Satanas* declared his apostate nature outright.¹¹⁵ Since their rebellion, the devil and his minions had been beguiling humans into eschewing their innate, God-given rationality and espousing all manner of wickedness. For Justin, who in his writings

¹¹³ *Dial.* 136 (ANF 1:268 [PG 6:789D]): “Ὁ γὰρ τοῦτον ἀγνοῶν ἀγνοεῖ καὶ τὴν βουλὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ ὁ τοῦτον ὑβρίζων καὶ μισῶν καὶ τὸν πέμψαντα δῆλον ὅτι καὶ μισεῖ καὶ ὑβρίζει· καὶ εἰ οὐ πιστεύει τις εἰς αὐτόν, οὐ πιστεύει τοῖς τῶν προφητῶν κηρύγμασι τοῖς αὐτὸν εὐαγγελισαμένους καὶ κηρύξασιν εἰς πάντα.”

¹¹⁴ *Dial.* 125 (ANF 1:262); *Dial.* 79 (ANF 1:238); cf. *I Apol.* 40 (ANF 1:176): “From which you may learn...how the devils, as much as they can, strive to escape the authority [ἐξουσία] of God the Father and Lord of all, and that of Christ Himself; and how God calls all to repentance before the Day of Judgment comes.”

¹¹⁵ *Dial.* 103 (ANF 1:250-1).

inclined toward a certain humanism, the devil, not humans, was the primary cause of discord in the world. Like Socrates,¹¹⁶ he understood the commission of sin and disobedience toward God as matters of ignorance. But he also saw that the demons compounded this ignorance through their deliberate efforts to “deceive and lead astray the human race,”¹¹⁷ taking in this quest “as their ally the lust of wickedness which is in every man, and which draws variously to all manner of vice.”¹¹⁸

Yet, in what was a testament both to humanity’s intrinsic rationality and its responsiveness to God’s call, in history there always had been those who lived by the Word and allowed true reason to guide their lives. First and foremost, of course, were the Hebrews, whose ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were the “first of all men to busy themselves in the search after God.”¹¹⁹ In their father, Moses, God had inspired a theological and intellectual tradition that continued in the Prophets, whose inheritors Justin considered the Christians like himself.¹²⁰ Moses, the “first of the Prophets,”¹²¹ recorded the true oracles of God, and his influence according to Justin extended far beyond just his Hebrew successors. Merely on account of his antiquity, Justin argued, it was clear that wherever the teaching of the Greeks seemed to resemble that of Moses it was the former who had borrowed from the latter:

“For Moses is more ancient than all the Greek writers. And whatever both philosophers and poets have said concerning the immortality of the soul, or punishments after death, or contemplation of things heavenly, or doctrines of the

¹¹⁶ Plato’s Socrates never states epigrammatically his credo that one never sins knowingly, but he seems to presuppose this belief in such dialogues as the *Meno* (77c-78b), *Apology* (28a-32e), and others.

¹¹⁷ *I Apol.* 54 (ANF 1:181).

¹¹⁸ *I Apol.* 10 (ANF 1:166).

¹¹⁹ *I Apol.* 43 (ANF 1:177).

¹²⁰ *Dial.* 49 (ANF 1:219-220).

¹²¹ *I Apol.* 31 (ANF 1:173).

like kind, they have received such suggestions from the Prophets as have enabled them to understand and interpret these things. And hence there seem to be seeds of truth among all men.”¹²²

Plato, too, was said to have reaped his cosmogony and even an obliquely Trinitarian theology from Moses.¹²³ Justin’s reconstruction of how precisely it came to be that the ancients were able to borrow from Moses remains unclear. His statement that Moses had been translated into Greek and was kept in Egypt¹²⁴ suggests that he accepted an old¹²⁵ and what by Justin’s time and later¹²⁶ must have been the quite developed belief that the Greeks had taken much of their knowledge from Egypt, where Moses had lived, though Justin was loath to suggest that the Greeks of his time actually were aware of the origins of what he thought was right in their philosophy. Through this process, Justin understood that from Mosaic theology and law there had been introduced into Greek thought strands of truth that were certain and trustworthy on account of their having their ultimate source in God. These seeds of true knowledge that were gleaned from Moses gave form to the intrinsically rational faculty that was in humans, namely those seeds of Reason (*Logos*) that the Creator had endowed innately to all humans but in fallen human practice were not infallible. This possibility of a human intellect informed by divine truth enabled a few

¹²² *I Apol.* 44 (ANF 1:177 [PG 6:396AB]): “Προσβύτερος γὰρ Μωσῆς καὶ πάντων τῶν ἐν Ἑλλήσι συγγραφέων· καὶ πάντα ὅσα περὶ ἀθανασίας ψυχῆς, ἢ τιμωριῶν τῶν μετὰ θάνατον, ἢ θεωρίας οὐρανίων, ἢ τῶν ὁμοίων δογμάτων, καὶ φιλόσοφοι καὶ ποιηταὶ ἔφασαν, παρὰ τῶν προφητῶν τὰς ἀφορμὰς λαβόντες, καὶ νοῆσαι δεδύνηνται, καὶ ἐξηγήσαντο· ὅθεν παρὰ πᾶσι σπέρματα ἀληθείας δοκεῖ εἶναι.”

¹²³ *I Apol.* 59-60 (ANF 1:182-3).

¹²⁴ *I Apol.* 31 (ANF 1:173).

¹²⁵ See e.g. Herodotus’ *Hist.* II.

¹²⁶ E.g. Pseudo-Justin, who wrote later than Justin, says in his *Hortatory Address to the Greeks* (14) (ANF 1:279): “For I think that some of you, when you read even carelessly the history of Diodorus, and of those others who wrote of these things, cannot fail to see that both Orpheus, and Homer, and Solon, who wrote the laws of the Athenians, and Pythagoras, and Plato, and some others, when they had been in Egypt, and had taken advantage of the history of Moses, afterwards published doctrines concerning the gods quite contrary to those which formerly they had erroneously promulgated.”

excellent humans to see through the epistemic morass that was created by two factors that conspired against them: demonic misinformation and human misconception.¹²⁷

On the one hand, the demons, whose very nature had become to oppose God's will, to twist true theology into the parody of it that one could find in the pagan myths and the heresies of latter times,¹²⁸ and to cajole rational creatures, in their ignorance, into doing the same, did not allow these rare few to go unmolested. Through their influence over the human establishment and their seeing to the appointment of laws conformable to their ends in human society,¹²⁹ the demons ensured that figures like Socrates, who exhorted the people "to reject the wicked demons" and the false teachings of the poets and to "consider and prove things by human reason,"¹³⁰ "suffered persecution and were in

¹²⁷ At this point, I must digress somewhat and point out that some in scholarship (e.g., most recently J. Behr in *The Way to Nicea* [Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2001], pp. 106f.) have gone as far as to suggest that this acquaintance by non-Jews with Moses' work is what constituted the entirety of Justin's celebrated notion of the *logos spermatikos*, not some rational seed which the Son of God endowed to all human beings, giving them an innate affinity with God and an ability through their own rational processes to come to a knowledge of Him. In support of this view is cited, of course, Justin's claim, above, that the Greeks learned (much of?) what was right in their thought from Moses (*1 Apol.* 44), but also a statement of his, early in the *Dialogue* (ch. 4), that the human soul cannot see God without instruction from the Holy Spirit. This view does not sit well with my reading of Justin, first because it does not seem to account fully for his repeated assertions that the Logos resides in all people (e.g. *1 Apol.* 46, *2 Apol.* 10, *2 Apol.* 13) though they be unable to see it perfectly, and, secondly, with his generally positive view of human ability which plays out, as we shall see, in his valorization of human free-will. Secondly, even the passage in *Dial.* 4 concedes that, although souls cannot see God, still "they can perceive that God exists, and that righteousness and piety are honorable," suggesting thereby that the human mind and soul can reach some truthful conclusions on their own. Thirdly, the ability to see God is not something Justin seems to want to ascribe to any one, even right believers, as *2 Apol.* 6 illustrates by making much of God's ineffability and namelessness, and suggesting that it is so even for those like himself, who, as believers, clearly must be guided by the Spirit. Finally, and very importantly, Justin seems to ascribe to the distinction between *Logos Prophorikos* and *Logos Endiathetos*. In Hellenistic thought, these two *Logoi* often correlated with two types of knowledge that humans possessed: that which was learned through external demonstration, and that which was known by nature (see e.g. Kamesar, Adam, "The *Logos Endiathetos* and the *Logos Prophorikos* in Allegorical Interpretation: Philo and the D-Scholia to the *Iliad*," in *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 44 [2004], pp. 163-181). On this circumstantial basis, I believe that Justin must accept that humans are possessed of an innate, albeit unclear, knowledge of God. I think, therefore, that a fairer synthesis would concede that there are two levels of knowledge produced by these "seeds": the ones, innate to humans, allow us to know that God exists; the others, gained through revelation, give us more complex details of God's nature. The pagans had the first but only a part of the second. The believers had both.

¹²⁸ *1 Apol.* 54-8 (*ANF* 1:181-2).

¹²⁹ *2 Apol.* 9 (*ANF* 1:191).

¹³⁰ *2 Apol.* 10 (*ANF* 1:191).

bonds,” while such charlatans and rogues as Sardanapalus and Epicurus “seemed to be blessed in abundance and glory.”¹³¹ On the other hand, despite their best efforts, the fact that these right thinkers had still only a partial view of the Logos, “which is Christ,” meant that, quite apart from the demons’ obstruction, they were unable still both to understand properly what they had borrowed from the Prophets and to reason through their own thoughts, and so inevitably they were led to contradict both the truth and each other on key matters of knowledge.¹³² Despite the efforts of some of its number, humanity at large was still in a state of darkness.

In this light, the incarnation of the Son emerged in Justin’s mind as the key event that on account of its fullness and immediacy broke the cognitive cycle that had kept people enslaved, and checked the further possibility of human misconception and demonic connivance by acting as an epistemological foundation on which one could build with trust. In Christ, the truth had been laid bare for all to see, and the veracity of his teaching was confirmed not only in the miraculous particulars of his life but also by the fact that they attested to what Scripture had already foretold. Christ’s submission to the Will of the Father,¹³³ his Incarnation, his rejection by his people,¹³⁴ his humiliation, his death,¹³⁵ his resurrection, and his ascension,¹³⁶ had all been portended by the Prophets. Christ’s supernatural coming, therefore, validated the tradition that had predicted it, and thus it inspired confidence in those prophetic claims that still remained

¹³¹ *2 Apol.* 7 (ANF 1:190).

¹³² *2 Apol.* 10; *1 Apol.* 44 (ANF 1:177): “But they are charged with not accurately understanding [what they have borrowed] when they assert contradictories”; *1 Apol.* 60 (ANF 1:183): “Which things Plato reading, and not accurately understanding, and not apprehending that it was the figure of the cross, but taking it to be a placing crosswise, he said that the power next to the first God was placed crosswise in the universe.”

¹³³ *Dial.* 48 (ANF 1:219).

¹³⁴ *1 Apol.* 49 (ANF 1:179).

¹³⁵ *1 Apol.* 48 (ANF 1:178-9).

¹³⁶ *1 Apol.* 45 (ANF 1:178).

unfulfilled, most notably the belief that all the nations will believe in Him.¹³⁷ For Justin, the embracing of the Incarnate Son by the whole world would be the natural realization of the partial knowledge of which all nations are possessed.¹³⁸

Placing the idea of Christ as the perfect offspring of God's will alongside the notion of the Son as the anchor of true knowledge, an understanding of the Son's mission on earth and its repercussions for the believer begins to take shape: Christ overturned the ill-work of the Devil and caused his destruction by enlightening the world through educative means and bringing about the free realignment of the will of rational beings with the will of God:

“And when Isaiah calls Him the Angel of mighty counsel [Is. 9:6], 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, and also for those who have rebelled against His will, whether men or angels, when He said: ‘They shall come from the east and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven: but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness.’”¹³⁹

If humans' disobedience toward God was the product of ignorance then only once they were educated could they be in a position freely to choose the good. The Son bestowed

¹³⁷ E.g. Gen. 49:10; Is. 11:1; etc.

¹³⁸ 2 *Apol.* 10 (ANF 1:191-2).

¹³⁹ *Dial.* 76 (ANF 1:236 [PG 6:653AB]): “...καὶ Ἡσαίας δὲ μεγάλης βουλῆς ἄγγελον αὐτὸν εἰπὼν, οὐχὶ τούτων ὦνπερ ἐδίδαξεν ἔλθῶν διδάσκαλον αὐτὸν γεγενῆσθαι προεκήρυσσεν; ἃ γὰρ μέγала ἐβεβούλευτο ὁ Πατήρ εἰς τε πάντα τοὺς εὐαρέστους γενομένους αὐτῷ καὶ γενησομένους ἀνθρώπους, καὶ τοὺς ἀποστάντας τῆς βουλῆς αὐτοῦ ὁμοίως ἀνθρώπους ἢ ἀγγέλους, οὗτος μόνος ἀπαρακαλύπτως ἐδίδαξεν, εἰπὼν· Ἔξουσιν ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν καὶ δυσμῶν, καὶ ἀνακληθήσονται μετὰ Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν· οἱ δὲ υἱοὶ τῆς βασιλείας ἐκβληθήσονται εἰς τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον.”

true knowledge on the world so that humans, thence enlightened, might then freely make the choice to obey God.

We begin to see here that Justin's implicit acceptance of Socrates' axiomatic connection between ignorance and sin was meeting with an explicitly anti-Stoic championing of human free will. To deny human freedom would mean for Justin the acceptance of the Stoics' proposition that Providence or Fate govern all human action. Theologically, such a belief would have to rest on one of two flawed premises: either that God was coterminous and identifiable with the endless, inexorable cycle that made up reality, in which case the world's wickedness was a part of God or was caused by him; or, secondly, that there was no essential difference between good and evil, right and wrong, because they were morally neutral subsets of a greater whole (viz. reality).¹⁴⁰ If there were no choice for humans, then one would be justified in laying the responsibility for one's actions at God's feet. Not so, said Justin, quoting Plato: "the blame is his who chooses; God is blameless."¹⁴¹ Shirking human responsibility in this way would render incoherent all understanding of accountability, reward and praise.¹⁴² Thus we see too that hand in hand with Justin's theodicean concerns were the inklings of an anthropology that was consonant with his basically humanist leanings, and emphasized the self-agency of rational creatures. "God," he argued, "in the beginning made the race of angels and men with free-will...this is the nature of all that is made: to be capable of vice and virtue."¹⁴³ And though "at our birth we were born without our own knowledge or choice, by our parents coming together, and were brought up in bad habits and wicked training;" the

¹⁴⁰ 2 *Apol.* 7 (ANF 1:190-1).

¹⁴¹ 1 *Apol.* 44; cf. Plato (*Rep.* X [617e]): "αἰτία ἐλομένου, θεὸς δ' ἀναίτιος."

¹⁴² 1 *Apol.* 43 (ANF 1:177): "...unless the human race have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions, of whatever kind they be"; cf. 2 *Apol.* 7.

¹⁴³ 2 *Apol.* 7 (ANF 1:190).

goal of Christians who had accepted the baptismal washing that “is called illumination” was that by being born again they might

“not remain the children of necessity and of ignorance, but may become the children of choice and knowledge, and may obtain in the water the remission of sins formerly committed.”¹⁴⁴

In Christ, therefore, who has “taught us these things for the conversion and restoration of the human race,”¹⁴⁵ humans were afforded the opportunity to become children of “choice and knowledge.” In short, God’s will stood against the necessity of this world. It was made manifest in Christ, the incarnate will of God, and humans were rescued by aligning their own individual wills with it. To be sure, Justin’s soteriology had a strongly ethical dimension in which right intentionality and action were the result of right knowledge. Christ came to reveal to the world that knowledge. From Justin, the philosopher, we would expect no less.

In light of his vision of Christ as revealer and fulfiller of God’s will, it seems clear that there was little sense in Justin of a volitional contingency in the Son around which one could build a theory of Christ’s meritorious obedience to God in behalf of humans. Of course, Justin preached that Christ was God who indeed took flesh for the healing of humanity,¹⁴⁶ that his “blood did not spring from the seed of man, but from the will of God,”¹⁴⁷ that human sin was forgiven in his blood,¹⁴⁸ that he took upon himself the curse that was the due of humanity,¹⁴⁹ that his flesh and blood served as nourishment for

¹⁴⁴ *1 Apol.* 61 (ANF 1:183 [PG 6:421A]): “ὅπως μὴ ἀνάγκης τέκνα μηδὲ ἀγνοίας μένωμεν, ἀλλὰ προαιρέσεως καὶ ἐπιστήμης, ἀφέσεώς τε ἁμαρτιῶν ὑπὲρ ὧν προημάρτομεν τύχωμεν ἐν τῷ ὕδατι.”

¹⁴⁵ *1 Apol.* 23 (ANF 1:171).

¹⁴⁶ *2 Apol.* 13 (ANF 1:193).

¹⁴⁷ *Dial.* 63 (ANF 1:229).

¹⁴⁸ *Dial.* 13 (ANF 1:200-1).

¹⁴⁹ *Dial.* 95 (ANF 1:247).

believers,¹⁵⁰ and that the particulars surrounding his suffering, death, and resurrection were all the fulfillment of prophecy,¹⁵¹ but the volitive movement throughout followed one and the same course: from God, through the Son, into creation. Creation was of course called to respond to this action of will through its own obedience, but never did it flow from the Son back to the Father, let alone as a contingent volitive action that could theoretically lapse. The Son remained the externalized volitional movement of the Father, and there simply was no possibility of conditionality of purpose in him that could serve as a basis for his exaltation as meritorious exemplar.

In this vein, it is unsurprising that Justin also rejected Trypho's suggestion that he adopt a theory of election and view Christ not as God born of a virgin—a tenet he considered “monstrous” and similar “to the fables of those who are called Greeks”—but as one who, “on account of having led a life conformed to the law and perfect,” earned the “honor of being elected to be Christ.” Justin stood his ground:

“...he endured all these not as if he were justified by them, but completing the dispensation which his Father the maker of all things, and Lord and God, wished him [to complete].”¹⁵²

This understanding of Christ's work as unidirectional volitive movement was reinforced by what appeared to be the absence in Justin of a developed appreciation of a human mind in Christ. I am not prepared to identify this as proto-Apollinarianism¹⁵³—there is

¹⁵⁰ *I Apol.* 66 (ANF 1:185).

¹⁵¹ *Dial.* 89-91 (ANF 1:244-5), 93 (ANF 1:246), 97-98 (ANF 1:247-8), 104-106 (ANF 1:251-2).

¹⁵² *Dial.* 67 (ANF 1:231 [PG 6:629C]): “...ἀλλ’ οὐχ ὡς δικαιούμενον αὐτόν διὰ τούτων ὁμολόγησα ὑπομενηκέναι πάντα, ἀλλὰ τὴν οἰκονομίαν ἀπαρτίζοντα, ἣν ἤθελεν ὁ Πατήρ αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν ὄλων Ποιητῆς καὶ Κύριος καὶ Θεός.”

¹⁵³ I will note that Erwin Goodenough (*The Theology of Justin Martyr: An Investigation into the Conceptions of Early Christian Literature and its Hellenistic and Judaistic Influences* [Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1968], p. 241) differentiates Justin from Apollinaris, not for any reasons pertaining directly to the action of a human mind in Christ, but because of their divergent understanding of the human nature that the

simply not enough information—but this deemphasis of the human will was most clearly illustrated was in his explanation of Christ’s seeming ignorance in Gethsemane and his words to the Father, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39):

“Even as there was not ignorance on God’s part when he asked Adam where he was, or asked Cain where Abel was, but [it was done] to convince each what kind of man he was, and in order that through the record [of Scripture] we might have a knowledge of all: so likewise Christ declared that ignorance was not on his side, but on theirs, who thought that he was not the Christ, but fancied they would put him to death, and that he, like some common mortal, would remain in Hades.”¹⁵⁴

His seeming ignorance was not a sign of the psychological frailty that lies in the human mind, neither was this a scene of supreme paradigmatic obedience, but it was a rhetorical moment aimed at bringing his listeners to their senses. For at all times, Christ as the Son

Logos assumed in the Incarnation. Goodenough makes the point that, in his effort to maintain a consistent vision of the divine nature in Christ, Apollinaris denied the fullness of the human one. In Justin, however, Christ’s humanity, though without doubt real (Justin was no Docetist), was a new creation, fashioned not from the preexistent human material in the Virgin’s womb, but completely anew as Adam’s had been. In defense of this peculiar understanding of Justin’s Christology, Goodenough invokes several passages (*ibid.* 242): *Dial.* 76 (ANF 1:236 [PG 6:652C]): “For when Daniel speaks of ‘one like unto the Son of man’...he declares...[that] He appeared, and was man, but not of human seed (τὸ γὰρ <<ὡς υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου>>) εἶπεῖν, φαινόμενον μὲν καὶ γενόμενον ἄνθρωπον μηνύει, οὐκ ἐξ ἀνθρωπίνου δὲ σπέρματος ὑπάρχοντα δηλοῖ”); *Dial.* 54 (ANF 1:222 [PG 6:593D-596A]): “For as God, and not man, has produced the blood of the vine, so also [the Scripture] has predicted that the blood of Christ would be not of the seed of man, but of the power of God” (“Ὁν γὰρ τρόπον τὸ τῆς ἀμπέλου αἷμα οὐκ ἀνθρωπος ἐγέννησεν, ἀλλὰ Θεός, οὕτως καὶ τὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ αἷμα οὐκ ἐξ ἀνθρωπίου γένους ἔσεσθαι, ἀλλ’ ἐκ Θεοῦ δυνάμεως, προεμήνυσεν); and *Dial.* 84 (ANF 1:241 [PG 6:673BC]): “...and predicted it, as I have repeated to you, in various ways; in order that, when the event should take place, it might be known as the operation of the power and will of the Maker of all things; just as Eve was made from one of Adam’s ribs, and as all living beings were created in the beginning by the word of God” (...προεκήρυξεν, ἵνα ὅταν γένηται, δυνάμει καὶ βουλῇ τοῦ τῶν ὅλων Ποιητοῦ γενόμενον γνωσθῆ· ὡς καὶ ἀπὸ πλευρᾶς μιᾶς τοῦ Ἀδάμ καὶ ἡ Εὕα γέγονε, καὶ ὡσπερ τᾶλλα πάντα ζῶα λόγῳ Θεοῦ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐγεννήθη). In my view, Goodenough is making too much of what are no more than statements that preclude a sexual understanding of the Son’s incarnation. Justin’s leading example is Eve’s generation from Adam’s rib—miraculous, non-sexual generation, but from pre-existent human material, which goes against Goodenough’s claim that Christ’s blood “was not made from Mary’s blood, His flesh was not her flesh” and that Christ had “no relationships with the human race” (*ibid.* 242). There is no warrant for this understanding of Justin.

¹⁵⁴ *Dial.* 99 (ANF 1:248 [PG: 6:708C-709A]): “Ὁνπερ τρόπον οὐδὲ τῷ Θεῷ εἰς ἄνοιαν ἦν τὸ ἐρωτᾶν τὸν Ἀδάμ ποῦ ἔστιν, οὐδὲ τὸν Κάϊν ποῦ Ἄβελ, ἀλλ’ εἰς τὸ ἕκαστον ἐλέγξει ὁποῖός ἐστι, καὶ εἰς ἡμᾶς τὴν γνώσιν πάντων διὰ τοῦ ἀναγραφῆναι ἐλθεῖν, καὶ οὕτως ἐσήμαινεν οὐκ εἰς ἄνοιαν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἀλλὰ τῶν νομιζόντων μὴ εἶναι αὐτὸν Χριστόν, ἀλλ’ ἡγουμένων θανατώσειν αὐτὸν καὶ ὡς κοινὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐν ἄδου μένειν.”

become human was omniscient and therefore impervious to the agony of deliberation, and there was no sense of conditionality to his virtue. If there was such an incidence of such that Justin called upon, it was the example of the Virgin Mary. The Son, Justin explained, became human by her so that “the disobedience which proceeded from the serpent might receive its destruction in the same manner in which it derived its origin.”

He went on:

For Eve, who was a virgin and undefiled, having conceived the word of the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary received faith and joy...and she replied, ‘Be it unto me according to thy word’ (Luke 1:38).”¹⁵⁵

It was not her obedience *per se* that destroyed the ancient disobedience, it was God, but it was an act of contingent volition that co-operated with the divine plan in an exemplary manner.

TERTULLIAN

We turn now to Tertullian. Of particular importance in our quest will be his *Against Praxeas*, a polemical tract written around 213 that constituted one of the earliest Christian expositions specifically on the doctrine of the Trinity. Tertullian directed this piece against certain factionists of his time who rejected the existence of three Persons in the Godhead because such a belief allegedly embodied the very polytheism from which Christianity was supposed to be leading people. For these malcontents, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were one and the same person. Responding to their erroneous views,

¹⁵⁵ *Dial.* 100 (ANF 1:249 [PG 6:712A]): “Παρθένος γὰρ οὖσα Εὐα καὶ ἄφθορος, τὸν λόγον τὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄφειος συλλαβοῦσα, παρακοὴν καὶ θάνατον ἔτεκε· πίστιν δὲ καὶ χαρὰν λαβοῦσα Μαρία ἢ παρθένος, εὐαγγελιζομένου αὐτῇ Γαβριὴλ ἀγγέλου ὅτι πνεῦμα Κυρίου ἐπ’ αὐτὴν ἐπελεύσεται καὶ δύναμις ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει αὐτήν, διὸ καὶ τὸ γεννώμενον ἐξ αὐτῆς ἅγιόν ἐστιν Υἱὸς Θεοῦ, ἀπεκρίνατο· Γένοιτό μοι κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου.”

Tertullian personified his opponents under the name of one Praxeas, apparently an old adversary of Tertullian's and originator of the heretical creed that he was now aiming to rebut.¹⁵⁶

Tertullian penned his *Against Praxeas* toward the end of his career, after he had joined Montanus' prophetic movement in a move that for many a later observer has tarnished his otherwise brilliant memory. As a Montanist, his stake in responding to a theological system that eliminated the distinctions between the persons of the Trinity and conflated them into one divine person took on an especially private character. By denouncing Praxeas and defending the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, Tertullian was by extension also shielding the distinct subsistence of the Holy Spirit, who was professed to be directly inspiring the work of the Montanist movement, of which he was now a part, and whose incarnation Montanus was even being claimed to be. Despite Tertullian's understandable motivations in defending the interests of his ecclesial confreres—an agenda that was all but made explicit in his preamble—the primary focus in the *Against Praxeas* was not so much the Holy Spirit, as one might initially expect, but the person of the Son and his relation to the Father. To be sure, this greater attention to the Son than to the Spirit conveniences our own concerns, given that we are retracing a particular theological trajectory that culminated in the controversies over Arius' teaching, but it should not be seen as being in tension with the essentially *Spiritualist* interests of his Montanist confederates. Tertullian was, as will become apparent, just arguing from

¹⁵⁶ The exact identity of Praxeas has remained a mystery. Because no other author mentions him, it has been surmised that Praxeas, which could be taken to mean “busybody,” might be a nickname. Hermann Hagemann (*Die römische Kirche und ihr Einfluss auf Disciplin und Dogma in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* [Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1864], 234-257) famously suggested that it was Pope Callistus. Though this is difficult to say with certainty, we can only note that Tertullian's contemporary Hippolytus (*Haer.* 9:6-7 [ANF 5:128-131]; 10:23 [ANF 5:148]) attributed to Callistus doctrines that closely resembled those of Praxeas.

Scripture, and Scripture mentions the Son more than it does the Spirit. To the Montanist mind, which shared much with those advocates of economic historicism, the fewer references to the Spirit in Scripture would have been taken not as a diminution of the same, but as part of a deliberate scheme in which Writ gave only enough information to establish his existence and his distinct, concrete personhood. More intimate knowledge of the third person in the Trinity would be gained only in the life of the Church as that prophetic, Spirit-filled institution that Montanus' devotees protested that it should be. So Tertullian defended the doctrine of the Son in order on the one hand to establish what he regarded as the catholic truth received by revelation and the apostles, but also to secure thereby the doctrine of the Spirit and the reality of his work in the unfolding of the divine economy as Tertullian had experienced it.

To read the preface of the *Against Praxeas*, we are left to conclude that Praxeas' unfortunate career began as a direct reaction to the good work of Montanus. For Tertullian, Praxeas represented the polar opposite of what he and his associates stood for. He related how in previous years, when Tertullian presumably had still not yet become a Montanist, Praxeas had first come to Rome from Phrygia in order to protest the apparent acknowledgement, by the Roman bishop of the time, of the activities and prophetic gifts of Montanus and his associates Priscilla and Maximilla in Asia Minor. By "urging false accusations against the prophets themselves and their churches," Praxeas apparently had managed to have Rome rescind its previously amiable correspondence to Montanus and adopt a now more hostile stance toward him—a policy shift that in Tertullian's newly Montanist reckoning of the past amounted to nothing less than the suppression of the gift of prophecy, the banishment of the Paraclete, and, presumably because of Praxeas'

heretical advocacy of anti-Trinitarian unipersonalism in the Godhead, the crucifixion of the Father. Nevertheless, Tertullian claimed that back then he had been able to expose and refute Praxeas, who, thus defeated, had no choice but to renounce his erroneous beliefs before finally withdrawing into obscurity. Despite his departure from the scene, however, the “tares of Praxeas” still managed “everywhere to shake out their seed,” which, “having lain hid for some while” with “its vitality concealed under a mask,” had now once again “broken out with fresh life.” All this forced Tertullian into renewed action, finally committing his thoughts to paper against the wrong doctrines of his old rival and this newer generation of his disciples that had been spawned of his dishonorable teaching.¹⁵⁷

Tertullian’s protest against Praxeas’ unipersonalization of God was, at its center, exegetical, in that the instinctive touchstone by which he measured the validity of his opponent’s beliefs was the data provided by Scripture. For Tertullian, Praxeas’ central claim that “one cannot believe in One Only God in any other way than by saying that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are the very selfsame Person”¹⁵⁸ ran up against a mountain of Scriptural evidence to the contrary. Tertullian’s methodology against Praxeas was straightforward: he offered a close reading of those contentious passages in Scripture, which either talked directly of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or in some more oblique way suggested at least a plurality of divine persons, and argued that it would strain the reader’s credulity to suggest that this plurality of persons in the texts really referred to one and the same person. On the contrary, Tertullian would contend,

¹⁵⁷ *Prax.* 1 (ANF 3:597-598).

¹⁵⁸ *Prax.* 2 (ANF 3:598).

there was no easy way of avoiding the fact that Scripture discerned three divine persons all of whom in various ways it called God.

Besides arguing for the textual implausibility of Praxeas' beliefs, Tertullian's work also cast light on two other areas. The first was that it allows us to gain an insight into some of the theological concerns that both Tertullian and Praxeas seemed to share. Thus, for example, we see him acknowledging Praxeas' concern for safeguarding monotheism and the divine monarchy (i.e. God's sole sovereignty), and even admitting the appeal that Praxeas' unipersonalist theology might have had for a considerable number of simple Christian believers. The Christian teaching on the Trinity was indeed a delicate one, he seemed to concede, and one that was easily mistakable for tri-theism. If the doctrine were misunderstood, or misrepresented, people understandably would begin to question whether the Church's mission really was to withdraw people from the "world's plurality of gods to the one only true God" as it surely is.¹⁵⁹

But these shared concerns did not serve so much as the possible ground for a meeting of minds as they did as fields for further battle, this time over what a modern critic might call interpretive premises. For, together with his rebuttal of Praxeas' readings of Scripture, we will also see Tertullian assailing his opponent over the facileness and contradictoriness of his comprehension of such concepts as the divine monarchy, over which they both ostensibly shared a concern, and how this understanding was informing, or to Tertullian's mind, misinforming Praxeas' reading. Tertullian's abiding goal in the *Against Praxeas* remained to argue for the real and distinct existence of three Persons in the Godhead as the proper reading of the Scriptural record, and to show how this, when properly understood, did not have to imply the capitulation of monotheism or the divine

¹⁵⁹ *Prax.* 3 (*ANF* 3: 599 [PL 2:180C]): "a pluribus diis saeculi ad unicum et verum deum transfert."

monarchy, as Praxeas seemed to presuppose, or the fracturing of the divinity into the tri-theism of which he accused Tertullian's camp.

The second, and, for the purposes of this study, more interesting dimension of Tertullian's work followed from the first, in that in Tertullian's attacks on Praxeas we can catch glimpses of the larger theological backdrop that was shaping his thought. To be sure, Tertullian was more of a polemicist than a systematic expositor, but we still can espy, and, with the help of other works of his, reasonably reconstruct, the broader theological framework that was holding together the various facets of his thought to which we are privy in the *Against Praxeas*. Clearly, parts of this framework had their apparent inspiration in Scripture. But other parts of it seemed to rest on Tertullian's attachment to specific precepts that, despite his celebrated scorn for the philosophers,¹⁶⁰ can only be described as philosophical. It is this systematic aspect of Tertullian's thought on which this study will place much of its focus. I will contend that a strong sense of the will suffused Tertullian's method as he tried in the *Against Praxeas* to form the data from Scripture into a theological whole that, over and against Praxeas' conflation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit into one person, upheld the reality and concreteness of the threefold distinction in the Godhead, as he believed had been received in the Christian tradition, while demonstrating that this in no wise denoted a lapse into tri-theism, viz. the acceptance of three independent divine entities. This preoccupation with the will in

¹⁶⁰ See, e.g., his often cited piece in the *Praesc.* 7 (*ANF* 3:246): "He [Paul] had been at Athens, and had in his interviews (with its philosophers) become acquainted with that human wisdom which pretends to know the truth, whilst it only corrupts it, and is itself divided into its own manifold heresies, by the variety of its mutually repugnant sects. What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians? Our instruction comes from 'the porch of Solomon,' who had himself taught that 'the Lord should be sought in simplicity of heart.' Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition! We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus, no inquisition after enjoying the Gospel! With our faith, we desire no further belief. For this is our palmary faith, that there is nothing which we ought to believe besides."

Tertullian will manifest itself manifoldly. First, in the broadest sense, Tertullian will present everything about God's nature—particularly God's threeness—as a matter of God's having both willed it to be so, and revealed it to be so, so that belief in the Holy Trinity will become not the product of human speculation but strict observation of God's revelation. Secondly, against those who accused Christians of tri-theism Tertullian will lay down the principle of the divine monarchy as a oneness of dominion and will that was born of the identity of substance between Father and Son, and the perfect and absolute knowledge they shared. Again, this will be in line with Greek norms describing ignorance and sin. Thirdly, Tertullian will establish the Father's begetting of the Son on the Father's intention to move beyond himself. Thus, a specific act of will stirs divine Reason into becoming the distinct Word, which will be externalized as Son by a further act of will in the Father. In this sense, Tertullian like Justin will establish the sense of precedent will in the Father's generation of the Son as a confirmation of God's sovereignty. Fourthly, the Son, possessed of the Father's substance—which Tertullian takes in materialist terms—will be understood as being the executor of the Father's power and will. Thus, through the Son all creation will be said to have been willed into existence. Fifthly, as the visible aspect of the otherwise invisible Godhead, the Son also will also be the revealer to humans of the will of the Father. All human interaction with God throughout Scriptural history will be presented as having been contact with the Son. Like Justin, Tertullian will also lay special emphasis on human free-will in salvation, and the human response and willing obedience to God will be understood as matters of revelation and overcoming sin through the education and elucidation—again in line with Greek conventions—that Christ brings to the world.

SCRIPTURE AGAINST PRAXEAS: GOD WILLED TO BE HOW HE IS

One of the basic premises that one quickly detects was lurking behind Tertullian's dispute with Praxeas is the centrality of Scripture to the theological enterprise. This idea that the word of Scripture must trump human calculation might not have been articulated explicitly but it is easily inferred from Tertullian's methodology. For example, we know already that Tertullian rejected Praxeas' principle that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were one and the same person. Yet it was not the logical difficulties that came with this belief that compelled Tertullian to dismiss it. On the contrary, when Praxeas was led to issue his corollary argument that "He [i.e. the Father] Himself...made Himself a Son to Himself,"¹⁶¹ and invoke God's omnipotence as the means through which it was made possible, Tertullian rather entertained this proposition as perhaps the only thing that might have lent Praxeas' beliefs some plausibility. Saying that "with God nothing is impossible"¹⁶² was at least an argument that was both logical enough and supported by Scripture.¹⁶³ But Tertullian's fear with invoking the unlimitedness of God's power was that "if we choose to apply this principle so extravagantly and harshly in our capricious imaginations," we may then have God "do anything we please, on the ground that it was not impossible for Him to do it." Therefore, rather than appeal to God's omnipotence in order to support something that one speculated God *may* have done, one would be better served simply by inquiring whether or not God had really done it.¹⁶⁴ For whether God truly did what one claimed was not a matter of ability—all agreed that God could do anything—but of whether he *willed* to do it. Thus, in his quest to defend the principle of

¹⁶¹ *Prax.* 10 (*ANF* 3:604-605).

¹⁶² Cf. Matt. 19:26: "...for God all is possible."

¹⁶³ E.g. Luke 18:27: "The things impossible for humans are possible for God"; 1 Cor. 1:27: "The foolish things also of the world hath God chosen to confound the things which are wise."

¹⁶⁴ *Prax.* 10 (*ANF* 3:604-605).

divine Monarchy, which he took as being synonymous with divine unipersonalism, Praxeas had to beware that he was not destroying that same principle by attempting to “overthrow the arrangement and dispensation of it, which has been constituted in just as many names as it has pleased God to employ.”¹⁶⁵ It was entirely proper to uphold the notion of the divine Monarchy as Praxeas tried to do, but one could not do so in a way that violated its “arrangement and dispensation” as God had willed them to be.

Already we can begin to see the strong sense of the divine will in Tertullian’s thought that displaced any attempt to impose human restriction on God. In this respect, Tertullian was the consummate theistic voluntarist¹⁶⁶—though, I must also add, a subtleminded one, who went in some unexpected directions—who confronted the too speculative endeavors of humans with the truth as God had revealed it directly. Even the doctrine of the Trinity was really a question of God’s will. God was three because God had decided it to be that way and because God had willed to reveal this fact to us accordingly, not because Christians had rationalized independently that it must be so, or projected onto God their own extraneous parameters that were unsupported by Scripture. Because God’s threeness had its origin in God’s will, and because God in turn had willed to reveal this threeness to humans, one had no other choice but to turn to the record of God’s self-revelation, namely Scripture, to see for oneself that it was from there that the belief in plurality in the Godhead—a belief “so handed down”¹⁶⁷—was grounded and confirmed. Since God was true, as Christians believed him to be, Tertullian was

¹⁶⁵ *Prax.* 4 (*ANF* 3:599-600).

¹⁶⁶ In this respect, Tertullian was of a similar theological strain to his contemporary Hippolytus, of whom Hermann Hagemann remarked, “Darum hat auch keiner unter den ältesten Vertretern der christlichen Wissenschaft solches Gewicht auf den Willen Gottes gelegt, wie Hippolytus” (*Die römische Kirche und ihr Einfluss auf Disciplin und Dogma in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* [Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1864], 197).

¹⁶⁷ *Prax.* 13 (*ANF* 3:607-609).

“sure that He declared nothing to exist in any other way than according to His own dispensation and arrangement, and that He had arranged nothing in any other way than according to His own declaration.”¹⁶⁸

Guided by what God had declared, therefore, we begin to see that Praxeas’ idea that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit were one and the same person, along with his scarcely imaginable theory of the Father begetting himself as his own son, had to be rejected because there was no mandate for them in Scripture. If Praxeas’ teaching were true, why did Scripture simply not say something in its support? All it would have to say is something like, “My heart hath emitted Myself as my own most excellent Word,”¹⁶⁹ or, “The Lord said unto Himself, I am my own Son, today have I begotten myself,”¹⁷⁰ or, “Before the morning did I beget myself,”¹⁷¹ or, “I the Lord possessed Myself the beginning of my ways for my own works; before all the hills, too, did I beget myself?”¹⁷² But it did not. Rather, each and every one of these passages stated the opposite, namely that the Father had begotten the Son and not himself.¹⁷³

So a plain reading of Scripture was of no help to Praxeas. But neither was a more constructive one either. Saying that the Father had begotten himself, or made a son of

¹⁶⁸ *Prax.* 11 (*ANF* 3:605-606 [PL 2:190A]): “Et ideo veracem Deum credens, scio illum non aliter quam disposuit pronuntiasset nec aliter disposuisse quam pronuntiavit.” Hippolytus, who in Noetus was battling a foe who was theologically akin to Tertullian’s Praxeas, is even more strident (*Noet.* 8-9 [*ANF* 5:226-7]): “For there is one God in whom we must believe, but unoriginated, impassible, immortal, doing all things as He wills, in the way He wills, and when He wills... There is, brethren, one God, the knowledge of whom we gain from the Holy Scriptures, and from no other source... Whatever things, then, the Holy Scriptures declare, at these let us look; and whatsoever things they teach, these let us learn; and as the Father wills our belief to be, let us believe; and as He wills the Son to be glorified, let us glorify Him; and as He wills the Holy Spirit to be bestowed, let us receive Him. Not according to our own will, nor according to our own mind, nor yet as using violently those things which are given by God, but even as He has chosen to teach them by the Holy Scriptures, so let us discern them.”

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Ps. 44:1 [LXX]: “My heart hath emitted my most excellent Word.”

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Ps. 2:7 [LXX]: “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.”

¹⁷¹ Cf. Ps. 109 (110):3 [LXX]: “I have begotten thee from the womb before the morning.”

¹⁷² Cf. Prov. 8:22f.: “The Lord made me at the beginning of his work...”

¹⁷³ *Prax.* 11 (*ANF* 3:605-606).

himself to himself, was inadequate because it failed to take seriously the significance of the names “Father” and “Son” that Scripture employed, and the kind of relation that they pointed to: “a Father makes a Son, and a Son makes a Father.” In other words, “father” and “son” were correlatives in that the existence of the one necessitated the existence of the other.¹⁷⁴ Things that were related in such a manner, “out of each other to each other,” could not by themselves become so related *to themselves* “that the Father can make Himself a Son to Himself, and the Son render Himself a Father to Himself.” Rather, in a father-son relation, a father had *to have* a son in order *to be* a father, and a son needed *to have* a father in order *to be* a son. Clearly, since it was “one thing to have, and another thing to be,” one was quickly led to a logical paradox if one took the one who *has* and the one who *is* to be one and the same person.¹⁷⁵ Correlatives such as father-son and husband-wife, in which the one was what it was by having the other, demanded logically that two subjects be understood in order to avoid an irrational morass: “if I am to be to myself any one of these relations, I no longer have what I am myself to be.” He concluded, “inasmuch as I ought to have one of these relations in order to *be* the other; so, if I am to be both together, I shall fail to be one while I possess not the other.”¹⁷⁶

So Praxeas’ contentions that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were one and the same person, and that the Father had begotten himself, had trouble squaring with even the most basic reading of Scripture or simplest of logical syllogisms. Praxeas’ woes were compounded when Tertullian also pointed out that, besides the numerous evidences of the Father begetting the Son as another, Scripture also pushed home the concrete and distinct personhood of each by recording verbal exchanges between them as though

¹⁷⁴ The understanding of correlatives is laid down by Aristotle (*Cat.* 7).

¹⁷⁵ *Prax.* 10 (*ANF* 3:604-605).

¹⁷⁶ *Prax.* 10 (*ANF* 3:604-605).

between distinct conversants. The pages of Scripture, he argued, were filled with instances of the Father addressing the Son,¹⁷⁷ and the Son addressing the Father,¹⁷⁸ so as to intimate the peculiarity and otherness of the first from the second. Almost all the Psalms, Tertullian argued, represented the Son speaking to the Father. In other instances, the Holy Spirit, too, was shown to be speaking to both Father and Son.¹⁷⁹ Some texts referred to God as “us,” or applied the name *God* to more than one subject.¹⁸⁰ Others even suggested distinct roles for these divine subjects, as in, for example, the creation account where the one agent, called God, issued commands and the other, also called God, executed them.¹⁸¹ These accorded with John’s account of the Word being with God, but also himself being God and the one “through whom all things were made, and

¹⁷⁷ Is. 42:1: “Behold my Son, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom I am well pleased: I will put my Spirit upon Him, and He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles”; Is. 49:6: “Is it a great thing for Thee, that Thou shouldest be called my Son to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the dispersed of Israel? I have given Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be their salvation to the end of the earth.”

¹⁷⁸ Is. 61:1: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel unto men”; Ps. 70:18 [LXX]: “Forsake me not until I have declared the might of Thine arm to all the generation that is to come”; Ps. 3:1 [LXX]: “O Lord, how are they increased that trouble me!”

¹⁷⁹ Ps. 109:1 [LXX]: “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on my right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool”; Is. 45:1: “Thus saith the Lord to the Lord mine Anointed” (Here Tertullian reads *Κύριος* as *Κυρίω*); Is. 53:1-2: “Lord, who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? We brought a report concerning Him, as if He were a little child, as if He were a root in a dry ground, who had no form nor comeliness.”

¹⁸⁰ Gen. 1:26: “Let us make man in our own image, and after our own likeness”; Gen. 3:23: “Behold the man is become as one of us”; Gen. 1:27: “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God created He him.” Tertullian cites more such proof texts in *Prax.* 13 (*ANF* 3:607-609): Ps. 109:1 [LXX]: “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on my right hand”; Is. 53:1: “Lord, who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” Gen. 19:24: “Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven.” The passage Ps. 44:6-7 [LXX] (“Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; the scepter of Thy kingdom *is a scepter of righteousness*. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity: therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee *or made Thee His Christ*”) speaks to God, but also says that God is anointed by God, suggesting that the two are God by reason of “the scepter’s royal power.” The reference to the “scepter’s royal power” seems to be Tertullian’s attempt at explaining the unity of the two Persons in terms of one power and authority. When elsewhere scriptures says, “The Sabeans, men of stature, shall pass over to Thee; and they shall follow after Thee, bound in fetters; and they shall worship Thee, because God is in Thee: for Thou art our God, yet we knew it not; Thou art the God of Israel” (Is. 45:14, 15 [LXX]), it is making clear reference to one who is God but also has God in him. The first, Tertullian argues, is Christ, the second, who is in him, the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸¹ Gen. 1:6-7: “And God said, ‘Let there be a firmament’...and God made the firmament”; Gen. 1:14: “And God said, ‘Let there be lights (in the firmament)’...and God made a greater and a lesser light.”

without whom nothing was made.”¹⁸² Unless one were to do the unthinkable and suggest that all these passages really were cases of divine dissimulation, in which God was pretending to talk to another though in reality talking to himself—an explanation that would make God “a liar, and an impostor, and a tamperer with His word”—then one had no choice but to acknowledge the reality of the distinction between the Persons in the Trinity. None of these passages appeared to have been written as a parable or an allegory, and so the allusions to more than one Person being called God had to be taken plainly and literally. And the fact that there were multiple persons being called God were a reassurance of Scripture’s consistency, for it also named as “gods” even those simple human believers in God who had become sons of God by faith.¹⁸³ How much more proper was it that that same Scripture also conferred the titles of “God” and “Lord” on one who was not just a human believer but God’s “true and only Son”?¹⁸⁴

THEOLOGY: MONARCHY AS ONENESS OF DOMINION AND WILL ESTABLISHED IN THE
ONENESS OF SUBSTANCE AND PERFECTION OF KNOWLEDGE

Tertullian had managed thus far to establish the support of Scripture, but his problem remained of how to arrange these details into a system that assured the inquirer that Christians are not tri-theists as Praxeas accused. The belief that three persons who were all called God could be misconstrued for faith in three gods—a difficulty that Praxeas had been quick to exploit for his purposes—but history itself was proof that

¹⁸² John 1:1-3, 9.

¹⁸³ Ps. 81:6 [LXX]: “I have said, ye are gods, and ye are children of the Most High;” Ps. 81:1 [LXX]: “God standeth in the congregation of gods.” We note that here Tertullian presumably bases humans’ becoming gods on their believing in God. There is no hint that he considers that the Son’s sonship to the Father is as contingent as the kind of sonship with God that human beings have. On the contrary, he will argue that the Son’s sonship to God is one according to nature, which, we must conclude, is of a different kind from that which believers have with God.

¹⁸⁴ *Prax.* 11-13 (*ANF* 3:605-609).

Christians had never declared a belief in three gods, even when it may have been advantageous for them to do so. Scripture applied the divine title to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, yet Christians had always insisted that they believe in one God, and this even at the pain of death. If Christians were tri-theists as Praxeas charged, why did they not just state this supposed belief in multiple deities and thereby escape persecution?¹⁸⁵ Clearly, there was more here than met the eye, yet the type of language that had been enlisted thus far was insufficient to grasp the intricacy of Christianity's true beliefs. Even Christians themselves spoke about God in a peculiar way that required elucidation. If, for example, both the Father and the Son were being referred to, Christians follow the example of Paul and "call the Father 'God,' and invoke Jesus Christ as 'Lord.'" On the other hand, when Christ alone was being mentioned, Christians referred to him as "God," again following Paul, who said, "...of whom is Christ, who is over all, God blessed for ever."¹⁸⁶ Tertullian explained this Christian convention with the help of a naturalistic interpretive paradigm and a theological vocabulary that he had expanded in important ways:

"For I should give the name of 'sun' even to a sunbeam, considered in itself; but if I were mentioning the sun from which the ray emanates, I certainly should at once withdraw the name of sun from the mere beam. For although I make not two suns, still I shall reckon both the sun and its ray to be as much two things and two forms of one undivided substance, as God and His Word, as the Father and the Son."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ *Prax.* 13 (*ANF* 3:607-609).

¹⁸⁶ *Rom.* 9:5.

¹⁸⁷ *Prax.* 13 (*ANF* 3:608-609 [PL 2:194A]): "Nam et radium solis seorsum solem vocabo: solem autem nominans cuius est radius, non statim et radium solem appellabo. nam etsi soles duos faciam, tamen et

Tertullian's solar analogy, together with his statement on "one substance," signaled a move beyond the firmly biblical parameters of the conversation thus far into a more philosophical and systematic direction. This shift in Tertullian's methodology, from arguing over the words of Scripture to testing the philosophical principles that informed how one read Scripture and understood theology, demanded a turn from his strictly biblical commentary to the rigorous examination of the more constructive elements in Tertullian's thought as he tried at once to undermine Praxeas' designs and organize the fragmented data of Scripture into a coherent theological system.

Tertullian's first target was Praxeas' conception of the divine Monarchy. From a strictly logical point of view, the divine monarchy could not be taken to depend necessarily on a notion of God's unipersonality because such a criterion did not even accord with the basic human concept of monarchy. For example, the unity of a king's dominion was fractured neither by his appointment of administrators, nor by the existence of a prince; all things being equal, the king remained the monarch despite the existence of subordinates or offspring. From the viewpoint of human statecraft, therefore, Praxeas' basic premise held no water. But even when considered from the vantage point of Praxeas' own theology there was contradiction. For it was certain that he would never dare to question the authority of his strictly unipersonal God because of the existence of the myriads of angels that ministered unto and stood before him. If in these two cases there was no question of the undermining of the idea of monarchy, by what rationale did Praxeas claim the fear of such if alongside the Father Tertullian upheld the existence also of the Son and Holy Spirit, when it was clear that these two persons were, in their relation

solem et radium eius tam duas res et duas species unius et indivisae substantiae numerabo, quam Deum et Sermonem eius, quam Patrem et Filium."

to him, “so closely joined with the Father in His substance” that the kind of division and severance that one might have had with the existence of the multitude of angels was potentially more deleterious to God’s monarchy? Thus, if one could accept with Praxeas the maintenance of the monarchy in the case of human government or of angels, then one had, *a fortiori*, also to accept it in the case of the Son and Holy Spirit, who were related to the Father in a way that was indivisible, inseparable, and by way of what he would call “substance.” “For,” he concluded, “do you really suppose that those, who are naturally members of the Father’s own substance, pledges of His love, instruments of His might, nay, His power itself and the entire system of His monarchy, are the overthrow and destruction thereof?” What constituted an assault on the divine monarchy was not whether there was a plurality of persons in the Godhead, but rather that

“another dominion, which has a framework and a state peculiar to itself (and is therefore a rival), is brought in over and above it: when, for example, some other god is introduced in opposition to the Creator, as in the opinions of Marcion; or when many gods are introduced, according to your Valentinuses and your Prodicuses.¹⁸⁸ Then it amounts to an overthrow of the Monarchy, since it involves the destruction of the Creator.”¹⁸⁹

As we can see, Tertullian framed the contingency of the divine monarchy in terms of an opposition to God the Father by some rival agent that had its own “framework and state.” To be sure, such a challenge to God’s dominion inevitably had to be conceived in

¹⁸⁸ A reference to the dualistic systems of Marcion and other Gnostics.

¹⁸⁹ *Prax.* 3 (*ANF* 3:599 [PL 2:181C-182A]): “Membra et pignora et instrumenta et ipsam vim ac totum censum monarchiae eversionem deputas eius? Non recte. Malo te ad sensum rei quam ad sonum vocabuli exerceas. Eversio enim monarchiae illa est tibi intellegenda cum alia dominatio suae condicionis et proprii status ac per hoc aemula superducitur, cum alius deus infertur adversus Creatorem cum Marcione, cum plures secundum Valentinus et Prodicos: tunc in monarchiae eversionem cum in Creatoris destructionem.”

terms of a conflict of wills between God and this contender. Tertullian seemed to be alluding that, whereas in human and angelic affairs concord with king or God was fundamentally a matter of coercion or subordination, with volitional disharmony being avoided only because the subordinate remained obedient to the potentate, there was on the other hand a sense that being joined “with the Father in His substance” greatly diminished or, rather, altogether eliminated the potential of volitional opposition. In order to appreciate this correlation, it remains for us first to explore what Tertullian meant by this new factor *substance*. And in order to be in a position to grasp his concept of substance more firmly, it would be more fruitful for us first to turn to what one might describe as the psychological paradigm that Tertullian puts forward to depict the relation between Father and Son. From there, we will be able to explore the significance of substance as we observe Tertullian complementing his psychological paradigm with a theory of the commonality of substance between the persons of the Trinity, which he in turn elucidated with naturalistic analogies drawn from the physical world.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PARADIGM OF THE BEGETTING AND THE IMPERATIVE OF PRECEDENT WILL

Moved by his conviction that there was a kinship between the human soul and God,¹⁹⁰ Tertullian propounded a psychological model of the Trinity that set up an analogy

¹⁹⁰ See *Apol.* 17 (*ANF* 3:32): “Would you have the proof from the works of His hands, so numerous and so great, which both contain you and sustain you, which minister at once to your enjoyment, and strike you with awe; or would you rather have it from the testimony of the soul itself? Though under the oppressive bondage of the body, though led astray by depraving customs, though enervated by lusts and passions, though in slavery to false gods; yet, whenever the soul comes to itself, as out of a surfeit, or a sleep, or a sickness, and attains something of its natural soundness, it speaks of God; using no other word, because this is the peculiar name of the true God. “God is great and good”—“Which may God give,” are the words on every lip. It bears witness, too, that God is judge, exclaiming, “God sees,” and, “I commend myself to God,” and, “God will repay me.” O noble testimony of the soul by nature Christian! Then, too, in using

between the human thought process and the relation of the Father to the Son. The first step in this model was to consider God the Father in himself. Tertullian observed that God the Father was generally taken to exist alone before the generation of the Son or anything else that was outside of his own person. In short, God the Father was at this point his own universe, his own space, and his own “all things.” Yet even here God was not completely alone because, being rational, he was possessed of his own Reason (*ratio*) that existed with him as a part of himself. However, moved by his intention to move beyond himself and create the universe, God agitated this Reason of which he is possessed so that it become Word (*sermo*). Word thus could be described provisionally as Reason that had been agitated by God’s Will. With this Word God then entered into a kind of premeditative conversation in a way that was, based on the fact that humans were created in God’s image and likeness, analogous to, though infinitely more perfect than, the human process of thinking a plan through in one’s own mind before acting.¹⁹¹

such words as these, it looks not to the Capitol, but to the heavens. It knows that there is the throne of the living God, as from Him and from thence itself came down.”

¹⁹¹ *Prax.* 5 (*ANF* 3:600-601). Worthy of note is Tertullian’s similarity on this point with Hippolytus (*Noet.* 10-11 [*ANF* 5:227]): “God, subsisting alone, and having nothing contemporaneous with Himself, determined to create the world. And conceiving the world in mind, and willing and uttering the word, He made it; and straightway it appeared, formed as it had pleased Him. For us, then, it is sufficient simply to know that there was nothing contemporaneous with God. Beside Him there was nothing; but He, while existing alone, yet existed in plurality. For He was neither without reason, nor wisdom, nor power, nor counsel. And all things were in Him, and He was the All. When He willed, and as He willed, He manifested His word in the times determined by Him, and by Him He made all things. When He wills, He does; and when He thinks, He executes; and when He speaks, He manifests; when He fashions, He contrives in wisdom. For all things that are made He forms by reason and wisdom-creating them in reason, and arranging them in wisdom. He made them, then, as He pleased, for He was God. And as the Author, and fellow-Counsellor, and Framer of the things that are in formation, He begat the Word; and as He bears this Word in Himself, and that, too, as (yet) invisible to the world which is created, He makes Him visible; (and) uttering the voice first, and begetting Him as Light of Light, He set Him forth to the world as its Lord, (and) His own mind; and whereas He was visible formerly to Himself alone, and invisible to the world which is made, He makes Him visible in order that the world might see Him in His manifestation, and be capable of being saved. And thus there appeared another beside Himself. But when I say *another*, I do not mean that there are two Gods, but that it is only as light of light, or as water from a fountain, or as a ray from the sun. For there is but one power, which is from the All; and the Father is the All, from whom cometh this Power, the Word. And this is the mind which came forth into the world, and was manifested as the Son of God. All things, then, are by Him, and He alone is of the Father. Who then adduces a multitude

To be sure, to the human mind this movement from Reason to Word was difficult to trace exactly, but Tertullian checked the imprecision of those who would simply identify them by remarking that “it would be more suitable to regard Reason as the more ancient; because God had not Word from the beginning, but He had Reason even before the beginning.” Reason began as a discernible faculty of God the Father that he stirred by his intention and planning into *becoming* a distinct reality—the Word—that, now a differentiated though still internal entity, God engaged, as like a second, in the reflective dialectic that preceded his creative act. In other words, moved by his plan, viz. God’s prior will, an “aspect” of God became more fully a “something other” while ever remaining, Tertullian would argue, inseparable from God. So, he concluded, “even...before the creation of the universe, God was not alone, since He had within Himself both Reason, and, inherent in Reason, His Word, which He made second to Himself by agitating it within Himself.”¹⁹²

The Scriptures confirmed the intellectual character of this second divine hypostasis by also referring to him as Wisdom.¹⁹³ They recorded Wisdom’s declarations

of gods brought in, time after time? For all are shut up, however unwillingly, to admit this fact, that the All runs up into one. If, then, all things run up into one, even according to Valentinus, and Marcion, and Cerinthus, and all their fooleries, they are also reduced, however unwillingly, to this position, that they must acknowledge that the One is the cause of all things. Thus, then, these too, though they wish it not, fall in with the truth, and admit that one God made all things according to His good pleasure. And He gave the law and the prophets; and in giving them, He made them speak by the Holy Ghost, in order that, being gifted with the inspiration of the Father's power, they might declare the Father's counsel and will.”

¹⁹² *Prax.* 5 (*ANF* 3:600-601 [*PL* 2:184A]): “et tunc Deum ante universitatis constitutionem solum non fuisse, habentem in semetipso proinde rationem, et in ratione sermonem, quem secundum a se faceret aitando se.”

¹⁹³ E.g.: Prov. 8:1, 22-25: “Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice?... ‘The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth’”; Prov. 8: 27-30: “‘When He prepared the heaven, I was present with Him; and when He made His strong places upon the winds, which are the clouds above; and when He secured the fountains, (and all things) which are beneath the sky, I was by, arranging all things with Him; I was by, in whom He delighted; and daily, too, did I rejoice in His presence.’”

of his being with God “in the beginning of his way,” and in these monologues they substantiated the reality of his personhood, but also his existence from before creation and his involvement in the preparation for the creative act itself.¹⁹⁴ In the act of creation that took place “as soon as it pleased God”¹⁹⁵ the Word assumed its own “form and glorious garb...sound and vocal utterance,” undergoing its own “perfect nativity” as it “proceeds forth from God” as his perfectly articulated command.¹⁹⁶ Thus, those things, which God had first planned and ordered within himself in conjunction with his inseparable Word, were now made “openly known,” and “kept permanently in their proper forms and substances,” through the now begotten, externalized Word.¹⁹⁷ In short, God internally generated the Word first “to devise and think out *all things* under the name of Wisdom—‘The Lord created *or formed (condidit)* me as the beginning of His ways;’”¹⁹⁸ then afterward begat him “to carry all into effect—‘When He prepared the heaven, I was present with Him [Prov. 8:27].’”¹⁹⁹ This internal preparatory phase resembled a period of gestation that culminated in God’s *begetting* of the Word when God willed to put his plan into effect. This fact of the begetting of what was thitherto the inherent Word as now the spoken or externalized Word was the reason why Scripture also named the second person *Son*:

“Thus does...[God]...make Him equal to Him: for by proceeding from Himself He became His first-begotten Son, because begotten before all things;²⁰⁰ and His only-begotten also, because alone begotten of God, in a way peculiar to Himself,

¹⁹⁴ *Prax.* 6 (ANF 3:601).

¹⁹⁵ *Prax.* 6 (ANF 3:601).

¹⁹⁶ *Prax.* 7 (ANF 3:601-602).

¹⁹⁷ *Prax.* 6 (ANF 3:601).

¹⁹⁸ Prov. 8:22.

¹⁹⁹ *Prax.* 7 (ANF 3:601).

²⁰⁰ Col. 1:15.

from the womb of His own heart—even as the Father Himself testifies: ‘My heart,’ says He,²⁰¹ ‘hath emitted my most excellent Word.’²⁰²

We must underscore that in ultimate terms the Word to Tertullian’s mind was not strictly coeternal with the Father. God’s Reason existed coeternally with the Father, but Reason was not the same thing as the Word. By an act of will God stirred Reason into *becoming* the fully personalized Word, and by an act of the Father’s will again it was fully externalized as Son.²⁰³ This *ordo* of generation broadly correlated with Tertullian’s denunciation of dualism in the *Adversus Hermogenem*. Here he argued that if even God’s very own Wisdom was at some point generated, how much more would something that was extrinsic to God also be generated.²⁰⁴ On this basis, the non-coeternity of the Son, i.e. the spoken Word, became an even simpler proposition: there was a time when the Father was not Father, only because there was a time when the Son was not;²⁰⁵ he was begotten

²⁰¹ Ps. 44:1 [LXX].

²⁰² *Prax.* 7 (ANF 3:601-602 [PL 2:184D-185A]): “Exinde eum patrem sibi faciens de quo procedendo filius factus est primogenitus, ut ante omnia genitus, et unigenitus, ut solus ex Deo genitus, proprie de vulva cordis ipsius secundum quod et Pater ipse testatur: *Eructavit cor meum sermonem optimum.*” We note, too, that beyond the Son’s generation being just an image of ratiocination on the part of God, there is also a sense in Tertullian of their relation being a communion of love between persons: “*The father* took pleasure evermore in Him, who equally rejoiced with a reciprocal gladness in the Father’s presence: ‘Thou art my Son, today have I begotten Thee;’ (Ps. 2:7 [LXX])²⁰² even before the morning star did I beget Thee (Ps. 109:3 [LXX]).”

²⁰³ Tertullian’s scheme of a Word that was first in the Father before springing forth from him fits into what H. A. Wolfson once identified as the “twofold stage theory of the Logos” that he shows is shared by a number of early Christian writers and which he believes has its ultimate source in Philo. See: H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970), 192-256.

²⁰⁴ *Herm.* 18 (ANF 3:487-488): “Let Hermogenes then confess that the very Wisdom of God is declared to be born and created, for the especial reason that we should not suppose that there is any other being than God alone who is unbegotten and uncreated. For if that, which from its being inherent in the Lord was of Him and in Him, was yet not without a beginning—I mean His wisdom, which was then born and created, when in the thought of God It began to assume motion for the arrangement of His creative works—how much more impossible is it that anything should have been without a beginning which was extrinsic to the Lord!”

²⁰⁵ *Herm.* 3 (ANF 3:478-479): “I *maintain* that the substance existed always with its own name, which is God; *the title* Lord was afterwards added, as the indication indeed of something accruing. For from the moment when those things began to exist, over which the power of a Lord was to act, *God*, by the accession of that power, both became Lord and received the name thereof. Because God is in like manner a

as Son, we saw already, when God commanded the cosmos into being. What mediated between God's prior sole existence and the generation of the Word was God's specific act of will.

SUBSTANCE

Tertullian began to unpack his idea of *substance* in earnest when he stated that this begotten or spoken Word was not of a fleeting and vacuous nature like those words that are uttered by humans, but was a being that had both its source in the "great and mighty substance," that is the Father, and was itself that through which all the mighty substances of creation had been brought into being. Though a thing made may have differed considerably from its maker, the fact remained that a void and empty thing could not make something that had existence. "How could He who is empty," he asked, "have made things which are solid, and He who is void have made things which are full, and He who is incorporeal have made things which have body?"²⁰⁶ The implication here that incorporeity was synonymous with existential void and emptiness reflected in Tertullian a materialist worldview influenced by Stoicism.²⁰⁷ That the Son was begotten of the

Father, and He is also a Judge; but He has not always been Father and Judge, merely on the ground of His having always been God. For He could not have been the Father previous to the Son, nor a Judge previous to sin. There was, however, a time when neither sin existed with Him, nor the Son; the former of which was to constitute the Lord a Judge, and the latter a Father. In this way He was not Lord previous to those things of which He was to be the Lord. But He was only to become Lord at some future time: just as He became the Father by the Son, and a Judge by sin, so also did He become Lord by means of those things which He had made, in order that they might serve Him."

²⁰⁶ *Prax.* 7 (ANF 3:602). Elsewhere (*Carn. Chr.* 11 [ANF 3:531]) he is even more explicit: "Everything which exists is a bodily existence *sui generis*. Nothing lacks bodily existence but that which is non-existent."

²⁰⁷ Sextus Empiricus: *Against the Professors* 8:263: "According to them [the Stoics] the incorporeal is not of a nature either to act or be acted upon" (*Τὸ γὰρ ἀσώματον κατ' αὐτοῦς οὔτε ποιεῖν τι πέφυκεν οὔτε πάσχειν*). Cicero, *Academica* 1.39: "Zeno differed from the same philosophers [Platonists and Peripatetics] in thinking that it was totally impossible that something incorporeal (to which genus Xenocrates and his predecessors too had said the mind belonged) should be the agent of anything, and that only a body was capable of acting or of being acted upon" (...nec vero aut quod efficeret aliquid aut quod efficeretur posse

Father, and in turn had created the entire cosmos, from the vast to the solid to the full, meant not only that he was a super-existent but that he must also have been of some unfathomable super-material. Otherwise, one would have had to draw what for Tertullian was the irrational conclusion that an incorporeal being was behind such mighty actions. All existents, especially ones that act, had to have corporeity. The angelic beings that stood before God, though invisible, had form and body. God, too, had the same, but of a sort that was entirely unfathomable. If his gainsayers were to point to the declaration in Scripture that “God is Spirit,” they would only be parading their failure to recognize that “Spirit”—and here Tertullian used *Spirit* to mean the divine substance or nature—was a type of material that “has a bodily substance of its own kind, in its own form,”²⁰⁸ and that this Spirit really was “the body of the Word.”²⁰⁹

Though a deeply problematic precept from the point of view of later theology—especially in the upheaval over the precise meaning of the *homoousion*—Tertullian’s materialization of the divine being allowed him to make more palpable what would be one of his principal claims, viz. that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, though distinct, were of one and the same substance.²¹⁰ Based on his materialistic conception of the divine substance, he easily drew analogies between the divine generation and processes that were observable in the physical world: “God sent forth the Word...just as

esse non corpus). For these Hellenistic sources, see A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley (*The Hellenistic Philosophers* [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987, repr. 1995], vol. 1, 272 (vol. 2, 269 for the Gk. and Lat.).

²⁰⁸ *Prax.* 7 (*ANF* 3:601-602). This reflects the Stoic idea that spirit and soul are material. Cf. Nemesius 78,7-79,2: “(1) He [Cleanthes] also says: no incorporeal interacts with a body, and no body with an incorporeal, but one body interacts with another body. (2) Now the soul interacts with the body when it is sick and being cut, and the body with the soul; thus when the soul feels shame and fear the body turns red and pale respectively. (3) Therefore the soul is a body.”

²⁰⁹ *Prax.* 8 (*ANF* 3:602-603).

²¹⁰ Tertullian’s vision of one and the same substance, of course, is a nascent antecedent of what in the fourth century will be formalized as the *homoousion*, one of the primary arguments against which will be precisely its materialistic connotations.

the root puts forth the tree, and the fountain the river, and the sun the ray.”²¹¹ In other words, though the Son was not the same thing as the Father, he was not a thing that was alien or extraneous to him either, but was of one and the same *stuff* as his source—the Father—in the same way that a tree is of the same substance as the root from which it springs without being one and the same thing as it. “Nothing,” Tertullian averred, “is alien from that original source whence it derives its own properties.”²¹² The Son derived his divine properties from the fact that he had his source in the Father. Whatever the divine properties were of the Father—be they immortality, omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence etc.—these same were those of the Son as well. But the Son *qua* Son was not exactly the same thing as the Father *qua* Father. One was the source, or parent, the other was the offspring: “every original source is a parent, and everything which issues from the origin is an offspring.”²¹³ They were connected correlatively but they could not be conflated. The same logic applied to a river and the fountain from which it issued, and a ray and the sun from which it radiated: “The root and the tree are distinctly two things, but correlatively joined; the fountain and the river are also two forms, but indivisible; so likewise the sun and the ray are two forms, but coherent ones.”²¹⁴

As per these analogies, therefore, the Son was envisaged as an extension from the Father of that very matter of which the Father consisted, to the point of its distinct personalization in the Son,²¹⁵ without this connoting a separation between Father and

²¹¹ *Prax.* 8 (ANF 3:602-603).

²¹² *Prax.* 8 (ANF 3:602-603).

²¹³ *Prax.* 8 (ANF 3:602-603 [PL 2:187A]): “quia omnis origo patens est; et omne quod ex origine profertur, progenies est.”

²¹⁴ *Prax.* 8 (ANF 3:603 [PL 2:187A]): “Nam et radix et frutex duae res sunt sed coniunctae, et fons et flumen duae species sunt sed indivisae, et sol et radius duae formae sunt sed cohaerentes.”

²¹⁵ This broadly agrees with the view expressed by Christopher Stead (*Divine Substance* [Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977], 178-80). In this same context, he asks whether the *homoousion* found

Son: “the tree is not severed from the root, nor the river from the fountain, nor the ray from the sun; nor, indeed, is the Word separated from God.” He continued:

“Everything which proceeds from something else must needs be second to that from which it proceeds, without being on that account separated. Where, however, there is a second, there must be two; and where there is a third, there must be three.”²¹⁶

By mentioning “a third” besides the Father and the Son, Tertullian was clear that all he had said till now on the substance and divinity of the Son also applied to Holy Spirit, and he expanded his materialist analogies accordingly: “Now the Spirit indeed is third from God and the Son; just as the fruit of the tree is third from the root, or as the stream out of

greater acceptance in the West because of the more materialist understanding of the Godhead that had been cultivated by such authors as Tertullian.

²¹⁶ *Prax.* 8 (*ANF* 3:603 [PL 2:187AB]): “Nec frutex tamen a radice nec fluvius a fonte nec radius a sole discernitur, sicut nec a Deo Sermo...omne quod prodit ex aliquo secundum sit eius necesse est de quo prodit, nec ideo tamen est separatum. Secundus autem ubi est, duo sunt, et tertius ubi est, tres sunt.” Cf. *Apol.* 21 (*ANF* 3:34-35): “But the Son of God has no mother in any sense which involves impurity; she, whom men suppose to be His mother in the ordinary way, had never entered into the marriage bond. But, first, I shall discuss His essential nature, and so the nature of His birth will be understood. We have already asserted that God made the world, and all which it contains, by His Word, and Reason, and Power. It is abundantly plain that your philosophers, too, regard the Logos—that is, the Word and Reason—as the Creator of the universe. For Zeno lays it down that he is the creator, having made all things according to a determinate plan; that his name is Fate, and God, and the soul of Jupiter, and the necessity of all things. Cleanthes ascribes all this to spirit, which he maintains pervades the universe. And we, in like manner, hold that the Word, and Reason, and Power, by which we have said God made all, have spirit as their proper and essential *substratum*, in which the Word has in being to give forth utterances, and reason abides to dispose and arrange, and power is over all to execute. We have been taught that He proceeds forth from God, and in that procession He is generated; so that He is the Son of God, and is called God from unity of substance with God. For God, too, is a Spirit. Even when the ray is shot from the sun, it is still part of the parent mass; the sun will still be in the ray, because it is a ray of the sun—there is no division of substance, but merely an extension. Thus Christ is Spirit of Spirit, and God of God, as light of light is kindled. The material matrix remains entire and unimpaired, though you derive from it any number of shoots possessed of its qualities; so, too, that which has come forth out of God is at once God and the Son of God, and the two are one. In this way also, as He is Spirit of Spirit and God of God, He is made a second in manner of existence—in position, not in nature; and He did not withdraw from the original source, but went forth. This ray of God, then, as it was always foretold in ancient times, descending into a certain virgin, and made flesh in her womb, is in His birth God and man united. The flesh formed by the Spirit is nourished, grows up to manhood, speaks, teaches, works, and is the Christ.”

the river is third from the fountain, or as the apex of the ray is third from the sun.”²¹⁷

Though Tertullian would not dwell on the particulars of the Spirit’s generation to the same extent that he did on those of the Son, he extended his previous claims on the preservation of the divine monarchy and economy to argue that the existence of the third person in the Godhead remained true to God’s self-revelation without embarrassing God’s monarchy: “the Trinity, flowing down from the Father through intertwined and connected steps, does not at all disturb the *Monarchy*, whilst it at the same time guards the state of the *Economy*.”²¹⁸

A CHRISTIAN *PROBOLE* BASED ON THE ONENESS OF KNOWLEDGE, WILL AND SUBSTANCE

Tertullian was aware that his conception of a Godhead that flowed down from the Father “through intertwined and connected steps,” might be taken as support for the doctrine of emanations, prolations or *probolai* that one could find in non-Christian theology.²¹⁹ He urged his readers not to fear the term *probole*, because he too was teaching something of the sort though in a way that was fundamentally different from how groups like the Gnostic Valentinians used it.²²⁰ The problem with the Valentinian

²¹⁷ *Prax.* 8 (*ANF* 3:603 [PL 2:187B]): “Tertius enim est Spiritus a Deo et Filio, sicut tertius a radice fructus ex frutice et tertius a fonte rivus ex flamine et tertius a sole apex ex radio.”

²¹⁸ *Prax.* 8 (*ANF* 3:603 [PL 2:187B]): “Ita Trinitas per consentos et connexos gradus a Patre decurrens et monarchiae nihil obstrepat et oeconomiae statum protegit.”

²¹⁹ Although he mentions only Gnostics, his teaching is also reminiscent of the Neo-Platonic theory of a cascading stream of divinity stemming from the One and overflowing to the Nous and the Soul (cf. Plotinus’ *Enn.* 5.2).

²²⁰ We note, however, Tertullian’s remark in his treatise against the Valentinians (*Val.* 4 [*ANF* 3:505]) that, although they have their ultimate origins in Valentinus—who he confesses was an able man both in genius and eloquence, but also a restless one, who left the Church allegedly out of bitterness at his not attaining a bishopric—they have departed from his original teachings. According to Tertullian, Valentinus had included the Eons “in the very essence of the Deity, as senses and affections of motion.” Rather, it was one Ptolemaeus, who came after, that established the later Valentinian tenet of “distinguishing the names and the numbers of the Eons into personal substances, which, however, he kept apart from God,” thus creating what Tertullian dismisses as the spectacle of “so many marriages, so many offsprings, so many exits, so many issues, felicities and infelicities of a dispersed and mutilated Deity” (*Val.* 3 [*ANF* 3:504-505]).

understanding of the *probole* between the Eons was not so much its materialistic implications—we have seen already that Tertullian was not far removed from them on this point—but the fact that, if it were used in a Christian context, a Valentinian conception of *probole* would put the Son at a distance from the Father, to such a degree that the Son, being almost swallowed up by the rest of matter, would no longer know the Father, but be left able only to yearn for him as the Valentinians understood has happened to the Eons.²²¹

In Tertullian's eyes, such an eventuality, in which the Son was ignorant of the Father, was first and foremost counter-Scriptural, because Scripture declared that “the Son alone knows the Father, and has Himself unfolded ‘the Father's bosom.’”²²² Moreover, Scripture also asserted that no man “knoweth the things which be in God, but the Spirit which is in Him.”²²³ The Word, we saw already, “was formed by the Spirit, and...the Spirit is the body of the Word.” If, then, the Son was of this same divine (and material) substance (that Tertullian called *Spirit*) as the Father, and that this substance knew the things that be in God, then it stood to reason that the Son was not only not ignorant of the Father, but rather had the most profound imaginable knowledge of him. For Tertullian, therefore, “the Son alone knows the Father, and has Himself unfolded ‘the Father's bosom.’ He has also heard and seen all things with the Father; and what He has been commanded by the Father, that also does He speak.” If this were so, then “it is not His own will, but the Father's, which He has accomplished, which He had known most

²²¹ *Prax.* 8 (ANF 3:602-603). We will see this in greater depth in the next chapter.

²²² *Prax.* 8 (ANF 3:603).

²²³ 1 Cor. 2:11.

intimately, even from the beginning.”²²⁴ The Son was not at a remove from the Father as a peculiarly Valentinian view of the begetting would have it, but was united with him in such a way that he executed whatever the Father commanded and whatever the Father willed without a distinction of purpose or volition ever arising between them. The Son’s complete consonance with God’s will was not the result of choice but of inherent nature; the Son effected the will of the Father because he was of the same substance as he.²²⁵

We observe that we have here two divergent perceptions of the significance of *probole* and its repercussions on the knowledge that an emanated entity had of its source. For the Valentinians, the Eons’ ignorance of and yearning for their source was archetypal of the even deeper ignorance and further distance (given humans’ lower ontological position to that of Eons) from God that afflicted humans. They desired knowledge of God’s nature and will in order to be reunited with him, their original source. Contained in the story of the eons’ primordial generation and fall from God was the understanding of how people might overturn their own removal from God and initiate their return to him. Conversely, in Tertullian’s understanding, the Son was generated by a specific act of the Father’s will and, on account of his commonality of substance with the Father, had

²²⁴ *Prax.* 8 (ANF 3:603 [PL 2:186BC]): “...solus Filius Patrem novit, et sinum Patris ipse exposuit...nec suam sed Patris perfecit voluntatem, quam de proximo immo de initio noverat.”

²²⁵ In *Prax.* 22 (ANF 3:617-618), Tertullian pointed out that the “*Ego et Pater unum sumus*” (John 10:30) employed the neuter *unum* not the masculine *unus* (Tertullian, expert in the language, must have known that the original Greek, ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ Πατήρ ἐν ἑσμεν, does the same), which suggested that the oneness was not of person, and the plural verb *sumus*, which could apply only to more than one subject. The “*unum*... does not imply singularity of number, but unity, likeness, conjunction, affection on the Father’s part, who loves the Son, and submission on the Son’s, who obeys the Father’s will” (PL 2:207BC: “Unum dicit, neutrali verbo, quod non pertinet ad sigularitatem, sed ad unitatem, ad similitudinem, ad conjunctionem, ad dilectionem Patris, qui Filium diligit; et ad obsequium Filii qui voluntati Patris obsequitur”). There is nothing to suggest that the language of *submission* (*obsequium*) here can ever imply potential dissonance between Father and Son. Tertullian’s scheme points rather to the suggestion that the Son’s unity with the Father can only ever mean that at all times he effects the will of the Father. Hippolytus (*Noet.* 7, [ANF 5:226]) also focuses on this passage but, placing it next to John 17:21-22 (“that they may be one, even as we are one”), concludes that it implies a oneness “in the power and disposition of unity of mind” between the Father and the Son.

perfect knowledge of and identification with that will, so that the Son was not the paradigm of the ignorance that was born of one's falling away from God as a Valentinian view of the Son would reckon, but was, oppositely, the very means through which God's will was effected in the universe and made known to humans. A hypothetically Valentinian Son would have been the paradigm of humans' ignorance of God, whereas for Tertullian, the Son was the very extension of the Father and the conduit of knowledge of him.

THE SON AS REVEALER OF GOD'S WILL

Tertullian offered his most rigorous examination of this status of the Son's as the revealer of God the Father in his fascinating attempt at resolving the apparent contradiction in Scripture over whether God was visible or invisible. Some passages in Scripture seemed to say that God was unseeable and incomprehensible, even stating that if one were to see God he would not live.²²⁶ In other passages, however, the patriarchs and prophets were said to have seen God, but without dying as those previous passages suggest that they should have. In fact, Moses and Jacob were said even to have beheld God face-to-face and yet they still lived.²²⁷ The episode with Moses was particularly puzzling. In Ex. 33:11 he was said to have conversed with God "face-to-face, as one would speak to his friend." Then, only a few narrative lines later, and in seeming unawareness of these face-to-face conversations' ever having taken place, Moses asked God to show himself to him. And God, almost as though to crown the reader's confusion, responded, "Thou canst not see my face; for no man shall see my face and live" (Ex.

²²⁶ For example, in response to Moses' request of God to be given to see him, God in Ex. 33:20 replies: "Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me, and live."

²²⁷ Ex. 33:11, Gen. 32:30.

33:20). One might have been left with the impression from all this that “Scripture misleads us, when it makes God invisible, and when it produces Him to our sight.”²²⁸

Of course, Tertullian’s exasperation was rhetorical. In reality, these apparent contradictions were for him programmatic. In line with his broader agendum of proving the plurality in the Godhead, he saw Writ’s conflicting statements on God as yet further evidence that there was more than one person in Scripture who was called God. Thus, he took these instances of God at one moment being described as visible and at another as invisible as reflecting the two divine persons, Father and Son, respectively. But this provisional explanation, left as it is, was not without its problems—the chief of which was how it could be reconciled with the idea of the identity of substance of the two persons that Tertullian had spent so long establishing. In other words, how could the Father and the Son have the identical substance and the first be invisible and the second visible?

Tertullian worked through his thoughts by using two of his various gainsayers as rhetorical foils. The first group—perhaps Praxeas—mounted the argument that the Son must also be invisible given the sameness of nature between the Father and the Son. The second—without doubt Praxeas—took this idea a further step and said that this community of nature between the Father and the Son really equated to an identity of Person. Thus, when manifesting himself as Father, this unitary Person was invisible, and when as Son, visible. Tertullian seemed to acknowledge the first group’s point and agreed that, because “He is God, and the Word and Spirit of God,” the Son, *when considered in himself*, had indeed to be invisible, too. With Praxeas, on the other hand,

²²⁸ *Prax.* 14 (*ANF* 3:609 [PL 2:194BC]): “...aut scriptura mentitur [cum invisum aut] cum visum Deum profert.”

Tertullian shared the general idea that visibility correlated with the Son and invisibility with the Father, except, of course, that he rejected Praxeas' idea that Father and Son were not two distinct Persons but mere manifestations of one underlying Person who chose when to be invisible and when visible. More subtly, however, by having already agreed with the first group, as we saw, and argued that the Son, too, was in himself invisible, Tertullian detracted from Praxeas' strategy of strictly confining divine invisibility to the Father-manifestation only. As divine, the Son, too, when seen from the point of view of his divine nature, was in his essence invisible.²²⁹

So the question arose of *how* the Son could be visible even though he was of the same substance as the Father who was by nature invisible. The answer lay in Tertullian's materialist understanding of the Trinity and the hierarchy in the Godhead. We have already seen how Tertullian understood the generation of the Son by the Father as the material extension of the Father's substance. Thus, though distinct, the Son was of the same substance as the Father. But in Tertullian's eyes, though they were of the same substance, the Father maintained a primacy that was not only causal, with the Father being perceived as the cause or source of the Son, but also materialistically quantitative and qualitative, wherein the Father was taken to be the substantive whole, and the Son a part: "the Father is the entire substance, but the Son is a derivation and portion of the whole, as He Himself acknowledges: 'My Father is greater than I.'"²³⁰ From the point of view of his perceivability to humans, therefore, the Father's sheer magnitude overwhelmed human cognizance, whereas the Son's partialness and derivedness, that is, his being a fraction of the unimaginable colossus of the divine mass, allowed humans an

²²⁹ *Prax.* 14 (*ANF* 3:609-610).

²³⁰ *Prax.* 9 (*ANF* 3:603-604 [PL 2:187C]): "Pater enim tota substantia est, Filius vero, derivatio totius et portio, sicut ipse profitetur: *Quia Pater maior me est.*"

albeit imperfect view of the divinity without their being completely overpowered.

Tertullian explained:

“It will therefore follow, that by Him who is invisible we must understand the Father in the fullness of His majesty, while we recognize the Son as visible by reason of the dispensation of His derived existence; even as it is not permitted us to contemplate the sun, in the full amount of his substance which is in the heavens, but we can only endure with our eyes a ray, by reason of the tempered condition of this portion which is projected from him to the earth.”²³¹

Tertullian’s solar paradigm was useful not only in explaining the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son, as we have seen already, but now also the seeming disparity between a Father, who to humans was invisible, and his Son who was at least partially visible. In short, the divine substance, which was of the Father and subsisted in him wholly and without fracture, was in itself invisible, and made him invisible too. But, because it subsisted in the Son proportionally and by derivation, the latter was rendered *less invisible*.²³²

²³¹ *Prax.* 14 (*ANF* 3:609 [PL 2:194C]): “Et consequens erit ut invisibilem Patrem intellegamus pro plenitudine maiestatis, visibilem vero Filium agnoscamus pro modulo derivationis, sicut nec solem nobis contemplari licet quantum ad ipsam substantiae summam quae est in caelis, radium autem eius toleramus oculis pro temper tura portionis quae in terram inde porrigitur.”

²³² In explaining Tertullian’s rationale on the Son’s visibility as a function of *material* rarefaction, I could be accused of being more extrapolative than strictly descriptive, although I would argue that my position finds a place for the evident materialism that pervades Tertullian’s thought. I cannot dwell on the question at length, but will note only that the question of the Son as the visible aspect of the otherwise invisible Godhead in the thought of some of the early fathers, including Tertullian, has been the subject of recent academic inquiry. See e.g. Robin Jensen’s “Theophany and the Invisible God” (*Vigiliae Christianae, Supplements*, 94: *God in Early Christian Thought: Essays in Memory of Lloyd G. Patterson* [Boston, MA: Brill Academic Publishers, 2009], 271-296). On Tertullian, specifically, she writes: “...this ability of the Word, to become visible to mortals, should not be used to separate the Eternal Word from the First Person, or to subordinate the latter to the former. He insisted that the two divine Persons are co-eternal, the same in substance, and united in intention and in deed. The difference is merely one of dispensation—one does

Armed with this interpretive paradigm, Tertullian now was in a position to unlock the difficulties he saw in Scripture on the matter of divine unknowability. Contextually, it was clear that the confusing Moses narrative above could not be taken literally. The “face-to-face” meetings that Moses had with God could not have been literally such, otherwise the text would not then have ignored them but a few lines later. Tertullian asked:

“If the Lord so spake to Moses, that Moses actually discerned His face, eye to eye, how comes it to pass that immediately afterwards, on the same occasion, he desires to see His face, which he ought not to have desired, because he had already seen it?”²³³

The explanation is that in these face-to-face meetings Moses was given to see God not as he really is—such a possibility is contextually unsustainable—but “as in a glass...and by enigma.”²³⁴ That there existed such *enigmatic* perceptions of God was confirmed by two passages in Scripture: Num. 12:6-8 and 1 Cor. 13:12.²³⁵ We will mention the second one first because of its lesser significance in Tertullian’s exposition. Its sole importance here was that it afforded passing confirmation of the fact that all divine apparitions, at least

appear to humans and the other does not. The Word is visible in virtue of its being a derived being and not an un-derived one.”

²³³ *Prax.* 14 (*ANF* 3:609-610 [PL 2:195C]): “si sic Moysi locutus est dominus ut et Moyses faciem eius cominus sciret, quomodo statim atque ibidem desiderat faciem eius videre, quam quia viderat non desideraret?”

²³⁴ *Prax.* 14 (*ANF* 3:610 [PL 2:195CD]). The whole passage reads: “Well, then, was the Son visible? Certainly not, although He was the face of God, except only in vision and dream, and in a glass and enigma, because the Word and Spirit (of God) cannot be seen except in an imaginary form” (“aut numquid Filius quidem videbatur—etsi facie, sed ipsum hoc in visione et somnio et speculo et aeni mate, quia Sermo et Spiritus nisi imaginaria forma videri non potest”).

²³⁵ Num 12: 6-8: “And he said to them, ‘Hear my words: If there should be of you a prophet to the Lord, I will be made known to him in a vision, and in sleep will I speak to him. My servant Moses is not so; he is faithful in all my house. I will speak to him mouth to mouth, apparently, and not in dark speeches.’” Though not cited by Tertullian, the passage continues: “‘And he has seen the glory of the Lord; and why are you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?’” 1 Cor. 13:12: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face-to-face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”

here on earth, were “enigmatic,” and secondly, it provided a name for these visions of which Tertullian clearly availed himself.

The first passage (Num. 12), however, was the more crucial for Tertullian. Besides talking about enigmatic visions of God, it allowed him to connect the question of divine visibility to an overarching understanding of the Son as the means of God’s self-revelation to the world, whose manifestations in the Old Testament were rehearsals for what would be the great culmination of his appearances in the Incarnation. In this pericope, which was set long after Moses’ visitations with God on Mount Sinai, God informed the Israelites that there would be further prophets who would rise up among them. To these God “will speak” only in visions and in sleep, but to Moses, they were told, God “will speak” mouth-to-mouth, apparently, and not in dark speeches.²³⁶ The crux of Tertullian’s interpretation of this prophecy hinged on its use of the future tense “will speak.” It insinuated that Moses had not yet seen God “mouth to mouth, apparently, and not in dark speeches,” but that this would happen at some future time. Thus, Tertullian understood that this prophecy was fulfilled neither at Sinai, nor at any other moment during Moses’ earthly life, but at Mount Tabor, where Moses was given to speak directly to Christ. As the New Testament reported abundantly, Christ was both God and, as incarnate, clearly had been seen face-to-face.²³⁷ So it made perfect sense for Tertullian

²³⁶ We should mention here that Tertullian did not cite the passage in its entirety. The uncut passage also mentioned that Moses had seen the glory of the Lord. Nevertheless, this omission presents no difficulty to our understanding of Tertullian, because, in accordance with what he had already said, we would have to take Moses’ seeing “the glory of the Lord” as nothing other than those enigmatic apparitions that were described back in Exodus. Thus, in kind, Moses’ having seen the “glory of God” was no different from what the other prophets would be given to see.

²³⁷ John 1:1-2: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.” Rom. 9:5: “Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.” 1 John 1:1-2: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear

that the prophecy in the Book of Numbers regarding Moses be understood to have found its fulfillment in the Transfiguration scene. If faces and mouths were visible, bodily things, then in Christ, an actual, no longer enigmatic, but face-to-face interaction with God had become a reality.²³⁸

Nevertheless, difficulties remained, primarily because these same New Testament witnesses, who had confirmed Christ's divinity and physical tangibility, also went to great lengths to reiterate the old point about God's invisibility.²³⁹ Even here, it seems, despite the new level of revelation gained in the New Testament, one was still returned to Tertullian's original question of how God, now incarnate and said to be seen, was so resolutely still said also to be invisible. How could it be so? Tertullian showed his hand: God unseen was the Father, and had always been the Father; God seen was the Son, and had always been the Son. The appearances of God to humans from the beginning of history were always in fact appearances of the Son, in which appearances the way was gradually prepared for the fullest possible interaction between God and humans in the Incarnation. He explained:

“This being the case, it is evident that He was always seen from the beginning, who became visible in the end; and that He, (on the contrary,) was not seen in the end who had never been visible from the beginning; and that accordingly there are two—the Visible and the Invisible. It was

witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us).” John 1: 14: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” 1 Cor. 9:1: “Am I am not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are not ye my work in the Lord?”

²³⁸ *Prax.* 14 (*ANF* 3:609-610).

²³⁹ 1 John 4:12: “No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.” John 1:18: “No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” 1 Tim. 6: 16: “Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen.”

the Son, therefore, who was always seen, and the Son who always conversed with men, and the Son who has always worked by the authority and will of the Father; because ‘the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do’ [Mt. 17:6; Mk. 9:6.]—‘do’ that is, in His mind and thought. For the Father acts by mind and thought; whilst the Son, who is in the Father's mind and thought, gives effect and form to what He sees. Thus all things were made by the Son, and without Him was not anything made [Jn. 1:3].”²⁴⁰

The distinction between God invisible and God visible, apart from bolstering Tertullian’s abiding belief in the existence of distinct Persons in the Godhead, fitted into a larger scheme wherein “the entire order of the divine administration has from the very first had its course through the agency of the Son.”²⁴¹ Tertullian had given us to see aspects of this agency already. As we had seen previously, the Word was generated when, by an act of will, the Father stirred his own Reason in an internal, premeditative process that preceded creation. Though it would be inaccurate simply to call the Son the product of the Father’s will, it was the Father’s will to move beyond himself that initiated this stirring that generated the Son from within the Father’s own nature. Next, in issuing his creative command, the Father externalized and begat the Word as Son, who in turn then created and maintained the world in line with the will of the Father. Now we see that, as God who was derived, partial, and more cognizable than the imponderable magnitude that was

²⁴⁰ *Prax.* 15 (*ANF* 3:611 [PL 2:197C-198A]): “Si haec ita sunt, constat eum semper visum ab initio qui visus fuerit in fine, et eum nec in fine visum qui nec ab initio fuit visus, et ita duos esse, visum et invisum. Filius ergo visus est semper et Filius conversatus est semper et Filius operatus est semper, ex auctoritate Patris et voluntate, quia Filius nihil a semetipso potest facere nisi viderit Patrem facientem—in sensu scilicet facientem. Pater enim sensu agit, Filius vero quod in Patris sensu est videns perficit. Sic omnia per Filium facta sunt et sine illo factum est nihil.”

²⁴¹ *Prax.* 16 (*ANF* 3:612 [PL 2:199C]): “...a primordio omnem ordinem divinae dispositionis per Filium decucurrisse.”

the Father, the Son was also he who had appeared to humans throughout salvation history, guiding them, and making known to them the will of the Father.

To be sure, we note that the Son's appearances to humans could never have been more than enigmatic, because the divine nature, of which the Son too was possessed, was in itself ontologically incomprehensible. For this reason, the fullest possible view of the Son could only be in the flesh of his Incarnation, not in his divine nature. Thus, we see that in salvation history his appearances followed a discernible upward trajectory from the Old Testament to the New as humans were gradually prepared for closer contact with God:

“For He it was who at all times came down to hold converse with men, from Adam on to the patriarchs and the prophets, in vision, in dream, in mirror, in dark saying; ever from the beginning laying the foundation of the course of *His dispensations*, which He meant to follow out to the very last. Thus was He ever learning even as God to converse with men upon earth, being no other than the Word which was to be made flesh. But He was thus learning (or rehearsing), in order to level for us the way of faith, that we might the more readily believe that the Son of God had come down into the world, if we knew that in times past also something similar had been done.”²⁴²

²⁴² *Prax.* 16 (*ANF* 3:611-612 [PL 2:198BC]): “ipse enim et ad humana semper colloquia descendit, ab Adam usque ad patriarchas et prophetas, in visione in somnio in speculo in aenigmate ordinem suum praestruens ab initio semper quem erat persecuturus in finem. Ita semper ediscebat et Deus in terris cum hominibus conversari, non alius quam Sermo qui caro erat futurus. Ediscebat autem ut nobis fidem sterneret, ut facilius crederemus Filium Dei descendisse in saeculum <si> et retro tale quid gestum cognosceremus.”

All divine manifestations, from his seeking after the disobedient Adam in Eden, to the judgment of those haughty malefactors at Babel, to the judgment of the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah, were appearances of the Son, acting by the “authority and will of the Father.” And the anthropomorphisms that were ascribed to God in many of these accounts, e.g., his seeming ignorance of Adam’s whereabouts, his tempting of Abraham, his taking offense at persons etc., were clues to humans not that the Son was imperfect or ignorant—on the contrary, he knew all things—but rather that he was rehearsing his eventual taking on of the human nature, where he would “experience even human sufferings—hunger and thirst, and tears, and actual birth and real death, and in respect of such a dispensation ‘made by the Father a little less than the angels [Ps. 8:6].’”²⁴³ The Father had committed to the Son the sovereignty over the universe, so that he might lead it back to the Father, and everything be restored and subject to him, in accordance with the will of the Father, whose monarchy was never compromised.²⁴⁴

THE CENTRALITY OF WILL IN HUMAN FALLENNESS AND THE RESPONSE TO GOD

The centrality of Will in Tertullian’s theology has so far been established in five ways. First, in the broadest, most overarching sense, we have seen that everything about God’s nature—particularly God’s threeness—was the way that it was because God had willed it to be so and, in the Economy, had revealed it to be so. Thus, belief in the Holy Trinity was not the product of human speculation but of attention to God’s revelation. Secondly, against those who accused Christians of tri-theism Tertullian laid down the

²⁴³ *Prax.* 16 (*ANF* 3: 612 [PL 2:199A]): “...ignorantes haec in Filium competisse qui etiam passiones humanas et sitim et esuriem et lacrimas et ipsam nativatem ipsamque mortem erat subiturus, propter hoc minoratus a Patre modicum citra angelos.”

²⁴⁴ *Prax.* 4 (*ANF* 3:599-600); *cf.* 1 Cor. 15:27-28.

principle of the divine monarchy as an oneness of dominion and will that was born of the identity of essence between Father and Son, and the perfect and absolute knowledge they shared. This was in line with Greek norms describing ignorance and sin. Thirdly, Tertullian established the Father's begetting of the Son on the Father's intention to move beyond himself. A specific act of will stirred divine Reason into becoming the distinct Word, and an act of will again externalized this Word as Son. Fourthly, the Son, as possessed of the Father's substance, was ever the executor of the Father's power and will. Through the Son all creation was willed into existence. Fifthly, as the visible aspect of the otherwise invisible Godhead, the Son also was the revealer to humans of the will of the Father. All human contact with God throughout salvation history was contact with the Son.

These five elements come together to form a view of the Economy as a grand *exitus* of the divine will from the Godhead into creation, that culminated in a corresponding *reditus*, in which the Son led creation back to the Father and subjected it to him. The Son effected this return through his role as the revealer of God's truth and will, a role that in the incarnation reached its consummation, and which showed the Son as the perfect and exemplary executor of the divine will.²⁴⁵ However, there was no trace in Tertullian of an understanding of Christ as the soteriological hero who overcame the

²⁴⁵ See e.g. *Or.* 4 (*ANF* 3:682-683): "There is, too, that will of God which the Lord accomplished in preaching, in working, in enduring: for if He Himself proclaimed that He did not His own, but the Father's will, without doubt those things which He used to do *were* the Father's will; unto which things, as unto exemplars, we are now provoked; to preach, to work, to endure even unto death. And we *need* the will of God, that we may be able to fulfill these duties. Again, in saying, 'Thy will be done,' we are even wishing well to ourselves, in so far that there is nothing of *evil* in the will of God; even if, proportionally to each one's deserts, somewhat other is imposed on us. So by this expression we premonish our own selves unto patience. The Lord also, when He had wished to demonstrate to us, even in His own flesh, the flesh's infirmity, by the reality of suffering, said, 'Father, remove this Thy cup;' and remembering Himself, *added*, 'save that not my will, but Thine be done.' Himself *was* the Will and the Power of the Father: and yet, for the demonstration of the patience which was due, He gave Himself up *to* the Father's Will."

contingency of his own will, remained obedient to God, and *earned* thereby salvation on behalf of humans. Rather, because the Son was of one and the same substance with the Father, and his will could not differ from the Father's, his saving work could only be seen as an act of grace, not merit. His coming in the flesh was the consummation of a long process of divine revelation whose goal had been to achieve humans' free realignment with the divine will by presenting them incrementally with truth.

The concept of repentance as an act of free will informed by truth formed the kernel of Tertullian's soteriology. Though he was a proponent of divine sovereignty and initiative, and was scornful of human attempts at postulating truth independently of Scripture, Tertullian came out as a strong supporter of human free will, making his strongest case for it against Marcion's opinions on the evil of the Old Testament God and his creation. In a classically theodicean manner, Tertullian defended God's goodness by citing human choice and disobedience to God as the true sources of human woe. God was not merely good, but was the only being that was good by its very nature. By contrast, humans were contingently good. Created with a predisposition toward the good, they had to appropriate this goodness and perform it spontaneously through the exercise of their free will. Otherwise, by acting out of compulsion, their virtuous deeds would be the unmeritorious work of automata: "the reward neither of good nor of evil could be paid to the man who should be found to have been either good or evil through necessity and not choice."²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ *Marc. 2.6* (*ANF* 3:302 [PL 2:318C]): "Caeterum, nec boni nec mali merces jure pensaretur ei qui aut bonus aut malus necessitate fuisset inventus, non voluntate." We note that Tertullian's advocacy of free will also extended to the matter of religious freedom—a question obviously of paramount importance for persecuted Christianity: "Let one man worship God, another Jupiter; let one lift suppliant hands to the heavens, another to the altar of Fides; let one—if you choose to take this view of it—count in prayer the clouds, and another the ceiling panels; let one consecrate his own life to his God, and another that of a goat. For see that you do not give a further ground for the charge of irreligion, by taking away religious liberty,

Yet, Tertullian's advocacy of human free will was more than just theodicy formulated in the heat of debate. It had more metaphysical roots, being founded on the basic affinity that, as we saw with his psychological understanding of the Godhead, Tertullian believed existed between the human soul and God. The source of human free will lay in the fact that God endowed humans with breath (*afflatus*) that granted them certain "lineaments of divinity"—e.g. immortality, freedom and self-mastery, foreknowledge, reasonableness, and a capacity for knowing and understanding.²⁴⁷ Although this breath had its source in Spirit, namely the divine substance, it was not exactly the same thing as Spirit, but a rarified derivative thereof, as a breeze was to the wind. It was an image of the divine substance, from which it had its origin, but the properties that it afforded did not amount to the actual power of deity.²⁴⁸ Despite this breath's divine provenance, it was on account of its "slenderness of nature" subject to the

and forbidding free choice of deity, so that I may no longer worship according to my inclination, but am compelled to worship against it. Not even a human being would care to have unwilling homage rendered him..." (*Apol.* 24 [*ANF* 3:38-39]).

²⁴⁷ As Tertullian says in *An.* 16 (*ANF* 3:194-195), the soul has two parts: the rational and irrational. The rational part is the *afflatus*, and has its origin in God, the irrational part has "accrued later, as having proceeded from the instigation of the serpent," and come to seem like a natural development in humans. Thus virtue is synonymous with reason, and evil with irrationality.

²⁴⁸ We cannot but diverge at this point in order to observe the similarity between the *afflatus* and the person of the Son. Both are *derived* from the divine substance, and we have seen that, given Tertullian's materialistic understanding of divine substance, their derivation in each case entails a relative rarefaction of the divine substance from its level of "density" in the Father, its source. In the case of the Son, the fact that he is but a part of what the Father is the whole means that, although the Father remains transcendent and invisible, the Son by contrast is less invisible, i.e., visible, but still only enigmatically so. But the contrast with the Father ends there, for there is never the sense in Tertullian that the Son could ever differ from the Father on matters pertaining to will. The Son's will remains completely identical with that of the Father, because, despite its relative *de-concentration*, the Son's own substance is still that of the Father. The Son is still God because he has no other substance than the divine, even if to an attenuated degree compared to that of God the Father. Substance for Tertullian is that thing that affords its possessor his properties, so its relative "thinning" in his generation gives the Son properties that are generally the same (e.g., will) as those of the Father, though slightly scaled down in some respects (e.g., he is less invisible). The *afflatus*, on the other hand, is a sliver of the divine substance that grants humans free will and the other higher traits. But here two additional factors come into play. The first is that humans are possessed of a created, human substance, in whose makeup also dwells the *afflatus* as a fraction of that divine substance that has been bestowed on it as God's gift. The divine substance is not the entire substance of the human, but is rather hosted by the created substance of humans, and is subject to their decisions. The second is that the rarefaction of the divine substance in the *afflatus* has been to such a degree that makes its subordination to the human even possible. Thus the *afflatus*' human possessors can abuse the powers that it confers to them.

possibility of disobeying God, though, Tertullian clarified, the rebellion that eventuated in Eden did not *properly* originate from within breath itself, but from humans' reckless deployment of the free will it engendered. Thus, the fault for the ancestral fall rested not with God but with humans.²⁴⁹ Having been made in God's image, they had self-mastery and knowledge, and were superior even to the angel that beguiled them.²⁵⁰ The choice to disobey was theirs and theirs only: "God designed for man a condition of life, so man brought on himself a state of death."²⁵¹

God's work through the entire span of salvation history since the fall therefore became to elicit the penitent response of humans and their free obedience to God by reacquainting them with the truth that had since become a stranger in this world.²⁵²

Repentance for Tertullian was an emotion of the mind that arises from disgust "at some previously cherished worse sentiment."²⁵³ Because "there is no sinning save by *will*,"²⁵⁴ and the "principle of voluntary obedience consists in similarity of minds,"²⁵⁵ there could be no repentance and turning to God unless there be a meeting of minds with him first.

For Tertullian, this meeting of minds took the narrowly heteronomous form of revelation

²⁴⁹ *Marc.* 2.9 (ANF 3:304-305).

²⁵⁰ We note that, too, that Tertullian places the culpability for the origin of evil in Satan in his free choice. From being the most intelligent and exalted of creatures, by choice he began "lusting after the wickedness which was spontaneously conceived within him" (*Marc.* 2.10 [ANF 3:305-306]). However, Tertullian does not offer an explanation of the origins free will in angels as he does for humans.

²⁵¹ *Marc.* 2.8 (ANF 3:303 [PL 2:320B]): "Deus homini vitae statum induxit, ita homo sibi mortis statum adtraxit."

²⁵² Cf. *Apol.* 1 (ANF 3:17): "She [i.e. Truth] knows that she is but a sojourner on the earth, and that among strangers she naturally finds foes; and more than this, that her origin, her dwelling-place, her hope, her recompense, her honors, are above."

²⁵³ *Paen.* 1 (ANF 3:657).

²⁵⁴ *Paen.* 3 (ANF 3: 659 [PL 1:1342B]): "quibus exceptis iam non nisi voluntate delinquitur." We note that for Tertullian (*Praescr.* 6 [ANF 3:245-6]) heresy, too, was a matter of the will. The term *heresy* derived from the Gk. for choice, and thus a heretic was said to be "self-condemned" (Titus 3:10-11) precisely because he had of himself chosen that for which he was being condemned. "We, however, are not permitted, to cherish any object after our own will," he concluded of the right-believers, "nor yet make choice of that which another has introduced of his private fancy."

²⁵⁵ *Paen.* 4 (ANF 3:660 [PL 1:1344A]): "obsequii enim ratio in similitudine animorum constituta est."

and acceptance. God came in revelation directly and told humankind what is good and evil. For Tertullian, God was the sole criterion of truth whose will determined what is virtue and sin: what he commanded was virtue, what he forbade was sin.²⁵⁶ Otherwise, one went the way of the unbelievers who, not knowing God but relying on their own decrepit postulations of truth, most often ended up repenting of deeds that were not sins and overlooking ones that were.²⁵⁷ There was no room objectively to confirm the virtue of God's laws by external rational criteria, because the goodness of his laws and the imperative of obeying them rested on the authority of him who issued them, and not on some limited human conception of virtue that might have sought audaciously to confirm them. In short, "it is not the fact that it is good which binds us to obey" a divine precept, "but the fact that God has enjoined it."²⁵⁸

This strict theocentricity in Tertullian's understanding of virtue was in keeping with the strong sense of theistic initiative that we have seen in him from the beginning of this study. However, what tempered this view of the relationship between God and humans, preventing it from becoming one of blind obedience to an arbitrary or fickle deity, was Tertullian's belief in the kinship between God and the soul. In this light, humans were not being called simply to bow down before something capricious or alien to themselves, because, in being given direct knowledge of God in revelation, they were in actuality being given direct knowledge of their true self. It was in this sense that

²⁵⁶ *Paen.* 3 (ANF 3:658): "For when the Lord is known, our spirit, having been 'looked back upon' [Luke 22:61] by its own Author, emerges unbidden into the knowledge of the truth; and being admitted to (an acquaintance with) the divine precepts, is by them forthwith instructed that 'that from which God bids us abstain is to be accounted *sin*.' inasmuch as, since it is generally agreed that God is some great *essence* of good, of course nothing but evil would be displeasing to good; in that, between things mutually contrary, friendship there is none."

²⁵⁷ *Paen.* 1 (ANF 3:657).

²⁵⁸ *Paen.* 4 (ANF 3:660 [PL 1:1344A]): "neque enim quia bonum est, idcirco auscultare debemus, sed quia Deus praecepit."

Tertullian could also say that all sin was irrational. It had its origin in the devil, and was an alien principle to God.²⁵⁹ There was here a prior correspondence between God and humans, of which the latter were unaware before they were brought to knowledge. This affinity explains why Tertullian went to considerable lengths to demonstrate God's willingness himself to execute first the virtues that he enjoined of humans. If Christians were called to patience²⁶⁰ or obedience,²⁶¹ they had to know that God was the first to exercise these. Similarly, when called to repentance, humans had also to know that, after having elicited from Adam and Eve an admission of their transgression by presenting them with the devastating truth of its consequences,²⁶² God inaugurated "repentance in His own self, by rescinding the sentence of His first wrath, engaging to grant pardon to His own work and image."²⁶³ Though still subject to death, by their earnest confession, Adam and Eve overturned the term of their punishment and won for the human race forgiveness in the form of candidacy for salvation and relief that was to come in the "future taking of the man into the divine nature."²⁶⁴ Thus was put into motion the plan that, by gradual re-familiarization with truth, would undo the consequences of their fall and punishment, and offer them redemption and salvation that would be predicated on their informed repentance.²⁶⁵ Because God knew *a priori* that humans "delight in the law of the Lord," the election of the Israelites and the promulgation of the Law became an

²⁵⁹ *An.* 16 (*ANF* 3:194-5).

²⁶⁰ *Pat.* 2-4 (*ANF* 3:707-708).

²⁶¹ *Or.* 4 (*ANF* 3:682-683).

²⁶² *Marc.* 2.25 (*ANF* 3:316-317). For Tertullian, the "O Adam, where art thou?" that God uttered was not a question into his whereabouts, but a presentation of truth, as though it were saying: "Look where you have placed yourself." Noteworthy, too, is the fact that when Cain was given similar opportunity to confess his crime, he chose instead to deny it, and thus earned God's curse.

²⁶³ *Paen.* 2 (*ANF* 3:657 [PL 1:1339A]): "iam inde in semetipso paenitentiam dedicavit, rescissa sententia irarum pristinorum ignoscere pactus operi et imagini suae."

²⁶⁴ *Marc.* 2.25 (*ANF* 3:316-317). Peculiarly, Tertullian takes the passage "Behold, Adam is become as one of us" (Gen. 3:22) as portending the future union of divinity and humanity in the incarnation.

²⁶⁵ *Paen.* 2 (*ANF* 3:657-658).

effort in re-acquainting humans with obedience, subduing “the nation’s hardness of heart, and, by laborious services, hewing out a fealty which was (as yet) untried in obedience,”²⁶⁶ with the prophets enjoining repentance whenever they fell short of the mark.²⁶⁷ In the incarnation, this re-exposure to truth reached its apogee. In Christ humans were given to see God himself, to learn his truth, to see the perfect execution of God’s commands, to become partakers in divinity through the re-awakening of that divine bestowal in themselves, to turn back to God through an act of free will, and to enjoy to forgiveness and salvation. Christ’s work opened the path for God to pour out his forgiving grace freely “as a flood of light on the universal world through His Spirit” on those who through repentance prepared the home of the heart, making it clean for the Holy Spirit, which was coming finally to save those who were fallen.²⁶⁸ Christ’s work was not only didactic but also sanctifying because “in Christ that same flesh is maintained without sin, which in man was not maintained without sin...in putting on our flesh, he made it his own; in making it his own, he made it sinless.”²⁶⁹ He was the new Adam who inaugurated a human race that henceforth would live without sin, coming “as the good brother, who should blot out the memory of the evil brother [i.e. the old Adam].”²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶ *Marc. 2.19* (ANF 3:312 [PL 2:333BC]): “Quam legem non duritia promulgavit auctoris, sed ratio summae benignitatis, populi potius duritiam edomantis, et rudem obsequio fidem operosis officiis dedolantis.”

²⁶⁷ *Paen. 2* (ANF 3:657-658).

²⁶⁸ *Paen. 2* (ANF 3:657-658 [PL 2:1339A]): “per Spiritum suum universo orbi inluminaturus esset.”

²⁶⁹ *Carn. Chr. 16* (ANF 3:535-536 [PL 2:826AB]): “in Christo sine peccato habetur quae in homine sine peccato non habebatur...nostram enim induens suam fecit, suam faciens non peccatricem eam fecit.”

²⁷⁰ *Carn. Chr. 17* (ANF 3:536 [PL 2:828A]): “in vulvam ergo Deus Verbum suum detulit bonum Fratrem, ut memoriam mali fratris eraderet.”

Yet, in all this we must note that in this notion of flesh that the Son assumed in himself there was no specific mention of a human mind in Christ. R. E. Roberts²⁷¹ was not incorrect to draw attention to the *Carn. Chr.* to show that Tertullian talked of both a soul and body in Christ. Indeed, in order to counter his various opponents, who either attempted to present the flesh that Christ assumed as a type of soul, or, oppositely, his soul as a type of flesh, Tertullian affirmed the distinctness of soul and flesh in Christ.²⁷² Nevertheless, the provenance and function of this soul were not clear. On the one hand, Tertullian averred that “the Son of God did descend and take on him a soul, not that the soul might discover itself in Christ, but Christ in itself.”²⁷³ Yet, on the other, the only thing that Tertullian registered an objection to in his opponents’ claim that “the soul became flesh”²⁷⁴ was the implication that the soul had changed its nature and was *transformed* into flesh and not *clothed* in flesh,²⁷⁵ but evidently not the suggestion that the soul somehow pre-existed its incarnation. This hint of the soul’s possible pre-existence gained additional texture in *Prax. 27*, where Tertullian presented the *flesh* in the incarnation as antipodal, not to the soul as he had done in the *Carn. Chr.*, but to the *Spirit*, namely the Son’s divine nature.²⁷⁶ This opened the field to a possibly proto-

²⁷¹ R. E. Roberts, *The Theology of Tertullian* (London: Epworth Press, 1924), p. 174-5.

²⁷² *Carn. Chr.* 11-13 (ANF 3:531-33).

²⁷³ *Carn. Chr.* 12 (ANF 3:532 [PL 2:821B]): “Propterea Filius Dei descendit et animam subiit, non ut ipsa se anima cognosceret in Christo sed Christum in semetipsa.”

²⁷⁴ *Carn. Chr.* 13 (ANF 3:533 [PL 2:821B]): “Caro facta est anima...”

²⁷⁵ *Carn. Chr.* 11 (ANF 3:532 [PL 2:820A]): “Restore, therefore, to Christ, His faith; *believe* that He who willed to walk the earth as a man exhibited even a soul of a thoroughly human condition, not making it of flesh, but clothing it with flesh [Redde igitur Christo fidem suam, ut qui homo voluit incedere animam quoque humanae conditionis ostenderit, non faciens eam carneam sed induens eam carne].”

²⁷⁶ *Prax. 27* (ANF 3:624 [PL 2:215BC]): “We see plainly the twofold state, which is not confounded, but conjoined in One Person—Jesus, God and Man. Concerning Christ, indeed, I defer what I have to say. (I remark here), that the property of each nature is so wholly preserved, that the Spirit on the one hand did all things in Jesus suitable to Itself, such as miracles, and mighty deeds, and wonders; and the Flesh, on the other hand, exhibited the affections which belong to it. It was hungry under the devil’s temptation, thirsty with the Samaritan woman, wept over Lazarus, was troubled even unto death, and at last actually died [videmus duplicem statum, non confusum sed coniunctum, in una persona deum et hominem Iesum. de

Apollinarian view of Tertullian's Christology in which the pre-incarnate Son himself made up at least a part of the human soul. In light of the kinds of actions that we saw Tertullian apportion to the two respective natures in the incarnation, my own temptation has been to suggest that he may have envisaged the Son as taking the place of the *afflatus* in the human soul, though there is neither solid evidence in Tertullian for such an interpretation, nor even the concurrence of more recent scholars.²⁷⁷ Whatever the underlying reasons, the fact remains that Tertullian maintained a relative silence on the question of Christ's human mind, and consequently on the matter of a human will in Christ that might be understood as operating, in terms of human volition, contingently relative to the Father. This was no small thing, and helps to reinforce why nowhere in Tertullian was there a hint that the efficacy of the Son's work of rebirthing the human race was dependent on a sense of the contingency of his will. Because in the incarnation the only volitive agent could have been the Son in his divine nature, a tenet of contingent will would have run contrary to the consubstantiality between Father and Son that Tertullian had spent so long establishing. Rather, the role of successful contingent was, as in Justin, ascribed to the Virgin Mary, who in the same *De Carne Christi* was likened to Eve: "As Eve had believed the serpent, so Mary believed the angel. The delinquency which the one occasioned by believing, the other by believing effaced."²⁷⁸ The work of

Christo autem differo. et adeo salva est utriusque proprietates substantiae, ut et spiritus res suas egerit in illo, id est virtutes et opera et signa, et caro passiones suas functa sit, esuriens sub diabolo, sitiens sub Samaritide, flens Lazarum, anxia usque ad mortem, denique et mortua est]."

²⁷⁷ Ernest Evans (*Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation: the Text Edited with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* [UK: SPCK, 1956]) leaves the question of the precise function and origin of the human soul in Christ unexplored. Eric Osbron (*Tertullian, the First Theologian of the West* [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 139-143), too, leaves the question of the origin of Christ's human soul untouched, preferring to focus on the question of how Christ's two natures, which to his materialist understanding must both be material, can occupy the same space.

²⁷⁸ *Carn. Chr.* 17 (ANF 3:536 [PL 2:828A]): "Crediderat Eva serpenti, credit Maria Gabrieli: quod illa credendo deliquit haec credendo delevit."

Christ remained therefore revelatory and sanctifying. His work was also exemplary and vicariously meritorious, but not on the basis of a supposed contingency of will that he shared with creatures.

CHAPTER III

THE GNOSTICS, PLOTINUS, AND IRENAEUS

In Justin and Tertullian we saw the establishment of a theology of volitional movement, from the Father in the Son, outward from the Godhead and into the world as an act of self-revelation and enlightenment, to which creation was called freely to align its own will and be led back to be together with the divine source. The Son, as perfect externalization of the Father's wisdom and will, was the channel of this divine expression. Divine sovereignty against necessity was affirmed with a psychological depiction of the generation of the Son as Logos which, in line with how a word is generated in the human mind, posited a precedent act of the Father's will, but also stressed the closeness of the Son to the Father, his commonality of substance and cognitive parity with him, and thus, in line with Greek norms, the impossibility of a volitional rift between the two that would embarrass what Tertullian described as the monarchy of the Trinity.

We also saw Tertullian contrasting his own understanding of *probole* ("projection") with that of the Valentinian Gnostics, who, he argued, in their account of theological origins placed the generate hypostases in the Pleroma at a distance from their source. The result was disarray in the heavenly realm. In this chapter, we will first examine Valentinian theology in more depth, and demonstrate that it was a system that had at its center a complex effusion of hypostases derived from the primal deity, Bythos, that will be racked by conflict precisely because of the stratification in their respective

cognitive powers. The result will be a sublimated version of the pagan theologies of old that too had been characterized by discord in the divine estate. Of more interest, however, will be our examination of two responses to the threat posed by Gnosticism. The first will be that of Plotinus in whom we will espy an evolution of thought that precipitates from his engagement with Gnosticism. Thus he will shift away from his early speculation on *tolma*, that is daring or arrogance, as the motor of pluralization in the divine sphere to a theory that sheds all hint of caprice to the divine plan and lays emphasis rather on the rational necessity of the divine movement. In this context we will see a recognition of choice and will as a pole of irrationality and ignorance.

The second response that we will examine will be that of Irenaeus of Lyon, the great defender of the faith against the encroachments of the Gnostics, from whose polemic efforts as bishop in southern Gaul we also have the fullest record of their belief. Of note will be the fact that his purposes stand on the opposite end of the theological spectrum from those of Tertullian. If Tertullian's effort had been to defend plurality in the Godhead from the likes of modalists such as Praxeas, Irenaeus' labors will be directed at restoring those who had "fallen away from unity, and taken up the doctrine of manifold deities."²⁷⁹ Tertullian sought to demonstrate how the Church's teaching on the begetting, including his own psychological model which included the notion of willing in the Godhead, did not compromise the divine monarchy. Irenaeus, on the other hand, having the Gnostics as his primary point of focus, will follow a similar route to that of Plotinus, and will put forward a theology that leaves little place for the will in the internals of the Godhead. His theology will be one that emphasizes a transcendent simultaneity of the divine persons and will instead prefer, in its effort to avoid imagery that suggest notional

²⁷⁹ *Haer.* 4.33.3 (ANF 1:507).

seriation in the Godhead, the corporeal and holistic image of Son and Holy Spirit as the “hands” of God. In this respect, we might see a vague analogy between the trio of the Gnostics, Tertullian, and Irenaeus, and the disputants in the fourth century, namely Arius and the two theological streams that reacted to him: the one group that would continue to talk of the will in its account of the Godhead, and the other which rejected such talk.

We turn now to our representative group of Gnosticism, namely the Valentinians.

VALENTINIANISM

The loosely neo-Platonist synthesis, described succinctly as transcendental monotheism,²⁸⁰ which emerged as the dominant philosophical and theological system in late antiquity, presupposed a stratified view of reality that allowed one to connect, through a layered series of intermediaries, the absolute oneness, infinitude, and transcendence of some ultimate source of existence with the multifariousness and limitation of creation. Within this basic framework, the Gnostic Valentinus (ca. 100—ca. 160) and his followers made their own unique explanation of the origins of the universe and the human predicament, in which the faculty of will featured so prominently as to provoke a consciously anti-volitionist reaction from competing schools of thought. This chapter, therefore, will examine the Valentinians, but also the rival schemes of Plotinus (ca. 204—270) and Irenaeus (d. ca. 202), an orthodox neo-Platonist and orthodox Christian respectively, with respect to our abiding concern over will in these emerging attempts at articulating cogent systems of pluralistic monotheism.

²⁸⁰ Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede, eds., *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), 15.

In Gnosticism scholarship has long identified religious and philosophical elements drawn from Irano-Zoroastrian, Babylonian, Judaic, Hellenistic, and Christian sources.²⁸¹ Yet the precise origins of the movement are difficult to pinpoint. It remains a mystery whether one of the abovementioned elements constituted the nucleus around which the others were arranged, or the basic core was something wholly other next to which all the above influences were juxtaposed. Yet its enigmatic, mixed lineage allowed Gnosticism to be all things to all people. Its free use of terminology that was congruent with that also used by both the neo-Platonists and the Christians, or their liberally citing the authorities and Scriptures of each in support of their own doctrines, had both Plotinus and Irenaeus often treating the Valentinians more as wayward kin than adherents of wholly other schools or religions.²⁸²

It was probably the Iranian strain in the Gnostic pedigree that produced the deep sense of alienation from the material world and led the Valentinians to believe in the severely antithetical, though ultimately derived, dualism they preached. In their eyes this world was profoundly corrupted and had been, till latter times—or, as Irenaeus reports, till Christ's time—under the governance of a being ignorant of the true origins of the physical universe and the existence of a higher and true sphere. As a result, and to the dismay of the churchmen, the Gnostics radically reinterpreted the Old Testament as the record of the rule of this inferior governing principle over the world. For them, both the visible world and its creator and ruler were byproducts of a malfunction in the higher

²⁸¹ R.M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (2d ed.: New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 6.

²⁸² Plotinus takes particular offence (*Enn.* 2.9.4) at their disrespect toward Soul, the governing principle of the Universe, whereas Irenaeus finds himself discussing with them all manner of Christian doctrine, no doubt lest their at least superficial similarity to Christianity draw “away the minds of the inexperienced” (*Haer.* 1.Praef.1 [*ANF* 1:315]). His rejections of the Gnostics’ relegation of the Creator to lower divine status are simply too many to enumerate. His almost proto-anti-Nestorian arguments against their questioning the concreteness of the incarnation can be found here: *Haer.* 3.9.3 (*ANF* 1:426-7), 3.16.1-9 (*ANF* 1:440-4), 3.17.4 (*ANF* 1:445), 3.18.1 (*ANF* 1:445-6), *inter alia*.

sphere, and saw themselves as spiritual entities that, from the fallout of this unrest, had become trapped in material form. In the ornate, convoluted myths they shared with their followers and believed disclosed to them the true knowledge they needed for their salvation and return to their original beauty, the Valentinians traced a path from original perfection, transcendence, stillness, and purity in a divine and supernal sphere they called the *Pleroma* (Plenitude), to a fateful moment of disturbance which had cosmic consequences that were still playing out in the human sphere, before culminating in the coming recapitulation of all things in their cosmic source in the Pleroma. Gnosticism shared with Judaism and Christianity the belief that this disturbance had its root in some ancestral misdeed. With the Eden account both Jews and Christians placed this fault firmly within the human sphere, although the furtive role of the serpent, who came to be identified with an angelic being that fell away from God before creation, perhaps also hinted at anterior causes rooted in some heavenly rebellion. However, Valentinianism saw this defect as having its origin unambiguously in the Pleroma. Thus, although strident dualists, they were derived dualists: there was, in the end, a singular principle from which, through rebellion, was formed a second.²⁸³

THE PLEROMA AND THE EMERGENCE OF A THEOLOGY OF WILL

Like any sophisticated cosmogony, the Valentinians' mythical account of the history of the Pleroma and the subsequent creation of the world sought to explain the

²⁸³ John Dillon ("Monotheism in the Gnostic Tradition," in *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* [ed. Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999], 69, 71) notes that, despite the "reckless multiplication of immaterial and quasi-divine entities for which the various Gnostic systems would generally be noted, as well as their strong dualistic tendencies," in one respect they also "can be seen as being even more monistic than either Christianity or Platonism: they do not postulate even an independent material principle, such as appears in the *Timaeus*, which constitutes a refractory element in the universe, resistant to the complete control of the demiurge in his creative activity." To my mind, his observation holds more firmly with respect to Platonism than it does to Christianity.

origins and nature of the universe, but also the source of the strife and wayward desires that bedeviled human endeavor, clouded people's judgment, and led them down the wrong path.²⁸⁴ On one level, one might accuse Valentinus of theological crudity because the drama that unfolded among the host of hypostases or *eons* he described in the Pleroma seemed like a sublimated rendition of the tumultuous and quarrelsome stories from the court of the gods of old.²⁸⁵ The eons were indeed more anthropomorphic in their behavior than what one found in other similar systems, and what made them so was their waywardness and contingent intentionality. Yet Valentinianism clearly felt that a serious consideration of the waywardness of will was the only way of accounting for the emergence of division from the primordial state of oneness. What powered this theory was the intensely psychological and typically Socratic belief²⁸⁶ that faulty knowledge begat faulty intention. The causal hierarchy in the Pleroma produced a corresponding stratification of knowledge. The *Gnostics* styled themselves the possessors of true, saving knowledge, and so it was only natural that the motor driving the disturbance in the Pleroma was access to knowledge and, more specifically, the kind of will it begat. The misalignment of wills in the Pleroma was in essence the result of the tension between knowledge and varying degrees of ignorance. Theirs was a theology that accepted plurality in the divine, yet, at the same time, foresaw an underlying unity among these divine persons that distinguished Gnosticism from the classic polytheism that had autonomous gods who often worked even at cross-purposes. As we will see below, the

²⁸⁴ According to Hippolytus (*Haer.* 6.31 [*ANF* 5:90]), the Valentinians believed that the Savior came to the world to rectify the passions of the soul, in the same way that, in the Pleroma, the Christ came to correct the passions of Sophia.

²⁸⁵ Indeed, Irenaeus likens their theology to the generation of gods that one finds in the theogonies of the ancients (*Haer.* 2.14.1).

²⁸⁶ *Meno* 77b-78b. Cf. Diogenes Laertius (*Lives* 2.31) on Socrates: "There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance."

locus of this underlying unity among the eons was a sense of the will, as informed by knowledge, as a unifying force between agents.

COSMIC BEGINNINGS

The Valentinian account began with Bythos (Profundity), the pre-existent eon, in whom, directly or indirectly, all the hypostases in the Pleroma—thirty in all, including Bythos—had their origin. Bythos, also known as Proarche (Pre-beginning) and Propator (Pre-father, Forefather), dwelt in the invisible and ineffable heights above. He was perfect, pre-existent, invisible, incomprehensible, eternal, and unbegotten, and “he remained throughout innumerable cycles of ages in profound serenity and quiescence.”²⁸⁷ Alongside Bythos there also existed his companion Ennoea (Idea), also known as Sige (Silence) or Charis (Grace).²⁸⁸ At some point, Bythos “determined to send forth from himself the beginning of all things, and deposited this production (which he had resolved to bring forth) in his contemporary Sige, even as seed deposited in the womb.”²⁸⁹ From her union with Bythos, Sige became pregnant and bore Nous (Mind), also known as Monogenes, Father, and Beginning of all things. Nous was both “similar and equal” to Bythos, who had produced him, and was alone capable of “comprehending his father’s

²⁸⁷ *Haer.* 1.1.1 (ANF 1:316 [PG 7:445A]): “ὑπάρχοντα δ’ αὐτὸν ἀχώρητον καὶ ἀόρατον, αἰδίον τε καὶ ἀγέννητον, ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ καὶ ἡρεμίᾳ πολλῆ ἡγερονέναι ἐν ἀπέριτοις αἰῶσι χρόνων.”

²⁸⁸ There appears to have been some disagreement among the various Gnostic groups over whether Ennoea was a separate entity, or simply an aspect of the masculine-feminine monad called Bythos. Hippolytus (*Haer.* 6.25 [ANF 5:85]) remarked that the dispute over whether Sige coexisted with Bythos hinged on whether one was loyal to the Pythagorean principle of the Monad, or one adhered to the idea that generation could not proceed from a male principle alone.

²⁸⁹ *Haer.* 1.1.1 (ANF 1:316 [PG 7:445AB]): “καὶ ἐννοηθῆναί ποτε ἀφ’ ἑαυτοῦ προβαλέσθαι τὸν Βυθὸν τοῦτον ἀρχὴν τῶν πάντων, καὶ καθάπερ σπέρμα τὴν προβολὴν ταύτην (ἢν προβαλέσθαι ἐννοήθη), καὶ καθέσθαι, ὡς ἐν μήτρᾳ, τῇ συναρχούσῃ ἑαυτῷ Σιγῇ.”

greatness.”²⁹⁰ Along with Nous, his companion Aletheia (Truth) was also brought into being. The details of her generation were not given, so we can only assume that she too was the product of this same generative process. These four primal hypostases—Bythos, Sige, Nous, and Aletheia—made up the first and first-begotten Pythagorean Tetrad, which the Valentinians viewed as the beginning of all things. Irenaeus was silent on what it was that led Bythos to commence this “sending forth from himself.”²⁹¹ Bythos’ calculations and motives were shrouded in the mystery of his transcendence. The most exalted of all conceivable principles, Bythos was impenetrable in all respects, unknown and unknowable except by his own voluntary self-disclosure and action. His prior “determination” “at some point” (*ἐννοηθῆναι ποτε*) was all one could identify as having mediated between the initial state of divine perfection and stillness, which had lasted for “innumerable cycles of ages,” and this new sending forth from himself that introduced other hypostases into the Pleroma. Further explanation was futile, except from assuming that, as highest principle, Bythos was the theoretical standard against which every knower of truth was measured, even if the precise content of that absolute truth remained inscrutable.²⁹² As a result, the will of Bythos simply was, and when he intervened, as he was to do later, to steady the misguided intentions of his subordinates, it was decisive and irrefutable, its perfection being simply the product of his absolute knowledge.

²⁹⁰ *Haer.* 1.1.1 (ANF 1:316 [PG 7:445B]): “ὁμοίον τε καὶ ἴσον τῷ προβαλόντι, καὶ μόνον χωροῦντα τὸ μέγεθος τοῦ Πατρὸς.”

²⁹¹ In *Haer.* 6.24 (ANF 5:85), Hippolytus suggested it was because he was “not fond of solitariness”: “He was all love, but love is not love except there may be some object of affection.”

²⁹² This doctrine of the complete unknowability of the true God, namely that behind each conception of a deity there in fact lay a deeper, more exalted, and unseen divine being, was the only explanation that expressed the Gnostics’ belief that this world, including its Creator, who was worshipped in the various theologies surrounding them, were but lesser beings compared to the ultimate deity to which only they had access.

In his turn, Nous, “perceiving the purpose for which he had been produced,” i.e. to be the “father of all those who were to come after him, and the beginning and fashioning of the entire Pleroma,”²⁹³ came together with Aletheia to put forth two new hypostases: the couple Logos (Word) and Zoë (Life). In like wise, Logos and Zoë produced Anthropos (Man) and Ecclesia (Church), and thus was completed the first-begotten Ogdoad, which comprised the four masculo-feminine principles mentioned thus far. Finally, the eons Logos and Zoë, and Anthropos and Ecclesia, having been produced for the glory of the Father, and “wishing, by their own efforts, to effect this object,” emanated new hypostases by means of their procreative conjunction.²⁹⁴ In this way, through their own initiative, and to the glory of Nous the Father, the Pleroma was populated with eons born of the union of each of these two divine couples: Logos-Zoë generated another five pairs of eons,²⁹⁵ and Anthropos-Ecclesia another six,²⁹⁶ bringing the total, along with the original four, to fifteen couples, or thirty individual eons. These thirty eons were enveloped in silence, known to no one, and grouped hierarchically into an Ogdoad, a Decad, and a Duodecad.²⁹⁷ To the frustration of Irenaeus, the Valentinians found support for this partition of the Pleroma in the highly allegorical hermeneutic they employed to interpret Scripture.

Along with this causal hierarchy in the Pleroma there also came, as one moved down through the ranks of the eons, a corresponding stratification of their cognitive powers. Bythos, located at the highest stratum, was all-knowing in himself, but to others

²⁹³ *Haer.* 1.1.1 (ANF 1:316 [PG 7:448A]): “*Αἰσθόμενον τε τὸν Μονογενῆ τοῦτον ἐφ’ οἷς προεβλήθη...πατέρα πάντων τῶν μετ’ αὐτὸν ἐσομένων, καὶ ἀρχὴν, καὶ μόρφωσιν παντὸς τοῦ πληρώματος.*”

²⁹⁴ *Haer.* 1.1.2 (ANF 1:316-7 [PG 7:449A]): “*Τούτους δὲ τοὺς Αἰῶνας εἰς δόξαν τοῦ Πατρὸς προβεβλημένους, βουλευθέντας καὶ αὐτοὺς διὰ τοῦ ἰδίου δοξάσαι τὸν Πατέρα, προβαλεῖν προβολὰς ἐν συζυγία.*”

²⁹⁵ Bythios-Mixis, Ageratos-Henosis, Autophyes-Hedone, Acinetos-Syncrasis, and Monogenes-Macaria.

²⁹⁶ Paracletos-Pistis, Patricos-Elpis, Metricos-Agape, Ainos-Synesis, Ecclesiasticos-Macariotes, and Theletos-Sophia.

²⁹⁷ *Haer.* 1.1.3 (ANF 1:317).

he remained entirely invisible and incomprehensible. Only Nous, the lone eon produced directly of Bythos (and Sige), was capable of contemplating and comprehending his father's "immeasurable greatness."²⁹⁸ The other eons, generated as they were by Nous or other lower entities, were not so privileged, and to these Bythos ever remained inscrutable. It was for this reason that Nous, already privy to the pleasure of beholding Bythos' infinitude and having communion with him, also meditated on how he might share this blessed vision of his greatness with the other eons. The fact that he deliberated over how he might divulge this knowledge to the lower eons is reflective of even Nous' limited cognition. He longed to convey to them a sense of Bythos' vastness, his might, beginninglessness, and invisibility, and inspire in them too a desire to investigate his nature. Thus, thanks to Nous' misguided intentions, was there kindled in the eons, though in a "kind of quiet way," a yearning to see Bythos, the first cause without beginning.²⁹⁹

We observe that the generation of Nous marked the entry of the first agent whose knowledge, though more exalted than that of any of the eons that were to follow, was, in comparison to that of Bythos, relative, and whose will, consequently, was characterized by uncertainty, deliberation, and a lack of resolution. Thus in Nous a downward trajectory of uncertain and ultimately misguided will was set into motion that, as we will see further, culminated in the eventual failure in the Pleroma and led to creation of the fallen world. Nous' relative knowledge and will manifested itself in two ways. First, Nous was said to begin generating other eons on *perceiving* the purpose for which he had

²⁹⁸ *Haer.* 1.2.1 (ANF 1:317 [PG 7:452B]): "Μόνος δὲ ὁ Νοῦς κατ' αὐτοὺς ἐτέρπετο θεωρῶν τὸν Πατέρα, καὶ τὸ μέγεθος τὸ ἀμέτρητον αὐτοῦ κατανοῶν ἠγάλλετο." Throughout this passage the object of Nous' contemplation was referred to as "the Father," by which, I believe, Bythos was intended. Irenaeus made clear earlier (*Haer.* 1.1.1) that Nous was "the Father" and Bythos the Propator (i.e. "Pre-father"). He called Bythos "Father" here only because he was Nous' father.

²⁹⁹ *Haer.* 1.2.1 (ANF 1:317 [PG 7:453A]): "Καὶ οἱ μὲν λοιποὶ ὁμοίως Αἰῶνες ἠσυχῆ πως ἐπεπόθουν τὸν προβολέα τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῶν ἰδεῖν, καὶ τὴν ἀναρχὸν εἶζαν ἱστορεῖσθαι."

been produced. We note that Irenaeus' word choice here (*αἰσθόμενον*—*having perceived*) suggests more a growth in knowledge than a solid possession of it from the beginning, although the term *βουληθέντας*, which he used to describe the desire of the secondary eons to reproduce the other hypostases to the glory of Father, was admittedly far less suggestive. In any case, this deficit in true understanding among the lower eons was manifested unambiguously in the second stage of the story, once all the eons had been generated. Here, as we saw, Nous became engrossed over how to share with the other eons the view and understanding of Bythos to which only he, as his direct descendant, had been privy. Clearly, Nous did not realize that this was contrary to Bythos' will and his plans met with opposition from above. As if to foresee the danger this ignorant desire posed to the harmony of the Pleroma, Bythos intervened: he imposed his own will on Nous and restrained him from acting on his perilous desire. This, "in accordance with the will of the Father," Ennoea-Sige was sent to restrain Nous from bringing his wishes to fruition and sharing his knowledge with the other eons.³⁰⁰ However, though almost completely choked at birth, this incipient passion nevertheless survived, and was passed down by contagion from those eons close to Nous to all the eons in the Pleroma. Among these was Sophia, one of the latest eons and the youngest of the Duodecad born of Anthropos and Ecclesia. At some point, the story went, this passion to know Bythos welled up inside and overcame her because she missed the embrace of her consort Theletos. In the other eons, this desire had always remained subdued, existing, as Irenaeus already reported, in a "kind of quiet way" (*ἡσυχῆ πῶς*). In Sophia, on the other hand, it boiled over and became uncontrolled, and this because her motivations, though

³⁰⁰ *Haer.* 1.2.1 (ANF 1:317 [PG 7:453A]): "Κατέσχε δὲ αὐτὸν ἡ Σιγή βουλήσει τοῦ Πατρὸς, διὰ τὸ θέλειν πάντας αὐτοὺς εἰς ἔννοιαν καὶ πόθον ζητήσεως τοῦ προειρημένου Προπάτορος αὐτῶν ἀγαγεῖν."

superficially inspired by a deep love for Bythos, were more precisely rooted in her great temerity (τόλμης), “because she had not, like Nous, enjoyed communion with the perfect Father.”³⁰¹

Although she was completely overwhelmed by this passion, her attempt at comprehending his greatness proved futile all the same. She had, after all, “aimed at an impossibility.”³⁰² Rather, her endeavor provoked in her an extreme agony of mind. Given the vast profundity and unsearchable nature of Bythos, and her great love for him causing her ever to stretch herself forward toward him, there was a danger of her being completely absorbed by his sweetness and resolved into his absolute essence. The only thing that saved her was a certain power within the Pleroma called Horos, which supported all things and “preserved them outside of the unspeakable greatness.”³⁰³ Horos both restrained and supported her, and, once she had been brought back to her senses, she came to see for herself that Bythos was incomprehensible. Thus she gave up both her reckless plan and the passion that had born it.³⁰⁴

Another account said that, in the heat of her futile attempt, Sophia brought forth a formless substance “such as her female nature enabled her to produce.”³⁰⁵ When she looked upon this thing she had produced, she was horrified both by its imperfection and ugliness, and the fear that her very existence was in danger. She, along with Nous and the

³⁰¹ *Haer.* 1.2.2 (ANF 1:317 [PG 7:453AB]): “πρόφασιν μὲν ἀγάπης, τόλμης δέ, διὰ τὸ μὴ κεκοινωνῆσθαι τῷ Πατρὶ τῷ τελείῳ, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Νοῦς. Τὸ δὲ πάσος εἶναι ζήτησιν τοῦ Πατρὸς· ἤθελε γάρ, ὡς λέγουσι, τὸ μέγεθος αὐτοῦ καταλαβεῖν.”

³⁰² *Haer.* 1.2.2 (ANF 1:317 [PG 7:453B]): “διὰ τὸ ἀδυνάτῳ ἐπιβαλεῖν πράγματι.”

³⁰³ *Haer.* 1.2.2 (ANF 1:317 [PG 7:453B]): “τῆ...ἐκτὸς τοῦ ἀρρήτου μεγέθους φυλασσοῦση τὰ ὅλα.”

³⁰⁴ *Haer.* 1.2.2 (ANF 1:317).

³⁰⁵ *Haer.* 1.2.3 (ANF 1:317 [PG 7:456A]): “Ἀδυνάτῳ καὶ ἀκαταλήπτῳ πράγματι αὐτὴν ἐπιχειρήσασαν, τεκεῖν οὐσίαν ἄμορφον, οἴαν φύσιν εἶχε, θήλειαν τεκεῖν.” This statement rested on the ancient belief that in the reproductive process the man supplies form, the woman the material substrate (see e.g. Aristotle, *Gen. an.* 1.20 [729^a9-11]). Therefore it followed that, in the absence of a man, a woman could bring forth only what she brings to the procreative process: formless matter.

other Aeons, besought Bythos to come to her aid. This version of the story teaches that, in response to their supplications, Bythos, without union or collaboration with a feminine principle,³⁰⁶ produced, in his own image and by means of Nous-Monogenes, the aforementioned Horos.³⁰⁷ It was this Horos who then intervened, purified Sophia of her passion, established her, and restored her to Theletos.³⁰⁸ Moreover, Horos removed from her this substance, which the Gnostics called Sophia's *enthymesis* (inborn idea), and placed it outside of the Pleroma.³⁰⁹ This *enthymesis* was a spiritual substance, which had some of the properties of an eon, but was shapeless and without form because it had "received nothing" from a male principle in an act of union, because, as we saw above, Theletos, Sophia's mate, was not with her.³¹⁰ It was to become the substance from which was to be derived all material existence, which the Gnostics were to disparage as having had its beginning in Sophia's "ignorance, grief, fear and bewilderment."³¹¹

In the wake of this crisis, Nous-Monogenes, acting in accordance with the forethought of Bythos, generated another connubial couple: Christ and the Holy Spirit. Their role was to safeguard the Pleroma against the re-emergence of the kind of discord unleashed by Sophia's reckless actions. In order to bring peace to the Pleroma, Christ began by instructing the eons that Bythos was simply incomprehensible to all of them, except, insofar as he was known by Nous only.³¹² The Holy Spirit then taught the eons to be grateful because they all had been made equal in form and sentiment; the younger

³⁰⁶ *Haer.* 1.2.4 (ANF 1:318 [PG 7:457A]): "ἀσύζυγον καὶ ἀθήλυτον."

³⁰⁷ Irenaeus (*Haer.* 1.2.4) remarks that Horos (Limit, Boundary) was also called Stauros (Cross), Lytrotes (Redeemer), Carpistes (Emancipator), Horothetes (Limiter, Boundary-placer), and Metagoges (Conveyor from one place to another).

³⁰⁸ *Haer.* 1.2.4 (ANF 1:318). The Gk. (PG 7:460A) has "ἀποκατασταθῆναι τῇ συζυγίᾳ" ("restored in union").

³⁰⁹ Thus Horos/Stauros became the outer boundary of the Pleroma. See *Haer.* 1.4.1, 1.7.2.

³¹⁰ *Haer.* 1.2.4 (ANF 1:318 [PG 7:461A]): "διὰ τὸ μηδὲν καταλαβεῖν."

³¹¹ *Haer.* 1.2.3 (ANF 1:318 [PG 7:457A]): "Ἐντεῦθεν λέγουσι πρώτην ἀρχὴν ἐσχηκέναι τὴν οὐσίαν ἐκ τῆς ἀγνοίας, καὶ τῆς λύπης, καὶ τοῦ φόβου, καὶ τῆς ἐκπλήξεως."

³¹² *Haer.* 1.2.5 (ANF 1:318).

eons were no lesser than those of the older generations. Thus perfect peace was restored to the Pleroma, and the eons came together with great joy to glorify and sing praises to Bythos. In a final crescendo, all the eons of the Pleroma gathered, and, with the approval of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and Bythos, they skillfully put together whatever most precious each of them had to offer in order to form a being of most perfect beauty. This being they named Jesus, and they fashioned him to the honor and glory of Bythos. He was the perfect fruit, the star of the Pleroma, and had been formed from the contributions of all the eons. Along with him they also produced angels of the same nature as he, and these were to act as his bodyguard.³¹³ This Jesus and his angelic cohort were to play a central role in the redemption of the fallen, created world that was created out of Sophia's enthymesis that had been sealed off from the heavenly realm. The created world was as a reflection of the Pleroma.³¹⁴

³¹³ *Haer.* 1.2.6 (*ANF* 1:318).

³¹⁴ The story of the Pleroma is of course the precursor to the account of the generation of this world, of which, for the sake of brevity, we can treat only as a footnote. The formless *enthymesis*, also named Achamoth (Cf. *Khokmah* [Hb. חִכְמָה]: Wisdom), which had been ejected from the Pleroma, continued to dwell, alone, formless, and racked by fear, in the places of darkness and vacuity outside the Pleroma. Out of pity, Christ and the Holy Spirit proceeded from within the Pleroma, penetrated through Stauros its boundary, and came to her in order to bestow on her form, intelligence (but not the level of intelligence enjoyed by the Aeons), and an "odor" of immortality, before withdrawing again. Achamoth began to long for that withdrawn source which had given her life, but was prevented from reentering the Pleroma because of her involvement with passion. She was overcome by grief at being barred from reaching the source, fear, lest her life withdraw too, and a general perplexity. All these passions were born of her ignorance. Sophia's ignorance and passion had been the result of her degeneracy, whereas Achamoth's were ontological—she had never possessed knowledge (*Haer.* 1.4.1 [*ANF* 1:321]). The passions that afflicted Achamoth went on to become the matter from which this world was formed. Every soul, including the Demiurge, was made from her desire for her source of life. From her tears, all things that were liquid were formed; from her smile, all things that were lucent; and from her perplexity came the corporeal elements in the world (*Haer.* 1.4.2 [*ANF* 1:321]).

Still, in her anguish, Achamoth was able to stave off her passions, undergo a kind of conversion, and supplicate the Pleroma for help. This time, Jesus came to give her form and intelligence. He also separated her passions from her—though not completely, because they were so entrenched—and compacted them into two groups: the first being an evil substance derived from her passions, and the second one that was subject to suffering and derived from her conversion. Freed from her passion, she was able to behold the angels that were with Jesus, and, in her ecstasy, conceived by them to bring forth new beings that were partly in her image, partly in that of the angels (*Haer.* 1.4.5 [*ANF* 1:321-2]). These beings were of three sorts: the first, from the passion, was matter; the second, from the conversion, were the animal beings; the third, which she brought forth herself, were the spiritual ones. She then also gave form

to these (She could only give form to those substances lower than herself: the animal and material. She did not form the spiritual substance of which she too consisted), according to the instruction she had received from Jesus, and thus were an image of how things were in the Pleroma. Thus, when from the animal substance she brought forth the Demiurge, the Creator of the world, her relationship reflected that between Bythos and Nous, except that she remained hidden from him. The angels, too, that the Demiurge brought forth were reflections of the eons in the Pleroma (*Haer.* 1.5.1 [ANF 1:322]). Thus the Demiurge became the Father and God of everything outside of the Pleroma, being the creator of all animal and material substances. He discerned between the animal and material substances, from which he made corporeal and incorporeal substances and fashioned the things on earth and in the heavens. This made him the framer both of things material and animal. He made the seven heavens beneath him, which were intelligent and said to be angels. Above the third heaven was Paradise, with which Adam had held converse and derived certain qualities from (*Haer.* 1.5.2 [ANF 1:322]). Unbeknown to the Demiurge, the things he created were done in conjunction with the creative power of Achamoth, which is why the Demiurge did not really know the things he was creating (*Haer.* 1.5.3 [ANF 1:322-3]). He thought he alone was God (e.g. Is. 45:5-6). For the Valentinians the Demiurge was not evil, just ignorant; it was Marcion of Pontus and his followers, not Valentinus, who taught that the Creator God revealed in the Law and Prophets was evil (*Haer.* 1.27.2). Achamoth continued to reside one level above the Demiurge, but outside of the Pleroma. The Demiurge, as a product of Achamoth's conversion, was animal. However, creatures Demiurge produced from the matter (i.e. from Achamoth's passions, in this case, specifically, her grief) the spirits of wickedness, at whose head was the Cosmocrator, i.e. the devil who dwells in this world (the Demiurge dwells above it). The elements of the world, too—earth, water, air, fire—were all born of these passions, which were the product of ignorance (*Haer.* 1.5.4 [ANF 1:323]). The Demiurge also created the bodily part of man, as well as breathed into him the animal element of his nature, which was in the image of the Demiurge (*Haer.* 1.5.5 [ANF 1:323]). Meanwhile, the Demiurge remained oblivious of both Achamoth and the spiritual substance she had brought forth, which, unbeknown to him, she deposited in him, and he in turn deposited in the humans he created. When this increased it would make humans receptive of perfect rationality. Thus, the man (also known as Ecclesia as a reflection of the Aeon above) consisted of his animal soul from the Demiurge, his body from the passions, and his spiritual aspect from Achamoth (*Haer.* 1.5.6 [ANF 1:323]).

Regarding these three substances, the material perishes and is incapable of receiving incorruption; the animal, as intermediate, passes to the side to which it is inclined; and the spiritual substance comes to unite itself to the animal and draw it upward. For the animal substance, endowed with free will, had to be trained by means of its outward senses. This why the world was even created: to train animal substance by means of outward senses. Savior came to save animal nature. He received the first fruits of Achamoth, namely the spiritual substance she produced. From the Demiurge he received the animal Christ who had an animal body that looked material—i.e. was visible, tangible and passible—but was not material. For them, the consummation of all things will take place when all that is spiritual has been formed and perfected by Gnosis, and attained and a perfect knowledge of God after being initiated into it by Achamoth (*Haer.* 1.6.1 [ANF 1:323-4]).

Animal people have mere faith, not knowledge, and need to perform works to be saved. They considered the members of the Church to be such ones. The Gnostics, however, as spiritual beings, shall be saved, not because of their conduct, but because they are spiritual by nature. In the way that it was impossible for material nature to be saved, so, conversely, was it impossible for spiritual nature ever to come under the power of corruption, irrespective of what deeds they had done: gold, even if it were dipped in filth, was still gold (*Haer.* 1.6.2 [ANF 1:324]). They made a distinction between those *in* the world (i.e. the spiritual) and those *of* the world (i.e. the animal). The latter had to exercise abstinence and good works so that they may gain the “intermediate habitation.” The former, however, were not subject to this rule. Their entry into the Pleroma was not a question of conduct and behavior, but a matter of a “seed sent forth thence in a feeble, immature state, and here brought to perfection” (*Haer.* 1.6.4 [ANF 1:324-5]). Indeed, when the seed was to have come to perfection, Achamoth would pass from the intermediate place where she resided, to the Pleroma, and be joined to Jesus-Savior. The spiritual ones would shed their animal souls, become intelligent spirits, and enter into the Pleroma as brides for the host of angels who wait upon Jesus-Savior. The Demiurge would ascend to Achamoth's former position in the intermediate habitation just outside the Pleroma. The souls of the righteous would repose here too with him, but the animal nature would not enter into the Pleroma. Then fire would arise that would obliterate all matter (*Haer.* 1.7.1 [ANF 1:325]).

Thus, final and lasting peace in the Pleroma was achieved through a twofold strategy: first, by the direct imposition by Bythos of his will over against that of his subordinates, although we note too that they had requested his help beforehand. This he did by specially generating Horos, who imposed proper order on the eons. Secondly, he brought peace by appointing a pair of, again, purposely-generated eons to educate the other eons on the limitation of their knowledge, the futility of their trying to exceed this limitation, and the necessity of their being satisfied with their station and level of understanding.³¹⁵ The final, triumphant celebration and the generation of Jesus that followed marked the close of this first chapter of the Gnostic story of the world, which we saw dealt with the origins of the eons in the Pleroma, the arising of the strife, and the

Regarding the abovementioned animal Christ, who was produced by the Demiurge, he passed through Mary as water through a tube and, at his baptism, Jesus-Savior descended upon him from within the Pleroma. He was composed of four substances: that which is spiritual, from Achamoth; that which is animal, from the Demiurge; the quasi-material (a substance that appeared material but was not), also from Demiurge; and Savior who descended on him. But only the quasi-material part underwent suffering on the Cross (Stauros), and in this way was a type of the Christ who extended himself through the Stauros (i.e. the boundary of Pleroma) (*Haer.* 1.7.2 [ANF 1:325]).

The souls that possessed the seed of Achamoth were dearly loved by the Demiurge, though he did not know why, and he distributed them among the prophets, priests and kings. These souls uttered things from Achamoth and from the Demiurge. There were three types of prophecy: those from Achamoth, those from the spiritual seed, and those from the Demiurge. Similarly, the animal Jesus uttered three types of prophecy: that from Savior, that from Achamoth and that from the Demiurge (*Haer.* 1.7.3 [ANF 1:325-6]). The Demiurge was skeptical of these prophecies, but when Savior came, Demiurge learned from him the truth and joined himself to him. In the meantime, he has been given care of the world and the Church, in the knowledge that he will be rewarded with Achamoth's habitation (*Haer.* 1.7.4 [ANF 1:326]). There are three kinds of people: spiritual, material and animal, who are represented by Cain, Abel, and Seth. These three natures are no longer found in one person, as was the case of Adam, but now characterize whole kinds of people. The material group goes to corruption. The animal, if it chooses the good, goes to the intermediate place just outside the Pleroma; if not, it too goes to corruption. The spiritual elements were weak when first sown by Achamoth. But after discipline and nourishment in righteous souls and attaining to perfection they shall be given over as brides to the angels of the Savior, while their animal souls, which they had to have out of necessity, will go with the Demiurge to the intermediate place. Of the animal souls, some are by nature good, others evil. The good ones can receive spiritual seed, the bad cannot (*Haer.* 1.7.5 [ANF 1:326]).

The reason why Savior came to endure suffering was to indicate the passion that the last of the eons had endured, and by his own end to announce that the disturbance that had arisen among the eons had ceased (*Haer.* 1.8.2 [ANF 1:326-7]).

³¹⁵ In *Haer.* 2.17.10-11, Irenaeus asks why Bythos did not simply educate the other eons about his inscrutable nature from the beginning, but allowed his transcendence to become the cause of sin.

final resolution and return to peace therein. It represented an enormously important dimension of the kind of theological thinking that surrounded early Christianity.

What is of key significance for our purposes is the centrality of the role of the interplay between informed and uninformed will in this Gnostic attempt at formulating a theology of what one might call pluralistic monotheism. The causal hierarchy in the Pleroma produced an analogous stratification in knowledge as one moved away from the primordial perfection of Bythos. This in turn correlated with a gradient in intention among the hypostases that ranged from the all-informed will of Bythos, which acted with absolute rectitude and decisiveness, to the careful indecision and learned intention born of a kind of growing into one's calling in the intermediate eons, to the impulsive and hubristic desire of the lowest eon Sophia that led to the disturbance in the Pleroma. In short, the entire drama in the Pleroma was a dialectic of wills, respectively informed and uninformed by knowledge as the case may be.³¹⁶ And what won the day in the Valentinian system was a combination of coercion and enlightenment that guaranteed what can only be described as a symphonic union of agents with a high degree of independence in the divine sphere. In this light, the Gnostic teaching on the heavenly realm or *Pleroma* as the abode of a causal hierarchy of divine entities whose generation, origins, and continued unity among themselves were based on a strong sense of the will as a theological factor is of special interest to us. Gnostic theology's vague congruence—only insofar as it identified plurality and otherness in the Godhead—with the Christian

³¹⁶ In a passage (*Haer.* 1.21.4 [*ANF* 1:346]) dealing with the followers of Marcus, another Gnostic, but which would be equally applicable to the Valentinians, Irenaeus expands on how they viewed the connection between knowledge, ignorance, and passion: “These hold that the knowledge of the unspeakable Greatness is itself perfect redemption. For since both defect and passion flowed from ignorance, the whole substance of what was thus formed is destroyed by knowledge; and therefore knowledge is the redemption of the inner man.”

doctrine of the Trinity, and the sweeping implications that it potentially could have had thereon if its theological methods were accepted uncritically, hold special significance for a study such as this which examines the evolution of the question of will in the understanding of the tri-hypostatic God. The reaction of Irenaeus to the postulations of the Gnostics on this matter, and his careful articulation of the orthodox position in answer to them, serve to make his interaction with them on the question of will something of a dress rehearsal for the disputes provoked by Arius.

PLOTINUS

The Gnostics' view of the heavenly realm had a hierarchy of divine hypostases, each one of which was causally dependant on its superior, and all subordinate volitionally to the will of the Chief hypostasis, Bythos. The neo-Platonists had been the first to present such a stratified view of reality as a means of connecting, through a layered series of intermediaries, the absolute oneness and infinitude of the ultimate source of existence with the multifariousness and individual limitation of creation. However, the Gnostics had taken this neo-Platonist scheme and modified it in key ways, to the great ire of the latter. Neo-Platonists like Plotinus (ca. 204—270) saw the production of a chain of hypostases from a single, original source, the *Hen* (One), as the result of a natural overflowing of its perfection. The Hen was absolute and lacked nothing. It did not actively will any proliferation of hypostases from itself, as will would imply movement, and movement would violate the Hen's absolute simplicity.³¹⁷ It was the Hen's own

³¹⁷ Plotinus, *Enn.* V.1.6: "Given this immobility in the Supreme, it can neither have yielded assent nor uttered decree nor stirred in any way towards the existence of a secondary." Any movement would have to be counted as a second principle, and the thing generated by this movement would then be the third (*Enn.* V.1.6.26-28). Thus, such movement could not have existed.

natural “exuberance” (τὸ ὑπερπλήρες)³¹⁸ that led to the production of the second hypostasis, *Nous* or Mind, in the same way that the unchanging sun produces the light that emits from it.³¹⁹ This begetting was not a matter of will but of necessity. For all existents, on account of their inherent power (παρούσης δυνάμεως) and essence (οὐσίας), produce about themselves “some necessary, outward facing hypostasis [that is] continually attached to them and representing, in image, the engendering archetypes.”³²⁰ Thus fire produces heat, snow keeps cold, and aromatic substances give off fragrance. *Nous* was the offspring of the very Hen itself and a direct image thereof, and was the most perfect that a begotten principle can be. The source and its product were intimately bound, “attached by a bond of necessity,” and “separated only in being distinct.”³²¹ And this distinction is what allowed *Nous* to turn toward the Hen, its begetter, to become the most complete and unmediated contemplative expression of its infinitude and perfection, and, thus, the supreme intellectual principle that its name, *Nous*, connoted.³²² *Nous* was the vision of the Hen, but it could never be the ultimate source because, unlike the Hen, it was not a simplex, self-sufficient entity, but, as intellectual principle, was determined by the object of its intellection. It was not a simplex but manifold.³²³

The Soul or *Psyche* was the third hypostasis in this cascade of being. Flowing forth from *Nous*, it too was an image of its source. More specifically, it was the verbalized expression of *Nous*. If *Nous* was *logos endiathetos*, then Soul was *logos prophorikos*, “an utterance of *Nous*.”³²⁴ As verbalized, it was necessarily time-bound³²⁵

³¹⁸ Plotinus, *Enn.* V.2.1.

³¹⁹ Plotinus *Enn.* V.1.6.31-34.

³²⁰ Plotinus, *Enn.* V.1.6.31-38

³²¹ *Enn.* V.1.6: “ἐξ ἀνάγκης σύνεστιν αὐτῷ, ὡς τῆ ἑτερότητι μόνον κεχωρίσθαι.”

³²² *Enn.* V.2.1.

³²³ *Enn.* V.4.2.

³²⁴ *Enn.* V.1.3.7-12.

and stood in relation to Nous in the way that discursive, sequential thought contrasted with holistic, simultaneously present cognition.³²⁶ Its discursive nature, and its outward and downward pitch gave it various aspects as it stretched across the many layers of reality, joining Nous with the variegation of the cosmos. In its upper reaches, close to its source, Soul differed but little from Nous. The closeness of their relationship was such that it resembled that of Nous to Hen: “nothing separates them but the fact that they are not one and the same.”³²⁷ Still, each of them operated between a highest and lowest level of being, and “descent to its own downward ultimate” before turning back were their natural movements. Thus, Nous’ “downward ultimate” was Soul, “to which it entrust[ed] all the latter stages of being while itself turn[ed] back on its course.”³²⁸ In like wise, Soul had its own band of operation, stretching from its highest aspect which “cleave[ed] continually to the beings above itself”³²⁹ (i.e. Nous), to its lowest, the “body side,”³³⁰ which interacted with, animated, and beautified the universe. Inspired by Plato’s *Timaeus*, Plotinus came to see the Soul’s animation with the material world as a matter of benign necessity. Soul was given to the sensory world by the goodness of the Creator so that all things might be possessed of intellect and thus be complete. God³³¹ sent Soul down in order to bring order to the lower spheres,³³² and for this reason Plato called the

³²⁵ *Enn.* V.1.4.16-20.

³²⁶ *Enn.* V.1.4.20-22.

³²⁷ *Enn.* V.1.3.27-28.

³²⁸ *Enn.* IV.8.7.19-20.

³²⁹ *Enn.* IV.8.7.27.

³³⁰ *Enn.* IV.8.8.14-15. Of the Soul, he explains elsewhere (IV.7.13.14) that “as a whole it is partly in body, partly outside.”

³³¹ Here we must assume that God refers to the entirety of Soul. Cf. *Enn.* V.1.2.35-38: “Through soul the universe is a God: and the sun is a God because it is ensouled; so too the stars: and whatsoever we ourselves may be, it is all in virtue of soul...This, by which gods are divine, must be the oldest God of them all.”

³³² *Enn.* IV.8.5.13-15, 23-32.

cosmos a blessed God.³³³ We note, too, that this animation took place in a special way, not through an act of “will, based on calculation as we do—but proceed[ed] by purely intellectual act as in the execution of an artistic conception—its ministrance [wa]s that of a laborless overpoising, only its lowest phase being active upon the universe it embellishe[d].”³³⁴ In a later tract against the Gnostics, Plotinus likened this unwilling, laborless act of animation to a kind of illumination by which the Soul left its image on the material world without directly contacting it or descending to it.³³⁵ The direct object of Soul’s laborless and “kingly presidency” was the unchanging, “complete, competent, and self-sufficing”³³⁶ cosmos itself, considered in its organic entirety.³³⁷

THE SOULS

Yet the Soul’s discursive, timebound nature also meant that around it, like fragments of itself, there existed lesser souls, “members of the Soul’s circuit.”³³⁸ These individualized aspects of Soul, namely the *souls*, also brought life to the material world, though in a very different way from how Soul itself did. Unlike with Soul, the products of their action were those more ephemeral entities—things like individual bodies that were always in a state of dissolution, headed to a natural terminus, and vulnerable both to assault and need.³³⁹³⁴⁰ And unlike Soul’s laborless *illumination*, the souls represented a second, more direct, mode of governance of the cosmos, the proverbial “hand to the

³³³ *Enn.* IV.8.1.38-45.

³³⁴ *Enn.* IV.8.8.14-18.

³³⁵ *Enn.* II.9.11.1-5.

³³⁶ *Enn.* IV.8.2.13-16.

³³⁷ *Enn.* IV.8.2.25-26. This is an allusion to the Cosmos as Living Thing—“of which all other things are parts” (*Tim.* 30d)—that Plato had talked of in the *Timaeus* (*Tim.* 30-34).

³³⁸ *Enn.* IV.8.2.39.

³³⁹ *Enn.* IV.8.2.8-16.

³⁴⁰ Rist, J. M., *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 115-6.

task,³⁴¹ and they effected this role through direct action, immediate contact, and enmatterment.

This more direct mode of control, wherein a soul became enmattered, also meant that souls were more likely to be influenced by the nature of their material object and to go astray.³⁴² Plato had held that the commerce between soul and matter³⁴³ was an evil that led to the soul's enchainment and entombment by the body.³⁴⁴ He saw it as having coming about through a kind of failure in the soul. In the *Phaedrus* he described this failure as a malfunction, a shedding of the soul's "wings," which prohibited it from remaining focused on the upper spheres and forced it to land onto something material.³⁴⁵ Elsewhere, he presented the soul's failure and enmeshment in the material world as the result of some prior judgment against it.³⁴⁶ "In all these explanations," Plotinus observed, Plato found "guilt in the arrival of the soul at body."³⁴⁷ Plotinus, however, did not consider the soul's descent into the material world as necessarily evil *per se*. On the contrary, he reasoned that if the soul turned back quickly, all was well; simply "acquiring the knowledge of evil and coming to understand what sin is" would not do it harm.³⁴⁸ If a soul did not penetrate deeply into the body and was not enslaved by it, but exercised sovereignty over it and always remained mindful of its own divine origin, then it would not succumb to the misfortunes that awaited the souls that had too close a liaison with

³⁴¹ *Enn.* IV.8.2.17-18.

³⁴² *Enn.* IV.8.2.28-29.

³⁴³ For Plotinus, matter was not another substance, but rather that which did not exist: non-Being. See *Enn.* II.4.15-16.

³⁴⁴ *Phaed.* 62B, 67CD; *Crat.* 400C; *Resp.* VII 514A, 515C, 517B.

³⁴⁵ *Phaedr.* 246C, 249A.

³⁴⁶ *Resp.* X 619D; *Phaedr.* 247D.

³⁴⁷ *Enn.* IV.8.1.37.

³⁴⁸ *Enn.* IV.8.5.26-28.

their material host.³⁴⁹ These woes included hindrance of their intellective powers, subordination to pleasure, desire, and pain,³⁵⁰ and the blissful vision of Nous that souls originally enjoyed giving way to but a memory of him³⁵¹—“Memory...commences after the soul has left the highest spheres.”³⁵² The resultant relative ignorance would only reinforce the sense of the Soul’s fragmentation into individual souls.³⁵³

Thus, for Plotinus the soul’s *fall* was not its spatial descent from the heavenly sphere to matter, but its inclination, once it had become enmattered, away from its source and toward materiality. Plotinus named this faulty inclination *tolma*, which meant self-will or audacity, and was tantamount to a desire for self-ownership (τὸ βουληθῆναι δὲ ἑαυτῶν εἶναι). It drove souls to forget their origins and cleave to the matter they had come to animate. Enamored of their freedom, some souls indulged their own fancy and “hurried down the wrong path.”³⁵⁴ Their shameless *tolma* was the underlying cause behind their fall,³⁵⁵ and only such an irrational act of will or defiance against the established rational order of things could explain the misfortune that befell soul and ushered in misery to human life. The punishment for this brazenness, to which Plato had alluded, was the Soul’s subjection to the aforementioned pain and suffering, and loss of its higher knowledge. Any additional offences committed by the soul after its embodiment were punished, if they were not grievous, by further transmigration to

³⁴⁹ *Enn.* IV.8.2.44-47.

³⁵⁰ *Enn.* IV.8.2.42-44. Cf. *Phaed.* 65A and 66C.

³⁵¹ *Enn.* IV.4.7.2-4.

³⁵² *Enn.* IV.4.5.13-14.

³⁵³ Elsewhere (*Enn.* IV.8.4.5-10), Plotinus presented the souls as originally being in the higher spheres with Soul: in the highest sphere they enjoyed its view of Nous; in the heavenly sphere, they were still inseparable from Soul, and with it co-administered the universe as though they were kings and Soul a supreme ruler, until the souls descended and bonded with matter.

³⁵⁴ *Enn.* V.1.1.3-6.

³⁵⁵ See also *Enn.* IV.7.13.11, IV.8.4.10-28, V.2.2.5.

another body, whereas graver sins incurred harsher penalties that were administered by demons.³⁵⁶

THE QUESTION OF TOLMA

Plotinus, especially after his dispute with the Gnostics, did not want to overemphasize the role of *tolma*, especially if it meant losing sight of the fact that all that happened in the cosmos was a matter of divine necessity, not of contingency and capricious errant-will. *Tolma* was ultimately an irrational, or at least uninformed and ignorant, impulse in what was for Plotinus a rational cosmic system. One could argue that it played a role similar to that of the random swerve that Epicurus invoked to counter determinism. And the truth is that, in his earlier writings, Plotinus made more regular appeal to *tolma* to explain otherwise inexplicable movement away from the eternal stasis, sometimes in ways that seemed to undermine even some of the pillars of his mature system.³⁵⁷ It could be argued that what forced him to narrow the role of *tolma* in his own theology and cosmogony was his confrontation with Gnosticism. Their ruthless rejection both of the material world and its creator as absolutely fallen and corrupt proved too much for Plotinus, who instead saw the sensory world as the very best possible reflection

³⁵⁶ *Enn.* IV.8.5.16-22.

³⁵⁷ I refer specifically to *Enn.* VI.9.5.29 (*ἀποστῆναι δέ πως τοῦ ἐνὸς τολμήσας*) where he attributes to *tolma* even the separation of *Nous* from the *Hen*. This contrasts with later tracts (e.g. IV.3.13.23-29) where *Nous*' actions are firmly rooted in necessity: "Even *Nous*, which is before all the *Cosmos*, has, it also, its destiny, that of abiding intact above, and of giving downwards: what it sends down is the particular whose existence is implied in the law of the universal; for the universal broods closely over the particular; it is not from without that the law derives the power by which it is executed; on the contrary the law is given in the entities upon whom it falls; these bear it about with them." As an aside, I cannot help but make the captivating observation that *tolma* also makes an appearance even in Christian hymnody, to explain the fission from primordial monoglotism to post-Babelian polyglotism: "Γλῶσσαι ποτὲ συνεχύθησαν, διὰ τὴν τόλμαν τῆς περιγοιῖας..." ("The languages were once upon a time confused because of the *tolma* of tower-building...") (Doxasticon of the Aposticha of Pentecost Vespers in the Orthodox Church).

of the intelligible one.³⁵⁸ Tellingly, they taught that this irredeemable strife in the cosmos had its origin in errant will, which they too called *τόλμη*,³⁵⁹ running unchecked in the heavenly realm. Thus, Plotinus lamented, they taught “a medley of generation and destruction...they cavil[ed] at the Universe...they ma[d]e the Soul blameable for the association with body...they revile[d] the Administrator of this All...they ascribe[d] to the Creator, identified with the Soul, the character and experiences appropriate to partial beings.”³⁶⁰ He acknowledged that it was from Plato³⁶¹ and others³⁶² that the Gnostics acquired the idea that the body was a “grave hindrance to the Soul.” But they simply pushed it too far, turning it into a blind hatred for the entire material world. They failed to understand that “as long as we have bodies we must inhabit the dwellings prepared for us by our good sister Soul in her vast power of laborless creation.”³⁶³ Only thus would they be able to see the beauty contained in those vast elements of the universe not given over to corruption,³⁶⁴ and use them as rational beacons back to the heavenly realm.

The Gnostics rejected any such naturalistic guideposts back to the heavenly sphere. For their salvation they relied instead on revealed and secret accounts of their divine origins that they shared among themselves. For Plotinus, these stories departed radically from the received philosophical tradition. Although the Gnostics took a part of their doctrine from Plato, “all the novelties through which they seek to establish a

³⁵⁸ *Enn.* II.9.4.27-30.

³⁵⁹ *Haer.* 1.2.2 (ANF 1:317 [PG 7:453AB]): “*πρόφασιν μὲν ἀγάπης, τόλμης δέ, διὰ τὸ μὴ κεκοινωνῆσθαι τῷ Πατρὶ τῶ τελείῳ, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Νοῦς. Τὸ δὲ πάσος εἶναι ζήτησιν τοῦ Πατρὸς· ἤθελε γάρ, ὡς λέγουσι, τὸ μέγεθος αὐτοῦ καταλαβεῖν.*”

³⁶⁰ *Enn.* II.9.6.54-60.

³⁶¹ *Enn.* II.9.17.1-3.

³⁶² *Enn.* II.9.7.1-3.

³⁶³ *Enn.* II.9.18.12-14.

³⁶⁴ *Enn.* II.9.17.4-5

philosophy of their own” had been “picked up outside the truth.”³⁶⁵ And this showed most clearly when they applied their belief system to their daily lives. For example, they taught they could exercise influence over the spiritual powers if they uttered “spells, appeasements, and evocations” in the right way, i.e. with “certain melodies, certain sounds, specially directed breathings, sibilant cries, and all else to which [was] ascribed magic potency upon the Supreme.”³⁶⁶ They also claimed to be able to drive off illnesses, which they thought to be spiritual beings and not the result of what levelheaded people could easily recognize as physical causes.³⁶⁷ The result was an irrational philosophy verging on magic and superstition.

The preeminence of the role of errant-will and desire inside the Pleroma in the Gnostics’ cosmic myths pointed to the idea of *tolma* in Plotinus’ own thought. So his project against the Gnostics was carefully to circumscribe the effects of *tolma* in his cosmogony in order to counter their tactic of giving it the kind of universal reach that justified their throwing out the whole created world. First, he countered the Gnostic belief that the deity itself had succumbed to desire and that creation had been the work of Soul after the failing of its wings. He rejected this claim and asserted instead that “no such disgrace could overtake the Soul of the All.”³⁶⁸ If such a thing had ever happened, he called on the Gnostics to demonstrate *when* and *why* it did: “if from eternity, then the Soul must be essentially a fallen thing; if at some one moment, why not before that?”³⁶⁹ If Soul was in ignorance as a result of its fall, then how could it create? Why, moreover,

³⁶⁵ *Enn.* II.9.6.9-11.

³⁶⁶ *Enn.* II.9.14.4-10.

³⁶⁷ *Enn.* II.9.14.13-20.

³⁶⁸ *Enn.* II.9.4.1-2. Hippolytus (*Haer.* 6.29 [ANF 5:88]) informs that in the Valentinian system Soul was identified with the Demiurge, and that the Demiurge projected the souls.

³⁶⁹ *Enn.* II.9.4.4-5.

would it create: to seek glory, the way that human sculptors do?³⁷⁰ How could the Gnostics say that their own souls were divine, yet declare that the Soul animating the stars in the heavens was inferior?³⁷¹ All these questions pointed to the new clarity that was forming in Plotinus' mind: Soul animated matter not because, in some moment of haughtiness, it chose to do so, but because that was what it was meant to do. The creative act presupposed no contingency—neither a fall, nor some intention to gain glory—only the *necessity* of Soul's natural movement, the “sheer need of its nature,”³⁷² of which the created world was also a manifestation: “To ask why the Soul has created the Cosmos, is to ask why there is a Soul and why a Creator creates.”³⁷³ The world was not the byproduct of “arrogance (*ἀλαζονείαν*) and *tolma*,”³⁷⁴ but necessity.

Secondly, Plotinus also wanted to make clear that this necessity extended to the descent of the individual souls as well. In coupling with matter, the souls were not impelled by self-centered volition, but by an inner, necessary principle. We quote him at length:

“The souls go forth neither under compulsion nor of freewill; or, at least, freedom, here, is not to be regarded as action upon preference; it is more like such a leap of the nature as moves men to the instinctive desire of sexual union, or, in the case of some, to

³⁷⁰ *Enn.* II.9.4.6-18.

³⁷¹ *Enn.* II.9.5.7-10. Irenaeus had the same complaint (*Haer.* 2.30.1). The Gnostics believed there were those, presumably themselves, who were of the spiritual substance brought forth by Achamoth. Of the animal substance produced by her were the Demiurge (*Haer.* 1.5.1) and those humans who had to perform good works to attain salvation (*Haer.* 1.6.2-4).

³⁷² *Enn.* II.9.4.16.

³⁷³ *Enn.* II.9.9.1-2.

³⁷⁴ *Enn.* II.9.11.27.

fine conduct; the motive lies elsewhere than in the reason: like is destined unflinchingly to like, and each moves hither or thither at its fixed moment.”³⁷⁵

An inner law resided innately in the souls and led them to be enmattered. He described it as an eternal law of nature, according to which there was a movement of being that abandoned its superior and ran out to serve the needs of another.³⁷⁶ It was necessary and purely instinctual; this is what souls were meant to do: to animate matter, to beautify the universe, and then to return to their heavenly source once their work was done. This was neither a question of free will nor of rationalizing through to a correct course of action, because for Plotinus the exercise of free will was at bottom a measure of ignorance.³⁷⁷ If, as the ancients held,³⁷⁸ no one could knowingly sin, then, for someone fully cognizant of truth, free will became a moot point; knowing agents made correct rational choices without having rationally to deliberate and choose. That some souls turned from their rational source and, in their material existences, became self-absorbed and lapsed into intellectual dysfunction presented the usual paradoxes that bedevil lapsarian myths—how could souls succumb to *tolma* if they enjoyed the divine vision?—but their lapse in no wise justified the Gnostics’ sweeping rejection of the entire rational architecture of universe. For the universe was basically good, the product of rational action from the divine, and the discord therein was limited only to the dissensions of one quarter. Even

³⁷⁵ *Enn.* IV.3.13.17-22: “*Ἰασι δὲ οὔτε ἐκούσαι οὔτε πεμφθεῖσαι: οὐ γὰρ τὸ ἐκούσιον τοιοῦτον ὡς προελέσθαι, ἀλλ’ ὡς τὸ πηδᾶν κατὰ φύσιν, ἢ [ὡς] πρὸς γάμων φυσικὰς προθυμίας ἢ [ὡς] πρὸς πράξεις τινὲς καλῶν οὐ λογιζομένων: ἀλλ’ εἰμαρμένον αἰεὶ τῷ τοιῷδε τὸ τοιόνδε, καὶ τῷ τοιῷδε τὸ νῦν, τῷ δὲ τὸ αὔριον.*”

³⁷⁶ *Enn.* IV.8.5.9-11.

³⁷⁷ *Enn.* VI.8.4.12-16: “...how can any movement towards a good be counted compulsion? Effort is free once it towards a fully recognized good; the involuntary is, precisely, motion away from a good and towards the enforced, towards something not recognized as a good; servitude lies in being powerless to move towards one’s good, being debarred from the preferred path in a menial obedience” (*Πῶς δὲ πρὸς τὸ ἀγαθὸν τι φερόμενον ἠναγκασμένον ἂν εἴη ἐκουσίου τῆς ἐφέσεως οὔσης, εἰ εἰδῶς ὅτι ἀγαθὸν ὡς ἐπ’ ἀγαθὸν ἴοι; Τὸ γὰρ ἀκούσιον ἀπαγωγὴ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ πρὸς τὸ ἠναγκασμένον, εἰ πρὸς τοῦτο φέροιτο, ὃ μὴ ἀγαθὸν αὐτῷ: καὶ δουλεύει τοῦτο, ὃ μὴ κύριον ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐλθεῖν, ἀλλ’ ἑτέρου κρείττονος ἐφεστηκότος ἀπάγεται τῶν αὐτοῦ ἀγαθῶν δουλεῖον ἐκείνῳ).*

³⁷⁸ See Plato, *Meno* 77b-78b.

so, the innate law would weigh heavily even on these dissenting souls and create in them a painful longing so that eventually they would break the cycle of punitive transmigration and, through their uncovering in themselves the truth, turn back heavenward.³⁷⁹ Again, this was not so much a question of an exaggerated remedial will that aimed at undoing the effects of some ancestral errant-will, but an opening of oneself to a philosophy that “inculcates simplicity of character and honest thinking in addition to all other good qualities...it cultivates reverence and not arrogant self-assertion...its boldness is balanced by reason, by careful proof, by cautious progression, by the utmost circumspection.”³⁸⁰ This dispassionate method of working through the human situation meshed perfectly with Plotinus’ vision of a universe operating along the ordered lines of necessity. As E. R. Dodds put it, “Whatever his earlier doubts, Plotinus emerges in the end as an upholder of Hellenic rationalism.”³⁸¹

PLOTINUS’ CONTRACTION OF WILL

In the face of Gnostic hyperbole, we see Plotinus curtail the extent to which will could be invoked as a factor in both theological and cosmological questions. Clearly, he found little satisfaction in the Gnostics’ portrayal of the supra-rational will of God overpowering an irrational, or at least ignorant, desire that arose among his subordinates, and he took steps to delimit its role in his system. Such commitment to volition as a theological factor led only to irrational superstition, for will was an index of irrationality. He made clear that will had no role whatever in the generation of the divine hypostases,

³⁷⁹ *Enn.* IV.3.13.29-33.

³⁸⁰ *Enn.* II.9.14.35-40.

³⁸¹ As E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge at the University Press, 1965), 26.

and left no trace of it in the descent of individual souls, which included humans' souls, to matter. Only in the course of certain souls' enmatterment did the question of will arise, as *tolma*, a narcissistic self-pride and absorption that drew souls away from their proper purpose. But even this was not so much a question of capricious choice as allowing oneself to turn from truths already known. These truths led one to a panorama of a universe built on the necessity of how things simply are. This does not mean that there was only compulsion and no freedom. Though this study has consciously tried to limit the conversation on will to its function in models of divine plurality, I cannot avoid closing this section with a long quote from J. M. Rist, which shows how in Plotinus even will, and the free exercise thereof in the human sphere, was but a question of knowledge and rationality:

“Freedom then for Plotinus is not simply equivalent to the power of choice. Rather it is a freedom from that necessity of choice which the passions impose. The soul that hesitates between good and evil is not free, nor is such a choice godlike. What is godlike is the desire for the truth and achievement of it, and this is a power available to a purified soul. It is an optimistic philosophy, but in Plotinus' world, where salvation by any miraculous act of God is excluded, it is the only alternative to despair. Were man to be unable to choose the right without additional help from God, then he would not choose the right at all.”³⁸²

Indeed, the notion of God as imagined by the Gnostics, as a being moved by inscrutable motives, had no place in Plotinus' thought.

³⁸² Rist, J. M., *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 137-8.

IRENÆUS

In this period of theological ferment came Irenæus' (d. ca. 202) contribution to the conversation. A Greek, resident in Gaul and prelate of the Church in Lugdunum, Irenæus had intricate knowledge—he is one of our most complete and systematic sources—of the various Gnostic factions, including the Valentinians on whom we have focused, but also of the various philosophical streams surrounding him. His contribution to the question of will in the understanding of the Trinity has enormous implications for our question of will for in it one saw for the first time in Christian theology the complete elimination of God's willful agency from the internal life of the Trinity and its limitation exclusively to his interactions with creation. Irenæus expressed no specific objection against the Valentinian application of will, but the fact that it was concomitant with their fissional view of the divinity directly implicated it in his accusation that they had abandoned the very principles of monotheism. For Plotinus, who wrote later than Irenæus, will was a corollary of ignorance, and its prominence in theology had to be stemmed in order to preserve the sense of the universe's underlying rationality. In Irenæus, will was eliminated from the internals of the divine life as part of his quest of restoring the sense of unity in the Trinity. Thus, although he was aware of, and in fact influenced by, Justin, Irenæus was evidently uninterested in following him and examining the triune God after the cosmological method first established by Philo, wherein was traced the movement from the Father's primordial solitude to the generation of the Son/Logos as the intermediary step to the creation of the world. In such a theology there was a level of distinction between Father and Son that was mediated by an act of will. Irenæus, however, rejected all suggestions of sequence when it came to the Trinity,

preferring what one might call an unfathomable simultaneity, wherein he affirmed the Son's inexplicable ever-presence with the Father. Of its nature, such a relation surpassed all human understanding. Thus, in what was a favorite image of his,³⁸³ Irenaeus presented the Son and the Spirit as God's *hands*, by which he created the world. The implication was that, in the same way that a human is never without hands, the Father was never without the Son and Spirit.³⁸⁴ They were the outer face of the Father's contact with the world, ever-present extensions of the Father, through which he created the world. On the other hand, a negative inference the critical observer could have drawn from the hand imagery was that in this scheme the Son and Spirit were not really personal, or at least they defied conventional human parameters of personhood: to be autonomous, willing beings that chose to love and be unified with the same.

Irenaeus' voluminous work, *Against Heresies*, written in his native Greek but surviving mostly in Latin,³⁸⁵ was directed against all the Gnostic groups known to him. Most prominent among these were the disciples of Valentinus, whom he attacked first and most extensively. Their errors were legion, but their gravest was that they had "fallen away from unity, and taken up the doctrine of manifold deities."³⁸⁶ Using both Scripture and the philosophical, generally neo-Platonist, principles within his reach, Irenaeus set about restoring the Valentinians to this *unity*. Their central claim that the creator of the

³⁸³ *Epid.* 11; *Haer.* 4.0.4, 4.20.1, 5.1.3, 5.6.1, 5.17.4, 5.28.4. Cf. Ps. 94:5 [LXX]: "For the sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land" (cited in *Haer.* 3.10.3).

³⁸⁴ The other argument that Irenaeus employed to establish the co-eternity of the Son with the Father was that God could never have been without Logos.

³⁸⁵ As Robert Grant explains (*Irenaeus of Lyons* [New York: Routledge, 1997], 7), "As a whole the work survives only in a Latin translation of the third or early fourth century (hardly later, since Valentinianism was fading away), though there are many Greek fragments, the most important being provided by Eusebius and Epiphanius, especially from Books I and III, as well as a valuable old Armenian version of Books IV and V. Most of Book II is found only in Latin, perhaps because the rational arguments were not remarkably convincing."

³⁸⁶ *Haer.* 4.33.3 (ANF 1:507 [PG 7:1074A]): "decidentem ab unitate, incidere in multiforme dei iudicium."

universe was not the true God but a lesser deity that was the product of disturbance in the divine realm which consisted of a host of hypostases, or eons, became the chief target of his attacks.³⁸⁷

“ANOTHER GOD BEYOND GOD”

High in Irenaeus' sights was the Valentinian claim that the creator of the world was not God. It flew in the face of the testimony of the prophets, Christ, the apostles, and their lineal successors in the Church, who all affirmed the opposite position that, namely, the heavenly Father, the highest deity, and the Creator of the world were one and the same being.³⁸⁸ There was no reason to prefer the Valentinians over such, far weightier testimony.³⁸⁹ However, this was not really a dispute over biblical interpretation but about how to reconcile the fact of an imperfect world with a supposedly perfect creator and/or first principle. Both sides agreed there was a creator, but for the Valentinians the world's imperfection showed that this creator was not the ultimate, but at best some intermediary, principle in the universe.³⁹⁰ A perfect God would not create such an imperfect world or even deign directly to exercise providence over it.³⁹¹ Thus, they posited “another god

³⁸⁷ We might add that, against Marcion and his followers, Irenaeus also rejected (*Haer.* 1.27.2-4 *inter alia*) the idea that the Law was evil because it was given by the Demiurge, for them an evil deity, and that Jesus was not the Son of the Creator but was “from that Father that is above the God that made the world” (*Haer.* 1.27.2 [ANF 1:352]) (“ab eo Patre, qui est super mundi fabricatorem Deum” [PG 7:688A]).

³⁸⁸ See, e.g., *Haer.* 4.0.1-4.5.5, among many, many other instances.

³⁸⁹ *Haer.* 2.30.6 (ANF 1:404 [PG 7:818B]): “These men are not more to be depended on than the Scriptures; nor ought we to give up the declarations of the Lord, Moses, and the rest of the prophets, who have proclaimed the truth, and give credit to them, who do indeed utter nothing of a sensible nature but rave about untenable opinions” (“Non enim sunt magis idonei hi quam Scripturae: nec relinquentes nos eloquia Domini, et Moyssem, et reliquos prophetas, qui veritatem praeconaverunt, his credere oportet, sanum quidem nihil dicentibus, instabilia autem delirantibus”).

³⁹⁰ The reason why the Valentinians did not want to have the true God involved with the creation of the world was “to guard against attributing want of power to him” (*Haer.* 2.13.3 [ANF 1:374]). The imperfection of the world implied that its creator must have been a lesser deity.

³⁹¹ In *Haer.* 3.25.1-7, Irenaeus complained that while even some of the Gentiles, such as Plato, acknowledged a providential deity that could be called Father, the Gnostics in general (he named no

beyond God,”³⁹² Bythos, whom they depicted as uninvolved in the creation of the world in order “to guard against attributing want of power to him.”³⁹³ The want of power lay with the Demiurge, that lesser being that was generated of the animal effluent of Achamoth and was ignorant of both Achamoth and the Pleroma from which she had been ejected. His relationship to Achamoth was seen as a reflection of the relationship between Bythos and Nous—except that the Demiurge had no awareness of Achamoth—and his creations were taken as reflections of the eons in the Pleroma.³⁹⁴ All this created a sufficient remove between the cause of this world and the supreme Bythos, who, dwelling in the invisible and ineffable heights, remained perfect, pre-existent, eternal, unbegotten, invisible, and incomprehensible.³⁹⁵ This remove from the world was not just causal, but also epistemological. Being wholly untied to the making and maintenance of the world, he was also unknowable because he lay outside the cognitive categories of this world. For the Valentinians, a deity that had “come within reach of human knowledge” earned only their disdain.³⁹⁶ To be sure, Irenaeus dismissed their Bythos as a mere revival of “the god of Epicurus, who does nothing either for himself or others [and]...exercises no

specific offender here) held that a providential God was beneath what a real God should be. They considered judicial and rebuking power as unworthy of the true God. For them, the true God was one that was good and without anger. In Marcion this tendency reached its apogee with the introduction of two deities, the one good and the other judicial (*Haer.* 3.25.3). For Irenaeus, conversely, God was both good *and* just: He “is good, and merciful, and patient, and saves whom He ought: nor does goodness desert Him in the exercise of justice, nor is His wisdom lessened; for He saves those whom He should save, and judges those worthy of judgment” (*Haer.* 3.25.3 [*ANF* 1:459]) (“Est enim et bonus, et misericors, et patiens, et salvat quos oportet: neque bonum ei deficit juste effectum, neque sapientia deminatoratur: salvat enim quos debet salvare, et judicat dignos iudicio” [PG 7:969AB]).

³⁹² *Haer.* 3.24.2 (*ANF* 1:458).

³⁹³ *Haer.* 2.13.3 (*ANF* 1:374).

³⁹⁴ *Haer.* 1.5.1-2.

³⁹⁵ *Haer.* 1.1.1.

³⁹⁶ *Haer.* 3.24.2 (*ANF* 1:458).

providence at all,³⁹⁷ but he was now presented with two new problems that required answers if he was to maintain that God the Father was the Creator.

The first, the classic problem of how to explain the imperfection in a world created by a good and perfect God, was dealt with through the standard biblical means of recalling Eden and the role of the devil in leading the ancestors to disobedience and death.³⁹⁸ This explanation, of course, took the cause of imperfection away the divine sphere, where the Gnostics had placed it, and planted it firmly within the realm of the free will of creatures.³⁹⁹ God allowed this adversity to ensue only because he foresaw that, in his plan, greater good would eventually come of it.⁴⁰⁰

The second issue focused on the Valentinians' insistence on the unknowability and remoteness of God and how this challenged Irenaeus' belief in a God who was known through his activity, both natural and supernatural, in the world. We recall that God's unfathomability was a key element in Valentinian theology. Apart from isolating Bythos from the imperfect world, it also served as one of the causes, if only passively, of the disturbance in the Pleroma by becoming the thing yearned for by the lower hypostases. The notion of a singular, transcendent supreme principle was nothing new in this period, and on this point Irenaeus stayed true to the prevailing mind. His work, too, was permeated throughout with unequivocal statements of God's unknowability and complete otherness from the world, and these would prove most useful to his theology.

³⁹⁷ *Haer.* 3.24.2 (ANF 1:459).

³⁹⁸ *Haer.* 5.23.1.

³⁹⁹ In his *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, an earlier work, Irenaeus held that God struck down the devil from heaven for misleading Adam and Eve, not earlier: "So the angel, becoming by his falsehood the author and originator of sin, himself was struck down, having offended against God, and man he caused to be cast out from Paradise" (*Epid.* 16).

⁴⁰⁰ *Haer.* 3.20.1.

Against an ever-shifting creation that was “compound, mutable and transient,”⁴⁰¹ Irenaeus placed an increate, simplex and immutable God,⁴⁰² who alone was “without beginning and without end, being truly and forever the same, and always remaining that same unchangeable being.” Conversely, the things he created received their “beginning of generation, and on this account [were] inferior to Him who formed them, inasmuch as they [were] not unbegotten.”⁴⁰³ God fashioned the world in exact accordance with the “conception of His mind,”⁴⁰⁴ and was its “creator, and maker, and sustainer, and Lord.”⁴⁰⁵ He was in no way obligated to or reliant on it;⁴⁰⁶ on the contrary, created things endured only as long as God willed “that they should have an existence and continuance.”⁴⁰⁷ The obvious difficulty that all this presented to Irenaeus was how to demonstrate that the singular God he advocated for could be both known on account of his work in the world, and unknown on account of his sheer supremacy. We shall see how this was resolved in his treatment of the second overarching question, namely the generation of the eons.

THE EONS

To be sure, Irenaeus’ transcendence theology was not an inconsequential appendage to his thought, but rather an integral part of it that gained some of its fullest expression in his attack on the Valentinians, especially with regards to their teaching on the eons. His lighter observations on the beliefs of his opponents had to do with the

⁴⁰¹ *Haer.* 2.3.2 (*ANF* 1:362).

⁴⁰² *Haer.* 2.13.3.

⁴⁰³ *Haer.* 2.34.2 (*ANF* 1:411).

⁴⁰⁴ *Haer.* 2.3.2 (*ANF* 1:362). Irenaeus here was trying to shut out the idea of a gap between God’s conceptions and actions that could be exploited by those, Gnostics and others, who would have two agents: one mentally forming the conception of the universe and the other actually producing “the things which had been conceived by Him in His mind” (*ibid.*).

⁴⁰⁵ *Haer.* 2.31.1 (*ANF* 1:407).

⁴⁰⁶ *Haer.* 4.16.4.

⁴⁰⁷ *Haer.* 2.34.3 (*ANF* 1:411).

arbitrary and nonsensical way they ordered their eons. First, they counted Bythos among the *Triacontad* of eons despite the fact that he was clearly of a different type from the rest of them. They were derived, he was not; he was incomprehensible to them all, they were all comprehensible to him; he was without form, they had definite shape; and, most serious of all, he was being enumerated with a being, Sophia, who was subject to passion and error.⁴⁰⁸ The same applied to Sige/Ennoea. If she was not generated, but was always with Bythos, on what basis did they include her with the other eons? And if she had always been united with Bythos in, one would presume, an inseparable conjunction, then it necessarily followed that their offspring, too, was generated from eternity, and so on, to include all the eons.⁴⁰⁹ This chain of reasoning also rendered impossible their belief that the last eon, Sophia, was at some moment apart from the embrace of her partner.⁴¹⁰ Also, why were not Horos, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and Savior, who were produced after the disturbance, not numbered among the *Triacontad*?⁴¹¹

On the other hand, the way they named these eons also made little sense. For example, how could Sige (silence) coexist eternally with Logos (speech) in the primordial Ogdoad?⁴¹² Or how could Bythos and Ennoea have produced Nous when the reverse would have been the more logical, viz. that Nous (mind) produced Ennoea (idea).⁴¹³ Ennoea, Enthymesis, and Logos, as mental expressions, all should have been subordinate to Nous.⁴¹⁴ They also erred when they suggested that Logos and Zoë (life) were sent forth by Nous in the fifth and sixth place when in reality neither of these could

⁴⁰⁸ *Haer.* 2.12.1 (*ANF* 1:371). Irenaeus explains that the Valentinians included Bythos with the other hypostases because they wanted them to total thirty, Jesus' age at baptism.

⁴⁰⁹ *Haer.* 2.12.2.

⁴¹⁰ *Haer.* 2.12.3-4.

⁴¹¹ *Haer.* 2.12.7.

⁴¹² *Haer.* 2.12.5-6.

⁴¹³ *Haer.* 2.13.1.

⁴¹⁴ *Haer.* 2.13.1-2.

be considered posterior to Nous.⁴¹⁵ No one could “maintain that intelligence is more ancient than life, for intelligence itself is life; nor that life is later than intelligence, so that he who is the intellect of all, that is God, should at one time have been destitute of life.”⁴¹⁶

The truth was that the Valentinians’ unfortunate muddling of the hypostases was a symptom of the graver theological malady that underlay their speculations. All quibbles over precise ordering and naming aside, the mere fact that the Valentinians chose to present a seriate hierarchy of hypostases in the godhead was the clearest evidence that they were applying to God what were really the “affections, and passions, and mental tendencies of men.”⁴¹⁷ Humans were “compound by nature,” consisting of a body and a soul,⁴¹⁸ and thus were characterized by division, discursiveness, and sequence in their thinking and acting. This is why one could say of the human mind that “thought [sprang] from mind, intention again from thought, and word (*logos*) from intention.”⁴¹⁹ Humans also lacked constancy. Sometimes they were “at rest and silent,” at other times “speaking

⁴¹⁵ *Haer.* 2.13.8-9.

⁴¹⁶ *Haer.* 2.13.9 (*ANF* 1:375 [PG 7:748A]): “Et neque sensum vita antiquiorem aliquis potest dicere; ipse enim sensus vita est: nec vitam posteriorem a sensu, uti non fiat aliquando sine vita is qui est omnium sensus, id est Deus.”

⁴¹⁷ *Haer.* 2.13.3 (*ANF* 1:374 [PG 7:743B]): “hominum affectiones, et passiones, et intentiones mentis describentes, Deum autem ignorantes.”

⁴¹⁸ *Haer.* 2.13.3 (*ANF* 1:373 [PG 7:743B]): “Et haec quidem in hominibus capit dici, quum sint compositi natura, et ex corpore et anima subsistentes.”

⁴¹⁹ *Haer.* 2.28.4 (*ANF* 1:400 [PG 7:807C]): “et quia ex sensu ennoea, de ennoea autem enthymesis, de enthymesi autem logos.” In this same passage, he even noted that *logos* was a bivalent notion: “There is among the Greeks one *logos* which is the principle that thinks, and another, which is the instrument by means of which thought is expressed” (PG 7:807C-808A: “aliud enim est secundum Graecos logos, quod est principale quod excogitat; aliud organum, per quod emittitur logos”).

and active,⁴²⁰ and even in speaking the tongue could barely keep up with the mind because of the haphazard interaction of soul with body.⁴²¹

But it was wrong to say these things of God. Isaiah⁴²² had declared that God's ways, counsels, and thoughts were unlike those of humans,⁴²³ and Irenaeus took it to mean that the fragmented, sequential ways of human life and thought simply had no place in a proper understanding of God. Where the Valentinians imposed sequence and fragmentation, Irenaeus saw there could only be oneness and simultaneity:

“He is a simple, uncompounded Being, without diverse members, and altogether like, and equal to himself, since He is wholly understanding, and wholly spirit, and wholly thought, and wholly intelligence, and wholly reason, and wholly hearing, and wholly seeing, and wholly light, and the whole source of all that is good—even as the religious and pious are wont to speak concerning God.”⁴²⁴

Irenaeus was moving well beyond Scripture here and disclosing a set of theological premises in keeping with the broader theological milieu.⁴²⁵ *Against the Valentinians*'

⁴²⁰ *Haer.* 2.28.4 (*ANF* 1:400 [PG 7:808A]): “...et aliquando quidem quiescere, et tacere hominem, aliquando autem loqui, et operari.”

⁴²¹ *Haer.* 2.28.4 (*ANF* 1:400 [PG 7:808A]): “Our tongue, as being carnal, is not sufficient to minister to the rapidity of the human mind, inasmuch as that is of a spiritual nature, for which reason our word is restrained within us and is not at once expressed as it has been conceived by the mind, but is uttered by successive efforts, just as the tongue is able to serve it” (“Velocitati enim sensus hominum propter spiritale ejus non sufficit lingua deservire, quippe carnalis existens: unde et intus suffocatur verbum nostrum, et profertur non de semel, sicut conceptum est a sensu; sed per partes, secundum quod lingua subministrare praevalet”).

⁴²² *Is.* 55:8-9.

⁴²³ *Haer.* 2.13.3.

⁴²⁴ *Haer.* 2.13.3 (*ANF* 1:374 [PG 7:744A]): “et simplex, et non compositus, et similimembrius, et totus ipse sibimetipsi similis, et aequalis est, totus cum sit sensus et totus spiritus, et totus sensuabilitas, et totus ennoia, et totus ratio, et totus auditus, et totus oculus, et totus lumen, et totus fons omnium bonorum; quemadmodum adest religiosis ac piis dicere de Deo.”

⁴²⁵ Irenaeus' near contemporary, Plotinus (*Enn.* V.1.4), would employ very similar language when contrasting the wholeness and simultaneity of *Nous* compared to the discursiveness and sequentiality of *Soul*: “*Soul* deals with thing after thing—now *Socrates*; now a horse: always some one entity from among beings—but the *Nous* is all and therefore its entire content is simultaneously present in that identity: this is pure being in eternal actuality; nowhere is there any future, for every then is a now; nor is there any past, for nothing there has ever ceased to be; everything has taken its stand for ever, an identity well pleased, we

depiction of a serialized extension of the godhead through the generation of the autonomous eons, which, as we saw, ultimately led to conflict and division in the divine sphere, Irenaeus took the step of identifying these eons with the attributes of God, which, he argued, had to inhere in him simultaneously and from all time:

“These and such like attributes have not been produced according to a gradual scale of descent, but they are names of those perfections which always exist in God, so far as it is possible and proper for men to hear and to speak of God. For the name of God the following words will harmonize: intelligence, word, life, incorruption, truth, wisdom, goodness and such like.”⁴²⁶

Although Irenaeus did not go to the trouble of explaining how each and every one of the thirty eons as the Valentinians conceived them might be reconceptualized as a divine perfection, his strategy was unmistakable: to pit one type of monotheist model popular in late antiquity—namely, the sort he loosely subscribed to, which argued that the apparent divisions in the godhead were superficialities underlain by divine unity⁴²⁷—against another, that is the idea that the order in the divine sphere resembled that which one

might say, to be as it is; and everything, in that entire content, is Nous and Authentic Existence; and the total of all is Nous entire and Being entire.”

⁴²⁶ *Haer.* 2.13.9 (*ANF* 1:375 [PG 7:748A]): “Et non secundum descensionem, et quae sunt talia acceperunt emissiones; sed earum virtutum quae semper sunt cum Deo, appellationes sunt, quemadmodum possibile est et dignum hominibus audire et dicere de Deo. Appellationi enim Dei coobaudiuntur sensus, et verbum, et vita, et incorruptela, et veritas, et sapientia, et bonitas et omnia talia.”

⁴²⁷ See, e.g., Ps. Aristotle [*Mund.*] 401^a12-26: “God being one yet has many names, being called after all the various conditions which he himself inaugurates. We call him Zen and Zeus, using the two names in the same sense, as though we should say him through whom we live [i.e. Ζήνα from ζῆν; Δία from δι’ ὄν]. He is called son of Kronos and of Time, for he endures from the eternal age to age. He is God of lightning and thunder, God of the clear sky and of ether, God of the thunderbolt and of rain, so called after the rain and the thunderbolts and other physical phenomena...deriving his names from all natural phenomena and conditions, inasmuch as he is himself the cause of all things” (trans. E. S. Forster in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: the Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991]). In Apuleius’ Hymn of Isis (*Metam.* 11.5) we read: “Behold, Lucius, moved by your prayers I have come, I the mother of the universe, mistress of all the elements, and first offspring of the ages; mightiest of deities, queen of the dead, and foremost of heavenly beings; my one person manifests the aspect of all gods and goddesses...My divinity is one, worshipped by all the world under different forms, with various rites, and by manifold names” (trans. J. Arthur Hanson in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*: Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

found in human, typically administrative, affairs,⁴²⁸ and in which category one could also group the Valentinian system on account of the top-down volitional symphony that held it together. It is no surprise that this second general system was one that more than one Christian apologist identified with his pagan counterparts, which Irenaeus was also quick to do of the Valentinians.⁴²⁹

With the sense of oneness against the Valentinians' dangerous "doctrine of manifold deities"⁴³⁰ secure, Irenaeus' next move went in an entirely different direction.

Here he began to argue that, although it was good and proper to predicate the abovementioned perfections of God which came together in the divine simplicity, one

⁴²⁸ See e.g. what Origen says of Celsus (*Cels.* 8.35 [ANF 4:652]): "Now let us consider another saying of Celsus, which is as follows: 'The satrap of a Persian or Roman monarch, or ruler or general or governor, yea, even those who fill lower offices of trust or service in the state, would be able to do great injury to those who despised them; and will the satraps and ministers of earth and air be insulted with impunity?' Observe now how he introduces servants of the Most High—rulers, generals, governors, and those filling lower offices of trust and service—as, after the manner of men, inflicting injury upon those who insult them"; or Aelius Aristides (*Or.* 43): Zeus, the supreme deity, was "the beginning of all things and all things come from Zeus..."(9); he gave "to the gods to dwell in heaven, as it were the acropolis of the universe" (14); "each one of all the tribes of the gods has an effluent from the power of Zeus, the father of all things, and indeed like Homer's chord, all are attached to him" (15); "first of all he begot Love and Necessity, these two powers which are most unifying and strong, so that they might hold the universe together for him" (16); "thus he gave preeminence, rule, and leadership to the gods" (17); "and he gave the four regions to the gods, so that nothing anywhere might be without gods" (18); "and the benefits of the gods are the work of Zeus, and all the gods care for mankind keeping to the position assigned by him, as it were, in an army by the general of all" (26) (From P. Aelius Aristides' *Orations* [from *The Complete Works*, trans. Charles A. Behr [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981]). Julian the Apostate (preserved in Cyril of Alexandria's *Contr. Jul.* IV [PG 76:677B]) held that: "Our writers say that the creator is the common father and king of all, but that the remaining [needs] of the nations have been assigned by him to national gods and guardian deities of cities, every one of whom administers his own province in his own characteristic way. For since, in the father, all things are complete and all things are one, it follows that in the individual deities one power or another predominates. Therefore Ares administers the warlike nations, Athena those wise and warlike, and Hermes those more wise than daring, so that the nations administered by both [*παρὰ σφῶν*—i.e. the father and their individual god] follow the respective essential character of their proper god."

⁴²⁹ *Haer.* 2.14.1 (ANF 1:376). Irenaeus claimed a close resemblance between the Valentinians' theology and the account of one Antiphanes, "one of the ancient comic poets," who in his *Theogony* spoke of "Chaos as being produced from Night and Silence...that then Love sprang from Chaos and Night; from this again, Light; and that from this, in his opinion, were derived all the rest of the first generation of the gods." The Valentinians had merely changed the names of these deities: "In place of Night and Silence they substitute Bythos and Sige; instead of Chaos, they put Nous; and for Love (by whom, says the comic poet, all other things were set in order) they have brought forward the Word; while for the primary and greatest gods they have formed the Æons; and in place of the secondary gods, they tell us of that creation by their mother which is outside of the Pleroma, calling it the second Ogdoad." Thus, Irenaeus lamented, the Valentinians had incorporated into their theology the very things that were being performed in the theaters.

⁴³⁰ *Haer.* 4.33.3 (ANF 1:507 [PG 7:1074A]): "incidere in multiforme dei iudicium."

had also to recognize that God himself remained “above these properties, and therefore indescribable.”⁴³¹ While it was correct to call God an Understanding that comprehends all things, he was not like the understanding of humans. He could be called Light, but he was wholly unlike the light with which people were familiar. By extension, therefore, God was above the human understanding of *all* the attributes that were ascribed to him. Of course, this was an enlargement of Isaiah’s principle that God’s ways differed from humans’ ways: the “Father of all is in no degree similar to human weakness.”⁴³² This amounted to a strident declaration of the divine unknown, and the most glaring problem was whether these attributions that were applied to God were functionally meaningless if they were always meant in a way that surpassed human understanding? No. Irenaeus clarified: “He is spoken of in these terms according to love; but in point of greatness, our thoughts regarding him transcend these expressions.”⁴³³

TWO ASPECTS OF GOD: GREATNESS AND LOVE

These were the beginnings of a distinction between God’s greatness and his love that Irenaeus would invoke over and over again, that helped him to steer the conversation into a more specifically Christian and Trinitarian direction and put into words a theory of the triune deity that both reinforced divine unity against the Valentinians and eased the tension over the God who was both known and unknown. Irenaeus had first mentioned the idea of *greatness* in connection with Bythos. We recall that Nous alone was capable

⁴³¹ *Haer.* 2.13.4 (*ANF* 1:374 [PG 7:744B]): “Est autem et super haec, et propter haec inenarrabilis.”

⁴³² *Haer.* 2.13.4 (*ANF* 1:374 [PG 7:744B]): “nulli similis erit omnium Pater hominum pusillitati.”

⁴³³ *Haer.* 2.13.4 (*ANF* 1:374 [PG 7:744B]): “...Et dicitur quidem secundum haec propter delectionem, sentitur autem super haec secundum magnitudinem.”

of comprehending Bythos' greatness (*μέγεθος*),⁴³⁴ and that he not only exulted in beholding this greatness (*μέγεθος*) but also meditated how he might communicate it to the other eons.⁴³⁵ Sophia's desire too had been to comprehend his greatness (*μέγεθος*),⁴³⁶ and the fact that none could contemplate his greatness (*magnitudinem*) led to passion in the Pleroma.⁴³⁷ Irenaeus was happy to take this term *greatness*, which he also correlated with God's *substantia*,⁴³⁸ and apply it to that aspect of God that was beyond the reach of human cognition. Yet, a focus solely on God's greatness gave only half of the story. Unlike the "Epicurean"⁴³⁹ Bythos of the Valentinians, which had no rapport with creation whatsoever, the God that Irenaeus preached was a God that had revealed himself and was known. Irenaeus called this outward moving aspect of God that underlay his activity in the world God's "love" (*dilectionem*): the Creator,

"who has granted this world to the human race, and who, as regards his greatness, is indeed unknown to all who have been made by him (for no man has searched out his height, either among the ancients who have gone to their rest, or any of those who are now alive); but as regards his love, he is always known through him by whose means he ordained all things."⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁴ *Haer.* 1.1.1 (PG 7:445B).

⁴³⁵ *Haer.* 1.2.1 (PG 7:452B).

⁴³⁶ *Haer.* 1.2.2 (PG 7:453B).

⁴³⁷ *Haer.* 2.7.10 (PG 7:453B).

⁴³⁸ *Haer.* 3.24.2 (PG 7:967B): "...in agnitionem autem non secundum magnitudinem, nec secundum substantiam."

⁴³⁹ *Haer.* 3.24.2.

⁴⁴⁰ *Haer.* 4.20.4 (*ANF* 1:488 [PG 7:1034AB]): "qui et mundum hunc attribuit humano generi, qui secundum magnitudinem quidem ignotus est omnibus his, qui ab eo facti sunt (nemo enim investigavit altitudinem ejus, nec veterum, qui quieverunt, nec eorum qui nunc sunt); secundum autem dilectionem cognoscitur semper per eum, per quem constituit omnia."

To be sure, the fact that God’s nature was above speculation meant that the initiative in his unveiling rested entirely with the Father—“God cannot be known without God,”⁴⁴¹ as Irenaeus put it so well.⁴⁴² Of course, the Father’s “express will” was that he should be known,⁴⁴³ and the channel through which he was made manifest—this abovementioned principle “by whose means he ordained all things”—was the Son, as Scripture declared:⁴⁴⁴ “No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whom the Son has willed to reveal [Him].”⁴⁴⁵ The Father revealed “the Son, that through His instrumentality He [the Father] might be manifested to all.”⁴⁴⁶ The agency of the Son in revealing the Father found exquisite expression in Irenaeus’ epigrammatic “the Father is the invisible of the Son, the Son is the visible of the Father.”⁴⁴⁷ The Son revealed “the knowledge of the Father through His own manifestation. For the manifestation of the Son is the knowledge of the Father; for all things are manifested through the Word.”⁴⁴⁸ Thus the Son/Word became the principle by which the Father acted and revealed Himself *ad extra*, in this divine outward movement that Irenaeus called God’s “love.” This work began with creation, with the Father

⁴⁴¹ *Haer.* 4.6.4 (ANF 1:468 [PG 7:989A]): “ἄνευ Θεοῦ μὴ γινώσκεισθαι τὸν Θεόν.”

⁴⁴² Cf. *Haer.* 4.6.4 (ANF 1:468 [PG 7:988C]): “No man is capable of knowing God, unless he be taught of God” (“Θεὸν εἰδέναι οὐδεὶς δύναται, μὴ οὐχὶ Θεοῦ δοξάζοντος”); *Haer.* 4.20.5 (ANF 1:489 [PG 7:1035A]): “Man does not see God by his own powers; but when He pleases He is seen by men, by whom He wills, and when He wills, and as He wills” (“Homo etenim a se non videt Deum. Ille autem volens videtur hominibus, quibus vult, et quando vult, et quemadmodum vult”).

⁴⁴³ *Haer.* 4.6.4 (ANF 1:468 [PG 7:989A]): “αὐτὸ δὲ τὸ γινώσκεισθαι τὸν Θεόν, θέλημα εἶναι τοῦ Πατρὸς.”

⁴⁴⁴ Mt. 11:27; Lk. 10:22; cf. Jn. 1:18 (cited in *Haer.* 4.20.6).

⁴⁴⁵ *Haer.* 4.6.1 (ANF 1:467 [PG 7:986C]): “Verbum ejus, per quem cognoscitur Deus, dicebat: ‘Nemo cognoscit Filium nisi Pater, neque Patrem quis cognoscit nisi Filius, et cui voluerit Filius revelare.’”

⁴⁴⁶ *Haer.* 4.6.5 (ANF 1:468 [PG 7:989A]): “Et ad hoc Filium revelavit Pater, ut per eum omnibus manifestetur.”

⁴⁴⁷ *Haer.* 4.6.6 (ANF 1:469 [PG 7:989C]): “invisible etenim Filii Pater, visibile autem Patris Filius.”

⁴⁴⁸ *Haer.* 4.6.3 (ANF 1:468 [PG 7:988A]): “Et propter hoc Filius revelat agnitionem Patris per suam manifestationem. Agnitio enim Patris, est Filii manifestatio: omnia enim per Verbum manifestantur.” Cf. *Haer.* 4.6.7 (ANF 1:469 [PG 7:990B]): “The Son is the knowledge of the Father, but the knowledge of the Son is in the Father, and has been revealed through the Son” (“Agnitio enim Patris, Filius; agnitio autem Filii in Patre, et per Filium revelata”).

creating the world through the Son.⁴⁴⁹ The more intrusive the Word’s intervention was in the world, the more profound was his disclosure of the Father—but also of the Son himself⁴⁵⁰—to the world. The most penetrating work of the Son was, of course, his incarnation, through which, as new Adam, he inaugurated a renewed, recapitulated human history, freed from the enslavement of sin.⁴⁵¹ Thus the Son was presented as the “dispenser of paternal grace,” and his work balanced between, first, preserving the Father’s invisibility, “lest man at any time become a despiser of God” and thus not “possess something towards which he might advance,” and, second, revealing enough of God to humans, lest they, “falling away from God altogether, should cease to exist.”⁴⁵² Communication between God and humans was central to Irenaeus’ theology: “the glory of God,” he declared, “is a living man; and the life of a man consists in beholding God.”⁴⁵³ And so the whole of history since the fall consisted of God’s not allowing the serpent to be triumphant,⁴⁵⁴ but to enact an unfolding plan of re-acquainting humanity

⁴⁴⁹ And, as we shall see, the Spirit.

⁴⁵⁰ *Haer.* 4.6.5 (*ANF* 1:468-9 [PG 7:989AB]): “The Father therefore has revealed Himself to all, by making His Word visible to all; and, conversely, the Word has declared to all the Father and the Son, since He has become visible to all” (“Omnibus igitur revelavit se Pater, omnibus Verbum suum visibile faciens: et rursus Verbum omnibus ostendebat Patrem et Filium cum ab omnibus videretur”).

⁴⁵¹ *Haer.* 3.18.7 (*ANF* 1:448 [PG 7:938BC]): “Thus, then, was the Word of God made man, as also Moses says: ‘God, true are His works’ (Deut. 32:4). But if, not having been made flesh, He did appear as if flesh, His work was not a true one. But what He did appear, that He also was: God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man; and therefore His works are true” (“Sic igitur Verbum Dei homo factus est, quemadmodum et Moyses ait: ‘Deus, vera opera ejus.’ Si autem non factus caro, parebat quasi caro, non erat verum opus ejus. Quod autem parebat, hoc et erat; Deus hominis antiquam plasmationem in se recapitulans, ut occideret quidem peccatum, evacualet autem mortem, et vivificaret hominem et propter hoc vera opera ejus”).

⁴⁵² *Haer.* 4.20.7 (*ANF* 1:489-490 [PG 7:1037B]): “Et propterea Verbum dispensator paternae gratiae factus est ad utilitatem hominum, propter quos fecit tantas dispositiones, hominibus quidem ostendens Deum, Deo autem exhibens hominem: et invisibilitatem quidem Patris custodiens, ne quando homo fieret contemptor Dei, et ut semper haberet ad quod proficeret; visibilem autem rursus hominibus per multas dispositiones ostendens Deum, ne in totum deficiens a Deo homo, cessaret esse.”

⁴⁵³ *Haer.* 4.20.7 (*ANF* 1:490 [PG 7:1037B]): “Gloria enim Dei vivens homo, vita autem hominis visio Dei.”

⁴⁵⁴ *Haer.* 3.23.1 (*ANF* 1:455 [PG 7:960B]): “For if man, who had been created by God that he might live, after losing life, through being injured by the serpent that had corrupted him, should not any more return to life, but should be utterly [and for ever] abandoned to death, God would [in that case] have been conquered, and the wickedness of the serpent would have prevailed over the will of God” (“Si enim qui factus fuerat a

with himself, “in regular order and connection, at the fitting time for the benefit [of humankind].”⁴⁵⁵ The end point of this revelatory process would come at the eschaton, at which time, even though under normal circumstances it was an impossibility to see God, God supernaturally would make the impossible possible and allow the faithful the view of his fullness.⁴⁵⁶

THE BLANKET OF MYSTERY SHROUDS THE WILL

The understanding of the Son as the perceivable aspect of the otherwise unknowable Father required explication. The natural questions that arose had to do with the origin of the Son, and the nature of his relationship with the Father. These Irenaeus subordinated to the notion of God’s unity: “God being all Mind, and all Logos, both speaks exactly what he thinks, and thinks exactly what he speaks.”⁴⁵⁷ In other words, God could not be said to be one thing and his mind another as if there were separation between them. God was not separated from his Logos. Scripture talked of the Son as being the only-begotten of the Father, but his sonship implied division from the Father only if one looked at it in terms of human generation, which was characterized by fission,

Deo homo, ut viveret, hic amittens vitam laesus serpente qui depravaverat eum, jam non reverteretur ad vitam, sed in totum projectus esset morti; victus esset Deus, et superasset serpentis nequitia voluntatem Dei”).

⁴⁵⁵ *Haer.* 4.20.7 (*ANF* 1:489 [PG 7:1037A]): “The Son of the Father declares [Him] from the beginning, inasmuch as He was with the Father from the beginning...in regular order and connection, at the fitting time for the benefit [of humankind]. For where there is a regular succession, there is also fixedness; and where fixedness, there suitability to the period; and where suitability, there also utility” (“Enarrat ergo ab initio Filius Patris, quippe qui ab initio est cum Patre, qui et visiones propheticas, et divisiones charismatum, et ministeria sua, et Patris glorificationem consequenter et composite ostenderit humano generi, apto tempore ad utilitatem”).

⁴⁵⁶ *Haer.* 4.20.5 (*ANF* 1:489).

⁴⁵⁷ *Haer.* 2.28.5 (*ANF* 1:400 [PG 7:808AB]): “Deus autem totus existens mens, et totus existens Logos, quod cogitat, hoc et loquitur; et quod loquitur, hoc et cogitat.”

and ignored Irenaeus' warning that human norms were inapplicable to the godhead.⁴⁵⁸

The nature of the Son's begetting was simply beyond human speculation. Scripture itself had made this clear when it declared that none "shall describe his generation" (Is.

53:8).⁴⁵⁹ On this we must quote Irenaeus at length:

"If any one, therefore, says to us, 'How then was the Son produced by the Father?' we reply to him, that no man understands that production, or generation, or calling, or revelation, or by whatever name one may describe His generation, which is in fact altogether indescribable. Neither Valentinus, nor Marcion, nor Saturninus, nor Basilides, nor angels, nor archangels, nor principalities, nor powers [possess this knowledge], but the Father only who begat, and the Son who was begotten. Since therefore His generation is unspeakable, those who strive to set forth generations and productions cannot be in their right mind, inasmuch as they undertake to describe things which are indescribable. For that a word is uttered at the bidding of thought and mind, all men indeed well understand. Those, therefore, who have excogitated [the theory of] emissions have not discovered anything great, or revealed any abstruse mystery, when they have simply transferred what all understand to the only-begotten Word of God; and while they style Him unspeakable and unnameable, they nevertheless set forth the production and formation of His first generation, as if they themselves had

⁴⁵⁸ *Haer.* 2.28.5 (*ANF* 1:400-401 [PG 7:808BC]): "...ye pretend to set forth His generation from the Father, and ye transfer the production of the word of men which takes place by means of a tongue to the Word of God, and thus are righteously exposed by your own selves as knowing neither things human nor divine" ("Vos autem generationem ejus ex Patre divinant, et verbi hominum per linguam factam prolationem transferentes in Verbum Dei, juste detegimini a vobis ipsis, quod neque humana, nec divina noveritis").

⁴⁵⁹ *Haer.* 2.28.5 (*ANF* 1:400).

assisted at His birth, thus assimilating Him to the word of mankind formed by emissions.”⁴⁶⁰

In short, the nature of the Father’s begetting of the Son was unknown and impossible ever to know, and one could not explain it using human parameters. One of the key collateral implications of the inscrutable nature of the Son’s generation was the similarly impenetrable question of the role of will in the begetting or even in the continued relation between the Father and the Son. It was thenceforth a matter that was impossible to speculate on because Irenaeus had, at a stroke, left no place for it in the inner life of God. In a similar way to how God’s attributes were said to come together in the divine simplicity in a mode that defied human understanding, so too was the begetting of the Son now put forth as leaving the divine oneness inviolate in a way that was also unfathomable. All one could know was that the Son was the visible aspect of the invisible Father, the “knowledge of the Father,”⁴⁶¹ and what process instituted this theological datum lay beyond the limits of human knowledge. To be sure, there remained the strong sense of the Son and the Holy Spirit acting in strict accordance with the will of the Father, but never was their work ever implied to be contingent. Rather, as extensions or aspects of the Father, their action was always one that could not have any other motor but

⁴⁶⁰ *Haer.* 2.28.6 (*ANF* 1:401 [PG 7:809AB]): “Si quis itaque nobis dixerit: Quomodo ergo Filius prolatus a Patre est? dicimus ei, quia prolationem istam, sive generationem, sive nuncupationem, sive adapertionem aut quolibet quis nomine vocaverit generationem ejus inenarrabilem existentem, nemo novit; non Valentinus, non Marcion, neque Saturninus, neque Basilides, neque Angeli, neque Archangeli, neque Principes, neque Potestates, nisi solus qui generavit Pater, et qui natus est Filius. Inenarrabilis itaque generatio ejus cum sit, quicumque nituntur generationes et prolationes enarrare, non sunt compotes sui, ea quae inenarrabilia sunt enarrare promittentes. Quoniam enim ex cogitatione et sensu verbum emittitur, hoc utique omnes sciunt homines. Non ergo magnum quid invenerunt, qui emissiones excogitaverunt, neque absconditum mysterium, si id quod ab omnibus intelligitur, transtulerunt in unigenitum Dei Verbum: et quem inenarrabilem et innominabilem vocant, hunc, quasi ipsi obstetricaverint, primae generationis ejus prolationem et generationem enuntiant, assimilantes eum hominum verbo emissionis.”

⁴⁶¹ *Haer.* 4.6.7 (*ANF* 1:469 [PG 7:990B]): “Agnitio enim Patris, Filius; agnitio autem Filii in Patre, et per Filium revelata: et propter hoc Dominus dicebat: ‘Nemo cognoscit Filium, nisi Pater: neque Patrem, nisi Filius, et quibuscumque Filius revelaverit.’”

the will of the Father.⁴⁶² The sphere of contingent will remained only the domain that lay wholly outside the divine interior, in creation, where the struggle between disobedience and obedience to the divine will was played out. Satan apostatized from God of his own free will, and instead of blaming his own “voluntary disposition,” he chose to blame God for his fall.⁴⁶³ By falsehoods, he then provoked the disobedience of Adam and Eve.⁴⁶⁴ Not to permit Adam and Eve to be “abandoned unto death” and thus allow the serpent’s wickedness to prevail “over the will of God,”⁴⁶⁵ the divine plan rectified the ancestral disobedience through the obedience, even unto death, of the new Adam, Christ.⁴⁶⁶ In the new Adam there was no sense of contingency in his obedience, for he was of the Father. His was an obedience and passion that brought knowledge of the Father—unlike the passion of the Valentinians’ Sophia, which was born of ignorance of the Father, and

⁴⁶² See e.g.: *Haer.* 2.32.5 (*ANF* 1:409): “When He was made man, he held fellowship with his own creation, and did all things truly through the power of God, according to the will of the Father of all, as the prophets had foretold”; *Haer.* 3.17.1 (*ANF* 1:444): “For [God] promised, that in the last times He would pour Him [the Spirit] upon [His] servants and handmaids, that they might prophesy; wherefore He did also descend upon the Son of God, made the Son of man, becoming accustomed in fellowship with Him to dwell in the human race, to rest with human beings, and to dwell in the workmanship of God, working the will of the Father in them, and renewing them from their old habits into the newness of Christ”; *Haer.* 3.21.7 (*ANF* 1:453): “So, then, we understand that His advent in human nature was not by the will of a man, but by the will of God”; *Haer.* 4.20.6 (*ANF* 1:489): “For certain of these men used to see the prophetic Spirit and His active influences poured forth for all kinds of gifts; others, again, [beheld] the advent of the Lord, and that dispensation which obtained from the beginning, by which He accomplished the will of the Father with regard to things both celestial and terrestrial”; *Haer.* 4.33.7 (*ANF* 1:508): “...and in the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord, by whom are all things, and in the dispensations connected with Him, by means of which the Son of God became man; and a firm belief in the Spirit of God, who furnishes us with a knowledge of the truth, and has set forth the dispensations of the Father and the Son, in virtue of which He dwells with every generation of men, according to the will of the Father”; *Haer.* 5.15.3 (*ANF* 1:543): “For the Lord [the Word] who formed the visual powers is He who made the whole man, carrying out the will of the Father”; *Haer.* 5.26.2 (*ANF* 1:555): “For those things which have been predicted by the Creator alike through all the prophets has Christ fulfilled in the end, ministering to His Father’s will, and completing His dispensations with regard to the human race”; *Haer.* 5.36.3 (*ANF* 1:567): “For there is the one Son, who accomplished His Father’s will.” See also *Epid.* 5.

⁴⁶³ *Haer.* 5.26.2 (*ANF* 1:555).

⁴⁶⁴ *Haer.* 5.23.1 (*ANF* 1:551).

⁴⁶⁵ *Haer.* 3.23.1 (*ANF* 1:455 [PG 7:960B]): “Si enim qui factus fuerat a Deo homo, ut viveret, hic amittens vitam laesus serpente qui depravaverant eum, jam non reverteretur ad vitam, sed in totum projectus esset morti; victus esset Deus, et superasset serpentis nequitia voluntatem Dei.”

⁴⁶⁶ *Haer.* 5.16.1-3 (*ANF* 1:544).

established ignorance and error in the world.⁴⁶⁷ Thus was fulfilled the incarnate Son's mission: "by his passion [he] destroyed death, and dispersed error, and put an end to corruption, and destroyed ignorance, while he manifested life and revealed truth, and bestowed the gift of incorruption."⁴⁶⁸ In keeping with the Irenaeus' idea of a perfect inversion and recapitulation of human history in the incarnation, he also saw the new Eve in the Virgin Mary.⁴⁶⁹ Unlike the old Eve, the Virgin Mary was obedient to God, although, Irenaeus noted, she "was persuaded to be obedient to God."⁴⁷⁰ Unlike that of her Son, who was the incarnate Word of God, her obedience was contingent, and "what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith."⁴⁷¹ For to "believe in God is to do his will."⁴⁷² And now that the Son had come to reveal the father, there was no excuse for those who, though they have seen, choose to turn away.⁴⁷³

⁴⁶⁷ In *Haer.* 2.20.3 (*ANF* 1:388 [PG 7:777C-778A]), Irenaeus elaborates on the contrast between the passion of Christ and the passion of the eon Sophia. Among other things, the eon "underwent passion while she was seeking after the Father, and was not able to find Him; but the Lord suffered that He might bring those who have wandered from the Father, back to knowledge and to His fellowship. The search into the greatness of the Father became to her a passion leading to destruction; but the Lord, having suffered, and bestowing the knowledge of the Father, conferred on us salvation" ("Sed neque Christi passio similis est passioni Aeonis, neque in similibus facta. Aeon enim passus est passionem dissolutionis, et perditionis, ita ut periclitaretur ipse, qui patiebatur, et corrumpi: Dominus autem noster Christus passus est passionem validam, et quae non cederet; non solum ipse non periclitatus corrumpi, sed et corruptum hominem firmavit robore suo, et in incorruptionem revocavit. Et Aeon quidem passus est passionem ipse requirens Patrem, et non praevalens invenire: Dominus autem passus est, ut eos qui erraverunt a Patre, ad agnitionem, et iuxta eum adduceret. Et illi quidem inquisitio magnitudinis Patris fiebat passio perditionis: nobis autem Dominus passus, agnitionem Patris conferens, salutem donavit").

⁴⁶⁸ *Haer.* 2.20.3 (*ANF* 1:388 [PG 7:778AB]): "Et Dominus quidem per passionem mortem destruxit; et solvit errorem, corruptionemque exterminavit, et ignorantiam destruxit; vitam autem manifestavit, et ostendit veritatem, et incorruptionem donavit."

⁴⁶⁹ *Haer.* 3.22.1-4 (*ANF* 1:454-455); *Haer.* 5.19.1-2 (*ANF* 1:547).

⁴⁷⁰ *Haer.* 5.19.1 (*ANF* 1:547 [PG 7:1175B]): "Et si ea inobedierat Deo; sed haec suasa est obedire Deo, uti virginis Evae Virgo Maria fieret advocata."

⁴⁷¹ *Haer.* 3.22.4 (*ANF* 1:455 [PG 7:959C-960A]): "Quod enim alligavit virgo Eva per incredulitatem, hoc virgo Maria solvit per fidem."

⁴⁷² *Haer.* 4.6.5 (*ANF* 1:468 [PG 7:989A]): "credere autem ei, est facere ejus voluntatem").

⁴⁷³ *Haer.* 4.6.5 (*ANF* 1:468-469).

Thus, the elimination of the will from the divine sphere, which had been the motor of division from original simplicity in both the Valentinian and early Plotinian systems, through the invocation of divine transcendence became the means of reinforcing the divine unity that Irenaeus so sought. This marked the earliest appearance of a strategy, that would enjoy some longevity, of eliminating will as a theological factor in order to ensure the divine unity in the face of such theologies where will was the cause of unseemly fracture in the divine sphere. It is nigh impossible to prove that will was the deliberate and not collateral target of Irenaeus' strategy, for he made no specific reference to it with respect to the internal relations in the godhead. Nevertheless, it was a strategy that was to be employed again by those theologies, which later would make their denunciations of will in the divine sphere explicit, and must be listed with them.

THE HOLY SPIRIT: THE PREPARER

Before proceeding further, we should at this point also mention the place of the Holy Spirit in Irenaeus' system. The Holy Spirit, which Irenaeus identified with God's Wisdom,⁴⁷⁴ was said always to have been with the Father, and was mentioned prominently as having had a role with the Son in the creation of the world. With the Father, Irenaeus taught, "were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously, He made all things."⁴⁷⁵ When the Father said, "Let us make man after our image and likeness" (Gen. 1:26), he was

⁴⁷⁴ *Haer.* 4.7.4; 4.20.1; 4.20.4.

⁴⁷⁵ *Haer.* 4.20.1 (*ANF* 1:487-488 [PG 7:1032B]): "Adest enim ei semper Verbum et Sapientia, Filius et Spiritus, per quos, et in quibus omnia libere et sponte fecit." Cf. *Haer.* 4.20.4 (*ANF* 1:488): "There is therefore one God, who by the Word and Wisdom created and arranged all things."

speaking to the Son and Holy Spirit.⁴⁷⁶ The Son and the Spirit were the Father’s “hands”⁴⁷⁷ by which he created the world, to the praise of the Psalmist.⁴⁷⁸ The manual imagery connoted ontological parity between the Son and the Spirit, for each one was a *hand*. It also suggested a caret-shaped symmetry in their relation to the Father, as though they were distinct aspects of him as his “his offspring and his similitude,”⁴⁷⁹ a perception reinforced by his description of the Son and Spirit as Word and Wisdom of the Father respectively. Finally, given that one is normally never without one’s hands, it also reinforced the sense of coeternity of the Son and the Spirit with the Father.

In the self-revelatory work of God, which as we saw, was so important in Irenaeus’ theology, the Spirit too had its own specific role. The Son we said was the outer face of the Father; the work of the Spirit was to prepare and sensitize humans spiritually for the coming of the Son. Here, the persons of the Trinity assumed a telescoped linearity. The Son sent forth the Spirit from the Father⁴⁸⁰ and in those of the Mosaic dispensation established a “receptacle of the prophetic Spirit.”⁴⁸¹ Thus in the Spirit the prophets were given to announce the coming of the Son not only in their prophecies, but in their visions, in their mode of life, and in the actions they performed “according to the suggestions of

⁴⁷⁶ *Haer.* 4.20.1 (ANF 1:488).

⁴⁷⁷ *Epid.* 11; *Haer.* 4.0.4, 4.20.1, 5.1.3, 5.6.1, 5.17.4, 5.28.4.

⁴⁷⁸ Ps. 94:5 [LXX]: “For the sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land” (ὅτι αὐτοῦ ἐστὶν ἡ θάλασσα, καὶ αὐτὸς ἐποίησεν αὐτήν, καὶ τὴν ξηρὰν αἱ χεῖρες αὐτοῦ ἐπλασαν), cited in *Haer.* 3.10.3.

⁴⁷⁹ *Haer.* 4.7.4 (ANF 1:470 [PG 7:993A]): “Ministrat enim ei ad omnia sua progenies et figuratio sua, id est Filius et Spiritus sanctus, Verbum et Sapientia.”

⁴⁸⁰ *Haer.* 3.17.2 (ANF 1:445 [PG 930B]): “The Lord, receiving this as a gift from His Father, does Himself also confer it upon those who are partakers of Himself, sending the Holy Spirit upon all the earth” (“Quod Dominus accipiens munus a Patre, ipse quoque his donavit qui ex ipso participantur, in universam terram mittens Spiritum sanctum”). Also, *Haer.* 5.18.2 (ANF 1:546 [PG 7:1173A]): “For the Father bears the creation and His own Word simultaneously, and the Word borne by the Father grants the Spirit to all as the Father wills” (“Pater enim conditionem simul et Verbum suum portans, et Verbum portatum a Patre, praestat Spiritum omnibus, quemadmodum vult Pater”).

⁴⁸¹ *Haer.* 4.36.2 (ANF 1:515 [PG 7:1091A]): “receptaculum prophetici Spiritus.”

the Spirit.”⁴⁸² Thus, Irenaeus could say that God was seen in the Spirit “prophetically.” In this same passage, of course, which tended toward a dispensationalist Trinitarianism, he also said that, in the Son, God was seen “adoptively,” and, at the eschaton, God himself would be seen “paternally.”⁴⁸³ The adoption signified the joining of humanity to God in the Incarnation, in which human history was restarted in the new Adam. We note that this reconstituted Adam was fashioned anew by God’s hands, just as the old one had:⁴⁸⁴ by the Son, who took on its flesh; and by the Spirit, who rested on him. In recapitulated humankind, the Son united “man to the Spirit, and causing the Spirit to dwell in man, He is Himself made the head of the Spirit, and gives the Spirit to be the head of man: for through Him (the Spirit) we see, and hear, and speak.”⁴⁸⁵ Thus, in the time since Christ’s coming, the work of the Spirit expanded from announcing the coming of the Son, leading the faithful to him, now that he had come. The work of the Spirit had believers incrementally “tending toward perfection, and preparing us for incorruption, being little by little accustomed to receive and bear God.”⁴⁸⁶ This was what it meant to be spiritual: not, as the Valentinians taught, to shed one’s physical body, but to possess the Spirit.⁴⁸⁷ The Spirit perfects and completes the human, and so a human that is in the perfect order

⁴⁸² *Haer.* 4.20.8 (*ANF* 1:490 [PG 7:1038A]): “secundum id quod suggerebat Spiritus.”

⁴⁸³ *Haer.* 4.20.5 (*ANF* 1:489 [PG 7:1035A]): “visus quidem tunc per Spiritum prophetiae, visus autem et per Filium adoptive, videbitur autem et in regno coelorum paternaliter.”

⁴⁸⁴ *Haer.* 5.1.3.

⁴⁸⁵ *Haer.* 5.20.2 (*ANF* 1:548 [PG 7:1178C]): “Haec igitur in semetipsum recapitulatus est, adunans hominem spiritui, et spiritum collocans in homine, ipse caput spiritus factus est; et spiritum dans esse hominis caput, per illum enim vidimus et audivimus et loquimur.”

⁴⁸⁶ *Haer.* 5.8.1 (*ANF* 1:533 [PG 7:1141B]): “Nunc autem partem aliquam a Spiritu ejus sumimus, ad perfectionem et praeparationem incorruptelae, paulatim assuescentes capere et portare Deum.”

⁴⁸⁷ *Haer.* 5.8.1 (*ANF* 1:533 [PG 7:1141C-1142A]): “‘For ye,’ he declares, ‘are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.’ This, however, does not take place by a casting away of the flesh, but by the impartation of the Spirit. For those to whom he was writing were not without flesh, but they were those who had received the Spirit of God, ‘by which we cry, Abba, Father’ (Rom. 8:15)” (“‘Vos enim,’ ait, ‘non estis in carne, sed in Spiritu, si quidem Spiritus Dei habitat in vobis.’ Hoc autem non secundum jacturam carnis, sed secundum communionem Spiritus fit. Non enim erant sine carne, quibus scribebat; sed qui assumpserant Spiritum Dei, ‘in quo clamamus: Abba, Pater’”).

in which the hands of God created him had also to possess Spirit.⁴⁸⁸ For the Spirit prepared humans in the Son of God, and the Son of God led them to the Father.⁴⁸⁹ And so at the end of time, all will return to the Father, with the telescoped linearity of the divine movement leading all back to his bosom: “The presbyters, the disciples of the apostles, affirm that this is the gradation and arrangement of those who are saved, and that they advance through steps of this nature; also that they ascend through the Spirit to the Son, and through the Son to the Father, and that in due time the Son will yield up His work to the Father.”⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁸ *Haer.* 5.4.1 (*ANF* 1:531).

⁴⁸⁹ *Haer.* 4.20.5.

⁴⁹⁰ *Haer.* 5.36.2 (*ANF* 1:567 [PG 7:1223B]): “Hanc esse ad ordinationem et dispositionem eorum qui salvantur, dicunt presbyteri apostolorum discipuli, et per hujusmodi gradus proficere, et per Spiritum quidem [ad] Filium, per Filium autem ascendere ad Patrem; Filio deinceps cedente Patri opus suum...”

CHAPTER IV

ORIGEN: THE THEOLOGIAN OF WILL

The great teacher of the Alexandrian school, a “man of spotless character” and “one of the most original thinkers the world has ever seen,”⁴⁹¹ Origen (185-253) was one of the most influential writers in the early Christian period. Roughly contemporaneous with Tertullian, the Gnostics, and Plotinus, the monumental undertaking of the deeply pious and ascetic Origen—himself the son of a martyr, Leonidas, pupil of the great Ammonius Saccas,⁴⁹² and confessor of the faith before the persecutors—had been to organize the doctrines of Christianity into a systematized whole at a level of academic rigor unheard of till that time, and thus to provide Christians with the intellectual sustenance that they otherwise might have sought elsewhere. The vastness of his learning, and the depth and originality of his speculations were the inspiration of many theologians in his day. Local churches vied for his services, and, after leaving behind his native Alexandria, he ended his days in Palestinian Caesarea, the see which the famous Eusebius, an indefatigable devotee of Origen’s, would come to man some sixty years after the death of the master.

However, despite these abundant accolades, it was also true that long after Origen’s death his name would become embroiled in controversy. A seminal thinker famed for blazing new ground, some of Origen’s undoubtedly well-intentioned but more exploratory points of theological conjecture had the misfortune of inspiring certain later

⁴⁹¹ Quasten, Johannes, *Patrology, Vol. II: The Ante-Nicene Literature after Irenaeus* (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1953), p. 37.

⁴⁹² Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.19.6.

thinkers, who became embroiled in the great theological disputes that were to rack the life of the Church in the centuries after its de-proscription by Constantine at Milan some seventeen-hundred years ago. The fierce loyalty he inspired in his admirers and the continual association of his legacy with controversy eventually made Origen a source of dread among those authorities who had grown weary of conflict in the bosom of the Church. Simply put, although his works had served to inspire so many, they came to be considered more trouble than they were worth. As a result, Origen was condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553), some three centuries after his death, and his works systematically were committed to the flames, with few of them surviving entirely in their original Greek.⁴⁹³

One such volume was his dogmatic work, the *Peri Archon*, which has survived in the Latin translation of his fourth century admirer, Rufinus of Aquileia, as the *De Principiis*.⁴⁹⁴ The degree of doctrinal interpretation and sanitization to which Rufinus subjected the work in order to protect the good name of his master has remained a matter of guesswork. Nevertheless, certain themes in this treatise were so strong that they were impossible to suppress. One such theme was its conscientious, full-blooded promotion of *will* as a central factor in theology. In Origen's case, the embrace of will was part of his effort to push far from the Church's teaching the materialist view of God, the soul, and the cosmos, which as we saw even in writers like Tertullian had ensconced itself in certain quarters of Christian thought, and thus to save it from what he feared would

⁴⁹³ A fine study on Origen's troubled legacy is Jon F. Dechow's *Dogma and Mysticism in Early Christianity: Epiphanius of Cyprus and the Legacy of Origen* (North American Patristic Society, Patristic Monograph Series 13, Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1988).

⁴⁹⁴ In this study, we will use English translation of G.W. Butterworth (*Origen on First Principles* [Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1973]) of the text as constructed by Paul Koetschau, with slight tense changes and references to the ancient languages as required.

degenerate into a theology of “force and necessity”⁴⁹⁵ that presumably⁴⁹⁶ rested on the determined mechanical interactions of purely material entities.⁴⁹⁷ Against this system of a world subject to God by compulsion, Origen put forward a vision of God as wielding dominion over the universe “through wisdom, that is, by word and reason.” All agreed that God was omnipotent because he held authority over all things. But for Origen the “purest and brightest glory” of this omnipotence was the fact that he held the universe in subjection “by reason and wisdom, and not by force and necessity.”⁴⁹⁸ In this quest, Origen framed *will* as his bulwark against materiality and necessity in theology. In it he saw the very clearest index of the freedom from the determinism that he associated with materiality, and not few would be his analogies between the operation of will and the dynamic inside the incorporeal triune Godhead. Second, as a movement of mind, will, at its best, could also be seen, in line with Greek thought, as the natural expression of knowledge. This was certainly the case in Origen’s postulations on the divine sphere, where there was the perfect meeting of absolute will and supreme omniscience.

⁴⁹⁵ *Princ.* 1.2.10 (PG 11:142A): “vi ac necessitate.”

⁴⁹⁶ I cannot be sure that this is exactly how Origen envisaged the connection between materiality and determinacy. Nevertheless, there was at least one attempt in antiquity, viz. the swerve of Epicurus, to avoid the determinacy presented by the materialist atomism of Democritus.

⁴⁹⁷ Who these opponents were remains a point of speculation. Henri Crouzel (“Theological Construction and Research: Origen on Free-will,” in *Scripture, Tradition and Reason: A Study in the Criteria of Christian Doctrine* [ed. Richard Bauckham and Benjamin Drewery; Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1988], pp. 239-40) suggested that Origen was directing himself against Gnostics. This theory was presented more forcefully by Michael Frede (*A Free Will: Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011] p. 113-118). His argument was that Origen was directing himself against, first, notions of astral determinism, and, second, “various forms of what we now call ‘Gnosticism,’” especially the Valentinians, who, as Origen reported in *Cels.* 5.61, preached the existence of three types of people: the carnal and the spiritual, whose respective damnation and salvation were certain, and the psychic, who could possibly avoid damnation. I cannot dwell on this beyond simply stating that some of what Origen was attacking looks like strands of Stoicism. This does not collide with Frede’s thesis that the Stoics were the first to establish the sense of free-will, but only suggests that there may have been divergent streams of Stoic thought.

⁴⁹⁸ *Princ.* 1.2.10 (PG 11:142A): “et haec est omnipotentiae purissima et limpidissima gloria, cum ratione et sapientia, non vi ac necessitate, cuncta subjecta sunt.”

Till now, we have made it our stated purpose to lay the primary focus of our examinations on the place of will in the divine sphere and in the theology of the Trinity as it developed in the early centuries of Christianity. But certain peculiarities in Origen's thought, particularly in his Christology—in itself an harbinger, I will argue, of future controversy—will make a full treatment of will in the Trinity impossible without also a very close examination of his views on the theological role of will *in creation*. He was, I will propose, the theologian of will. For in his understanding of the created and mutable world, Origen ascribed such primacy to the freedom of will that even the prevailing Greek principle of will as the natural outflow of knowledge suddenly seemed inadequate. It was as if Origen was responding to the opinions of his fellow pupil at the knee of Ammonius Saccas, namely Plotinus, for whom the questions of free will and choice were relevant only where there was a deficit of knowledge, and took them as representing a rationalistic form of repression of freedom, which ultimately left no room for the Christian call to faith and obedience to God's self-revelation. Thus, it would become apparent that Origen invested the operation of will with characteristics that, although not necessarily opposed to the dictates of reason, they were not entirely circumscribed by them either, so that assent became its own criterion nurtured by, but also functioning alongside, understanding.⁴⁹⁹

In this context, the free operation of will became the mechanism that drove a cosmic system resting on free choice and its consequences. Origen's purposes were to restore to the cosmos, and specifically to the created volitive agents therein, that sense of

⁴⁹⁹ In this respect, Origen seemed to move to a position that Michael Frede (*Will*, p. 98) attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias, and which he saw as favored by Albrecht Diehl, namely the “notion of a will which decides or chooses in some mysterious way that is independent not only of the external objects of desire but also of the desires and beliefs of the person.”

fairness and accountability in their relation to God that appeared to be absent in the predetermined and arbitrary mechanisms of the materialists, but also to ensure that, in the etiologies surrounding the misery of the human condition, God remained forever unimpeachable. This stood to reason. The rise of Christianity and its belief in a judgment at the end of time, which assumed that the earthly deeds by which humans would be judged lay within their power, made the analysis of intentionality and the pursuit of a sense of ultimate justice all the more imperative.⁵⁰⁰ That Origen was not alone among Christians in this quest, but was expressing beliefs that were widely held in the Church at large, was attested to by the fact that the entire first chapter of the third book of his treatise, which argued for free will and tackled the biblical texts that seemed to challenge it, was preserved in its original Greek as the twenty-first chapter of the *Philocalia* compiled by Gregory Theologian and Basil, who clearly considered it salutary reading.⁵⁰¹ For the God of Christianity was good, and the cosmos was in a fallen state and at a distance from him only because, for Origen, rational creatures had in previous incarnations succumbed and voluntarily turned away from him. Human circumstances were the direct consequence of their own actions. In the wake of Christ's example and teaching, therefore, the purpose of the God-seeker became to acquire godly wisdom and exercise obedience to the divine will so that he would be brought close to God once again.⁵⁰² Origen understood that this educative, karmic process might take time, even

⁵⁰⁰ Illustrative of the connection between the doctrines of the last judgment and the free-will was Origen's opening statement of the first chapter of the third book of this treatise, which contained one of his most in-depth expositions on the matter of free-will: "Since the teaching of the Church includes the doctrine of the righteous judgment of God, a doctrine which, if believed to be true, summons its hearers to live a good life and by every means to avoid sin—for it assumes that they acknowledge that deeds worthy of praise or of blame lie within our own power—let us now discuss separately a few points on the subject of the free will, a problem of the utmost possible urgency" (*Princ.* 3.1.1 [Gk.]).

⁵⁰¹ Of course, that chapter had no references to the pre-existence of souls.

⁵⁰² *Princ.* 1. Praef. 1.

several incarnations, so that one might overcome the compounded consequences of primordial disobedience.

Origen's explanation of the current state of the world as being the result of a turning away from God at a time prior to the present incarnation made his system on some levels similar to that of the Valentinians. As we saw, for them the world was the complex result of a disturbance in the Pleroma that was produced when the generate divine hypostases, moved by their naiveté, sought to be like the primal deity. Origen would differ from the Valentinians on key points. First, he would place this arena of choice-making exclusively within the created order, and not primordially in the divine sphere and flowing over into creation as the Valentinians had taught. Moreover, Valentinianism's teaching on the disturbance in the Pleroma was meant to explain what it taught was the stratified, and largely, though not completely, determinate state of affairs that prevailed in the dualistic cosmos. For the Valentinian, free choice was severely curtailed in the present life because of the predetermined, mutually-opposed, and immiscible spiritual domains established in this world following the unrest in the heavenly realm. Origen, conversely, would view every creature's lot in this world as the result of its own choices in its previous existence, and its future as lying entirely within its own control and choice.

However, we must also emphasize that, although Origen did not share the Valentinians' belief in a collision of purposes in the divine sphere, he did not eliminate all sense of will from the Godhead itself. On the contrary, will would be absolutely key to his understanding of God. On the one hand, as many others had done, Origen, too, viewed the divine will as a purposeful movement outward from the Godhead, a governing

force precedent to creation, and the perfect expression of God's absolute omniscience. In this context, deliberative choice, as a phenomenon founded on relative ignorance, had no place in his understanding of God. At the same time, on a very different level, and in a way peculiar to Origen, his reflections on willing, as a purely psychic and non-materialist action emanating from within mind, would afford him a means of visualizing the Father's begetting of the Son that would depart from the conceptions of materialist fission that others had relied on to describe it. In this scheme, the Father would be mind, and the Son will itself, emerging from within mind without fissure. Thus, his likening the begetting of the Son to an act of volition was to anchor the entire architecture of Origen's theology to will, from its conceptual starting point inside the Trinity downward, into creation. For the notion that in the divine sphere will was an action of non-material mind would stand as archetype behind human free will in its role as rampart against materialist determinism in the created order.

The most contentious aspect of Origen's thought, especially in terms of the theological trajectories it inspired in the Trinitarian and Christological disputes that were to beset the Church from the fourth century onward, would center on how he juxtaposed these two theaters of volitional activity, namely the divine and the created, in the mediating principle between the two, namely the Christ. In the person of Christ—and here I use *person* in a decidedly non-technical sense, given what would be Origen's proto-Nestorian understanding of the Incarnation—was played out the perfect example of obedience of his human soul to the divine will, both prior to his incarnation, during which phase his soul's willing subordination to God earned him the divine favor and his special union with the divine Logos, and in his incarnation, where he served as perfect exemplar

to incarnate being, showing obedience to God, even unto death. The paradigm of Christ as contingent moral exemplar would prove to be theologically very attractive, and in Arius we would see what may well have been an indexterous attempt, in the heat of the dispute, at steering clear of the dual agency in Christ that Origen had put forth and placing the Son as the sole volitive agent in Christ. The unfortunate result in Arius' case was that he would reintroduce potential discord into the Godhead, with all the cognitive inequities among the divine persons that this entailed, thus setting off a monumental dispute in the life of the Church. These things shall be examined in their turn. For now, we turn to the seminal work of Origen.

GOD AS MIND

The materialism that for Origen underlay this coercive theology of determinism and necessity was all-encompassing, and Origen made it one of his first duties to challenge the central claim of those materialist Christians that even God himself consisted, in his being, of a material body. Clearly inspired by the Stoic⁵⁰³ identification of God with the elemental building blocks of the universe, these faithful had found support for their belief in God's corporeality⁵⁰⁴ in such passages as "God is a consuming

⁵⁰³ See, e.g., Aetius 1.7.33: "The Stoics made God to be intelligent, a designing fire which methodically proceeds toward creation of the world, and encompasses all the seminal principles according to which everything comes about according to fate, and a breath pervading the whole world, which takes on different names owing to the alterations of the matter through which it passes"; Origen (*Cels.* 4.14): "The God of the Stoics, in as much as he is a body, sometimes has the whole substance as his commanding-faculty; this is whenever the conflagration is in being; at other times, when world-order exists, he comes to be in a part of substance"; Diogenes Laertius (7.142): "The world is created when the substance is turned from fire through air into moisture; then the thicker parts of the moisture condense and end up as earth, but the finer parts are thoroughly rarefied, and when they have been thinned still further, they produce fire. Thereafter by mixture plants and animals and the other natural kinds are produced out of these." All citations taken from A.A. Long & D.N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers, Volume 1: Translations of the Principal Sources, with Philosophical Commentary* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 274-276.

⁵⁰⁴ *Princ.* 1.1.1.

fire”⁵⁰⁵ and “God is spirit.”⁵⁰⁶ In response, Origen’s strategy became to draw special attention to those passages in Scripture that he argued declared God’s non-materiality, and thus to challenge their claim of Writ’s univocally materialist witness on God’s nature. For example, those Scriptural descriptions of God as *light*⁵⁰⁷ by which humans themselves saw light⁵⁰⁸ were for Origen references not to a material light, like that of the sun, but to an intellectual light, a spiritual power, which, “when it lightens a man, it causes him either to see clearly the truth of all things or to know God himself who is called the truth.”⁵⁰⁹ God the fire consumed not material things such as “wood or hay or stubble,”⁵¹⁰ but “evil thoughts of the mind, shameful deeds and longings after sin, when these implant themselves in the minds of believers.”⁵¹¹

In similar wise, when God was called *spirit* it did not mean that he consisted of rarefied matter like *wind*, as some took spirit to be, but of something intellectual and entirely non-material in character. Illustrative of this was the person of the Holy Spirit himself. He was *spirit* in very name, and yet human experience showed him to be very different from material entities. For example, the saints’ liberating and knowledge-bearing⁵¹² participation in the Spirit did not entail his material division into shares that were then apportioned to those who partook of him. Rather, participation in the Spirit more closely resembled a group of people sharing in a common object of intellection, such as medicine, without physically partitioning and distributing it among themselves. Of course, the Holy Spirit was “far different” from the “system or science of medicine”:

⁵⁰⁵ Deut. 4:24.

⁵⁰⁶ John 4:24.

⁵⁰⁷ 1 John 1:5.

⁵⁰⁸ Ps. 35:10 (LXX).

⁵⁰⁹ *Princ.* 1.1.1.

⁵¹⁰ Cf. 1 Cor. 3:12.

⁵¹¹ *Princ.* 1.1.2.

⁵¹² Cf. 2 Cor. 3:15-17.

he was an “intellectual existence, with a subsistence and being of its own, whereas medicine is nothing of the sort.”⁵¹³ Nevertheless, Origen’s underlying point remained. By describing God as *spirit*, Scripture was urging one to understand him in non-material and non-spatial terms. Christ had made this clear to the Samaritan woman⁵¹⁴ when he revealed to her that the proper way of worshiping God, “in spirit and in truth,” would require one to “abandon all idea of material places” in one’s conceptions of God. The localized and materialist worship symbolized by both Jerusalem and Gerizim, long the objects of Jewish and Samaritan bickering, was a preoccupation with the mere “shadows and images”⁵¹⁵ of the heavenly realities that Christ had come to make known.⁵¹⁶

This call to look beyond the shadows and images of the material world to the higher realities in God would form one of the cornerstones of Origen’s theology. To be sure, as the only being which alone had the “privilege of existing apart from all material intermixture,”⁵¹⁷ God was “incomprehensible and immeasurable,”⁵¹⁸ and the human mind, enfeebled as it was by its association with the human body,⁵¹⁹ and used only to perceiving material things, strained even to catch a glimpse of the incorporeal divine nature:

⁵¹³ *Princ.* 1.1.3.

⁵¹⁴ John 4:20-24.

⁵¹⁵ cf. Heb. 8:5.

⁵¹⁶ *Princ.* 1.1.4.

⁵¹⁷ *Princ.* 1.1.6.

⁵¹⁸ *Princ.* 1.1.5.

⁵¹⁹ *Princ.* 1.1.5: “...our mind is shut up within bars of flesh and blood and rendered duller and feebler by reason of its association with such material substances; and although it is regarded as far more excellent when compared with the natural body, yet when it strains after incorporeal things and seeks to gain a sight of them it has scarcely the power of a glimmer of light or a tiny lamp.”

“Whatever may be the knowledge which we have been able to obtain about God, whether by perception or by reflection, we must of necessity believe that he is far and away better than our thoughts about him.”⁵²⁰

However, he also included a crucial addendum. Despite the transcendence of the Godhead, Origen was convinced that it was possible to infer certain things about God based on “the beauty of his works and the comeliness of his creatures.”⁵²¹ Among those created things that told of God was, first and foremost, the human mind itself, which too owed its existence to God, “the mind and fount from which originates all intellectual existence or mind.”⁵²² The clearest proof of this affinity between the human mind and God was the behavior of the mind itself. By late antiquity, the largely Platonist perception, namely that the ultimate ontological principle was both unknowable and nameable only on the basis of what it was not, had become widespread. It was on these grounds that Origen observed a high degree of correlation between the way mind did its work and the characteristics that philosophical thought had resolved must apply to the ultimate principle. He noted how mind required no physical space to move and operate, and experienced no delay in its movements. Its operation was largely unaffected by its physical location,⁵²³ and it was able to grow and broaden its knowledge and abilities without requiring any physical addition to itself.⁵²⁴ The mind’s correlation with what was postulated of the divine nature was to such a degree that Origen concluded that, unlike

⁵²⁰ *Princ.* 1.1.5 (PG 11:124A): “Si quid enim illud est, quod sentire vel intelligere de Deo potuerimus, multis longe modis eum meliorem esse ab eo quod sensimus necesse est credi.”

⁵²¹ *Princ.* 1.1.6.

⁵²² *Princ.* 1.1.6.

⁵²³ Origen acknowledged that one’s mind might operate with less vigor if one were being tossed at sea than if one were on dry land, but he attributed (*Princ.* 1.1.6) this to the regular hindrances that human minds were subject to because of their possession of a body. For Origen, “the mind is shut up within bars of flesh and blood, and rendered duller and feebler by reason of its association with such material substances” (*Princ.* 1.1.5).

⁵²⁴ *Princ.* 1.1.6.

the organs of sensory perception, such as the eyes, the ears, etc., which were material in their make-up and whose activities were directed at material objects, the mind had as its truest object of contemplation things, such as God himself, that were intellectual in nature and physically invisible.⁵²⁵ All this led to what would be one of Origen's central premises, namely that it was the processes of mind and intellection, which all humans could observe through simple introspection, and not the metaphysical systems of the Stoic and other materialists, that provided the most appropriate and accurate paradigm for approaching the nature of God.

THE SON AS WILL

Origen then turned his attention to the person of the Son, and to exploring his relationship with the Father in terms of the non-materialist and psychological framework he had just established to conceptualize the divine nature. His strategy was to gather the scriptural data relating to the person of the Son, and to argue that there was no warrant to understand any of it in a materialist manner. In fact, the only way to harmonize the various titles that Scripture had bestowed on the Son was to interpret them in a way that purposely looked beyond the norms of the material world. When considering the Son as *Wisdom*, Origen could not ignore the fact that he was also *Son*, and thus concluded that this Wisdom, unlike the wisdom of humans, was not an entity “without hypostatic existence.” Wisdom was not an inanimate thing that merely imparted influence and

⁵²⁵ *Princ.* 1.1.7-8. Origen clarified (*Princ.* 1.1.8) that *seeing* was, strictly speaking, an activity limited to corporeal objects, whereas God, as non-physical, could not be seen: “to see and to be seen is a property of bodies; to know and to be known was an attribute of intellectual existence.” Even the Son was said not to *see* the Father but to *know* him (Matt. 6:27). This was not a matter of the Son's supposed inferiority to the Father, as Arius would suggest a century later, but because to be seen was something impossible for the invisible divine nature. Origen did grant that a certain type of seeing was mentioned in Scripture—“seeing God in the heart” (cf. Matt. 5:8)—but he insisted that this really just corresponded to knowing God with the mind (*Princ.* 1.1.8).

intelligence to the minds of people and made them wise.⁵²⁶ He was a concrete, personal existence, a “wise living being,” as one would expect of an entity who was also a son. He was “God’s wisdom, hypostatically existing.”⁵²⁷

However, this same entity was also called the Firstborn Son of the Father, born in truth of him and drawing his being from him.⁵²⁸ He was Son by very nature, and not through some “external way” such as adoption in the Spirit.⁵²⁹ Paul had called the Son the “image of the invisible God,”⁵³⁰ and one knew from the example of Adam, who had begotten Seth “after his own image and after his own kind,”⁵³¹ that *image* could denote only the “unity of nature (*naturae*) and substance (*substantiae*) common to a father and a son.”⁵³² The Son, therefore, was connected to the Father by nature. Solomon had said the same thing of Wisdom, talking of it as a “a breath of the power of God,” “a pure emanation⁵³³ of the glory of the Almighty,” “the brightness of the eternal light,” “an unspotted mirror of the working of God,” and, we note, “an *image* of his goodness.”⁵³⁴ This was further proof that the Son and Wisdom were one and the same, and it influenced how one perceived his generation from the Father. For if one took his generation as implying a beginning in the existence of the Son, or that he was begotten in time, this

⁵²⁶ *Princ.* 1.2.2.

⁵²⁷ *Princ.* 1.2.2 (PG 11:130C): “unigenitum Filium Dei sapientiam ejus esse substantialiter subsistentem.” Origen was careful also to ensure that his use of the term *hypostasis* here did not give cause for a materialist diversion, and stated specifically that it could not be allowed to connote shape, color, size, or any other corporeal characteristic.

⁵²⁸ *Princ.* 1.2.2.

⁵²⁹ *Princ.* 1.2.4.

⁵³⁰ Rom. 8:15.

⁵³¹ Gen. 5:3.

⁵³² *Princ.* 1.2.6 (PG 11:134C). For Origen, the idea of an “image of the *invisible* God” (Rom. 8:15) could be understood in two ways, either as a visible or an invisible image thereof. The visible images of the invisible God were humans, who were, of course, material. However, the Son as incorporeal was the *invisible* image of the invisible God, and was possessed of the same invisible nature and substance as the Father.

⁵³³ *Aporrhoea*.

⁵³⁴ Wis. 7:25f. (in *Princ.* 1.2.5).

amounted to an act of impiety against the unbegotten Father himself, because it denied that he had been possessed of his Wisdom from all ages.⁵³⁵ To reach the true understanding of the Son's relation to the Father, therefore, one had to extrapolate beyond the bounds of human comprehension and say that the generation of the Son was indeed a begetting, but one that did not imply a beginning. It was an "eternal and everlasting begetting, as brightness is begotten from light,"⁵³⁶ and it lay "beyond the limits of any beginning that we can speak of or understand."⁵³⁷

There was, of course, the issue of Scripture calling Wisdom the "beginning [*ἀρχὴν*]" of his [i.e. God's] ways for his works,⁵³⁸ but this was not to be taken in the temporal sense but only as a statement that in Wisdom were contained "both the beginnings and causes and species of the whole creation." In Wisdom was "implicit every capacity and form of the creation that was to be, both of those things that exist in a primary sense, and of those which happen in consequence of them."⁵³⁹ Thus understood, Wisdom as the beginning of God's ways was nothing other than the *Logos*, which was another title that Scripture had bestowed on the Son, and which represented that cosmic principle broadly recognized⁵⁴⁰ as the summation of all laws and principles (*logoi*) governing the creation and workings of the universe.⁵⁴¹ The Logos revealed to created beings "the meaning of the mysteries and secrets which are contained within the wisdom

⁵³⁵ *Princ.* 1.2.3.

⁵³⁶ *Princ.* 1.2.4.

⁵³⁷ *Princ.* 1.2.2.

⁵³⁸ Prov. 8:22.

⁵³⁹ *Princ.* 1.2.2.

⁵⁴⁰ Origen was clear (*Princ.* 1.3.1) that Christians were "not alone in declaring that he [God] has a Son." Although many of the philosophers, both Greek and barbarian, considered this a marvelous and incredible claim, there were nevertheless some among them who displayed a belief in his existence "for they admit that all things were created by the word or reason of God."

⁵⁴¹ We have already seen above (n. 503) how Aetius (1.7.33) described the Stoic view of God as an intelligent designing fire that created the world and encompassed all the seminal principles (*spermatikoi logoi*) by which all things came to be according to fate.

of God” because he was the “interpreter of the mind’s secrets.”⁵⁴² That the Logos too was one and the same as Wisdom, and by extension the Firstborn Son, was made clear by Scripture itself. The (apocryphal) *Acts of Paul*, for example, called the Logos a “living being,” and John had declared that he was “in the beginning with God”⁵⁴³—two observations that, as we saw above, Origen had also made regarding Wisdom. Indeed, all the titles that Scripture had given the second person of the Trinity were in agreement with what had been said of Wisdom, and in no instance was there justification for a materialistic understanding of his being.⁵⁴⁴

Another proof that the Son possessed the image of the Father was for Origen the scriptural declaration that “all things that the Father doeth, these the Son doeth likewise.”⁵⁴⁵ He reasoned that based on the fact that the “Son does all things just as the Father does,” one could say that “the Father’s image is reproduced in the Son, whose birth from the Father is, as it were, an act of his will proceeding from the mind.”⁵⁴⁶ Given his correlation of *image* with *nature*, Origen here was effectively *presenting activity as an index of nature*. Because the Son’s activity was the same as that of the Father, he necessarily was possessed of the same nature as the Father. This alignment of activity with nature was in itself poignant enough, and it was a correlation, albeit indirectly

⁵⁴² *Princ.* 1.2.3.

⁵⁴³ John 1:1-2.

⁵⁴⁴ *Princ.* 1.2.4: “Whatever we have said of the Wisdom of God will also fitly apply to and be understood of him in his other titles as the Son of God, the Life, the Logos, the Truth, the Way, and the Resurrection. For all these titles are derived from his works and powers, and in none of them is there the least reason to understand anything corporeal, which might seem to denote either size or shape or color.”

⁵⁴⁵ John 5:19.

⁵⁴⁶ *Princ.* 1.2.6.

presented here by Origen, that subsequent generations would nevertheless uphold and cultivate.⁵⁴⁷

His next point, however, on the Son's birth from the Father and its resemblance to an act of the Father's will, was a part of so obliquely articulated and compressed a passage of reasoning that we must pause here and trace carefully how Origen was advancing his argument. It is fair to assume that he was positioning will as precedent to any action. Because the activity of the Father and the Son was the same, it followed, perforce, that their antecedent volitional activity was identical too. It was in this context of identity of will that Origen found opportunity to frame the Son's incorporeal generation from the Father as comparable to an act of will "proceeding from the mind." We already know that Origen likened the Father to mind, and so the invocation of mind here was both a synonym for the Father, but also a cue to appreciate the illustration of a volitive procession by reflecting on the incorporeal processes of the human mind. Origen was not in this particular passage making the Son a *product* of the Father's will, but saying only that his generation was analogous to how the mind/Father generates an act of will. Origen continued:

“...an act of the Father's will ought to be sufficient to ensure the existence of what he wills; for in willing he uses no other means than that which is produced by the deliberations of his will.”⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁷ Cf. Origen's *Cels.* 8.12 (*ANF* 4:644-5): “We worship, therefore, the Father of truth, and the Son, who is the truth; and these, while they are two, considered as persons or subsistences, are one in unity of thought, in harmony and in identity of will. So entirely are they one, that he who has seen the Son, ‘who is the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of His person’ (Heb. 1:3), has seen in Him who is the image of God, God Himself.” I cannot however agree with Joseph Lienhard (*Contra Marcellum*, 94), who, based on this passage from the *Cels.*, suggested that for Origen Jn. 10:30 (“I and the Father are one”) “refers only to a harmony of wills,” and that this had inspired the anti-Nicene Asterius in the fourth century. As we can see, Origen had prefaced his introduction of the matter of will in the Godhead with a statement on the oneness of nature and substance between Father and Son. This could not have been a question of the oneness of will *only*.

Here was the mystery. An act of will clearly always does the same thing as its origin, the willer. In like manner, because, as per Scripture, the Son, too, always did the things that the Father did, it was entirely reasonable to assume that the generation of the Son might have resembled the way the divine will proceeded from the Father, whom Origen had already likened to mind. That the divine will was an unmediated action flowing forth from the Father suggested that the generation of the Son was similarly unmediated a process. Thus, Origen concluded, “it was in this way”—namely as an act of willing proceeding from mind—“that the existence of the Son also is begotten of him.”⁵⁴⁹ The Son was begotten in a way comparable to how the divine will proceeds from the Father, and the implication was that humans could perceive this through reflection on the procession of their own will from their mind.

Although this notion of the connection between the Son’s generation and the procession of will from mind would prove a mainstay of Origen’s theology throughout the *Peri Archon*, we must also draw attention to what was his slight vacillation on this point. Till now, he had *likened* the generation of the Son to the movement of the divine will. There had been, however, no explicit statement that the Son’s begetting was an act of divine will, but reference only to a resemblance in the mutually incorporeal manner of their operation. Yet there were also moments in his treatise where increasingly he began to see the Son both as the special product of the Father’s will and as the externalized and hypostatized will of the Father. Inspired, for example, by the scriptural description of Wisdom as “the breath of the power of God,”⁵⁵⁰ he argued that *power* here referred to

⁵⁴⁸ *Princ.* 1.2.6 (PG 11:134C): “Et ideo ego arbitror, quod sufficere debeat voluntas patris ad subsistendum hoc, quod vult pater. Volens enim non alia via utitur, nisi qua consilio voluntatis profertur.”

⁵⁴⁹ *Princ.* 1.2.6 (PG 11:134C): “Ita ergo et filii subsistentia generator ab eo.”

⁵⁵⁰ Wis. 7:25: “Ἀτιμὶς γὰρ ἐστὶ τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ δυνάμεως.”

“that by which he is strong,” by which also he established, preserved, and controlled all things visible and invisible, and by which he exercised his providence without any lack. The *breath* of this power, i.e. Wisdom, “so great and so immense” as it was, came to have a “subsistence of its own.” Of course, this breath proceeded from God’s power itself “as will proceeding from mind.” However, it was also a fact that “the will of God comes itself to be a power of God.” God’s Will was one of God’s powers and so Wisdom was also a breath of God’s will. And, in being begotten

“There comes into existence, therefore, another power, subsisting in its own proper nature, a kind of breath, as the passage of Scripture calls it, of the first and unbegotten power of God, drawing from its source whatever existence it has; and there is no time when it did not exist.”⁵⁵¹

Because this “breath” of God’s was the product of God’s power, it was also the product of his will. And as “another power, subsisting in its own proper nature,”⁵⁵² it was also the externalized and hypostatized will of the Father, taking on executive power⁵⁵³ in God’s outward movement. Later in his treatise, in the parts of it that have been preserved in the original Greek, Origen would go as far as to say that the Son was “begotten of the Father’s will,” and even to call him the “Son of his will,” because he was begotten of the “invisible and incorporeal God apart from any bodily feeling, like an act of will proceeding from mind.”⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵¹ *Princ.* 1.2.9 (PG 11:138A): “Efficitur igitur virtus altera in sua proprietate subsistens, ut ait sermo Scripturae, vapor quidam primae et ingenitae virtutis Dei, hoc quidem quod est, inde trahens; non est autem quando non fuerit.”

⁵⁵² *Princ.* 1.2.9.

⁵⁵³ See e.g. *Princ.* 1.2.10, where, referring to God’s omnipotence, he says: “God the Father is almighty because he holds dominion over all things...this dominion he exercises through his Word.”

⁵⁵⁴ *Princ.* 4.4.1 (PG 11:402B): “ex invisibili et incorporeo Verbum et sapientiam genitam dicimus absque ulla corporali passione, velut si voluntas procedat a mente.”

Clearly, Origen was wed to his paradigm of comparing the generation of the Son to the procession of will from within the mind. However, one would have expected that his complete theory to be that God/mind generated the Son/will, and that the Son was to the Father as will was to mind. Origen had committed much time to paralleling the nature of the Father to that of mind, and the natural corollary would have been to take the Son to be God's own will. Yet, he appears never unambiguously to have made such a statement. Even in the instance where he presented the Son as the externalized will of the Father, i.e. "another power, subsisting in its own proper nature,"⁵⁵⁵ he still presupposed that God was possessed of his own proper power and will, which in the Son were externalized as "another power." We know from other examples that, to Origen's mind, the Son, as image of the faculties of the Father, was not these same faculties in their fullness. Thus, although, for example, the Son was the image of the Father's goodness, it was clear to Origen that he was "not goodness itself"; the Son, "while being good, is yet not good purely and simply." Original goodness resided in the Father, but the Son and the Holy Spirit drew into themselves the nature of that goodness that existed "in the fount," that is, in the Father.⁵⁵⁶ In like manner, the clear implication was that the Son was not the will of the Father per se, but its externalized and hypostatized image.⁵⁵⁷ This quality of secondariness, which Origen ascribed to the Son as God's image, was central to his

⁵⁵⁵ *Princ.* 1.2.9.

⁵⁵⁶ *Princ.* 1.2.13. A more unsettling example can be found in the Greek fragment at *Princ.* 1.2.6: "We, therefore, having been made according to the image, have the Son, the original, as the truth of the noble qualities that are within us. And what we are to the Son, such is the Son to the Father, who is the truth."

⁵⁵⁷ I am not in complete agreement with R.P.C. Hanson (*The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: the Arian Controversy, 318-381* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007], p.66) who notes that "...Origen is not clear as to whether the Son is the Father's will or simply obeys the Father's will." A. van de Beek ("Origen as a Theologian of the Will," *RefR* 51:3 [Spring, 1998] p. 246) seems to follow the same thinking: "For if the Son is the will of God, he is also obedient." To me, the dilemma in Origen seems to have been whether the Son was the Father's own will or an externalized image of the Father's will. I have found nothing that suggests the *obedience* of the Son to the Father in a way that suggests potential for discord.

hierarchical vision of the Trinity. The Son and the Holy Spirit of the Father, “from whom the one is born and the other proceeds,”⁵⁵⁸ he likened to the two six-winged seraphim that in the Book of Isaiah (6:2) were said to be close to the throne of God.⁵⁵⁹ The most vivid proof of this hierarchy, of course, was Origen’s famous theory of the diminishing purview of the divine persons as one considered them in their turn.⁵⁶⁰

For those churchmen of the fourth century, desperately searching for precedents in support of their positions in the height of theological controversy, these points of irresolution had serious ramifications. Whether one considered the Son as having been generated in a way analogous to the procession of will from mind, or identified him with an image of the divine will, or the divine will itself, or described him as a product of the divine will, all would become markers of the ontological standing in which one held the Son in the theological speculations surrounding the Council of Nicaea. All sides would look back to Origen for their inspiration, but Origen himself clearly could have had no inkling of the theological problems that the coming centuries would bring and the authority his writings would assume during them. He was a seminal thinker, and one of the early pioneers who tried to put into writing a systematic account of Christian theology. His specific purpose here had been simply to put forward a convincing alternative to the materializing paradigms that had encroached into the theology of his day. He intended this theory to preclude notions of corporealist emanation, fracture, and

⁵⁵⁸ *Princ.* 1.2.13 (PG 11:144C): “quae est in eo fonte de quo vel natus est Filius, vel procedit Spiritus sanctus.”

⁵⁵⁹ *Princ.* 1.3.4; 4.3.14.

⁵⁶⁰ See, for example, the Greek fragment at *Princ.* 1.3.5: “The God and Father, who holds the universe together, is superior to every being that exists, for he imparts to each one from his own existence that which each one is; the Son, being less than the Father, is superior to rational creatures alone (for he is second to the Father); the Holy Spirit is still less, and dwells within the saints alone. So that in this way the power of the Father is greater than that of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and that of the Son is more than that of the Holy Spirit, and it turn the power of the Holy Spirit exceeds that of every other holy being.”

division in the divine nature, while maintaining proper theological order and the notion that none was unbegotten except the Father.⁵⁶¹ And although his final product was characterized⁵⁶² by a strong sense of hierarchy inside the Trinity that would enthuse many an anti-Nicene, from the perspective of our particular focus what I find more engaging is the way that Origen subordinated the all-important question of will to a different sense of hierarchy, not that hierarchy that applied to the internals of the Trinity, but a cosmic one that was stratified according to the degree of materiality of the various beings in the universe. As purely incorporeal and non-material, God was at the peak of this pyramid. All other beings, even the ostensibly invisible powers, were material, even if that materiality consisted of the most rarefied matter. As we shall see, Origen viewed matter as inherently labile, and therefore as the agent of waywardness in material beings.⁵⁶³ The only thing that would keep them in obedience to the divine will was their own concerted volitional effort,⁵⁶⁴ which in turn was a function, although not exclusively so, of their

⁵⁶¹ *Princ.* 1.2.6.

⁵⁶² This system of hierarchy had as its pillars the unbegottenness of the Father, and the Son's status as image of the Father. The secondariness in rank of the image was typified by such illustrations as that the Son was the image of God's goodness but "not goodness itself." The Son, "while being good is yet not good purely and simply" (*Princ.* 1.2.13). The clearest example of this hierarchy is in Origen's famous theory of the diminishing purview of each of the divine hypostases when they were considered in turn: the Father, as source of all existence, had jurisdiction over all creation; the Son, as the origin of reason, had jurisdiction over the rational beings; and the Spirit, as source of holiness, had jurisdiction over the saints.

⁵⁶³ *Princ.* 2.2.2 (PG 11:187B): "...material substance possesses such a nature that it can undergo every kind of transformation" ("materialis ista substantia hujus mundi habens naturam quae ex omnibus ad omnia transformatur").

⁵⁶⁴ *Princ.* 1.3.8 (PG 11:155BC): "But if at any time satiety should possess the heart of one of those who have come to occupy the perfect and highest stage, I do not think that such a one will be removed and fall from his place all of a sudden. Rather must he decline by slow degrees, so that it may sometimes happen, when a slight fall has occurred, that the man quickly recovers and returns to himself. A fall does not therefore involve utter ruin, but a man may retrace his steps and return to his former state and once more set his mind on that which through negligence has slipped from his grasp" ("Si autem aliquando satietas capit aliquem ex his qui in summo perfectoque constiterint gradu, non arbitror quod ad subitum quis evacuetur, ac decidat; sed paulatim et per partes defluere eum necesse est: ita ut fieri possit interdum, ut si brevis aliquis lapsus acciderit, et cito respiscat, atque in se revertatur, non penitus ruere, sed revocare pedem, et redire ad statum suum, et rursus statuere possit id quod per negligentiam fuerat lapsum").

own level of cognizance or wisdom.⁵⁶⁵ Needless to say, in this scheme, the will of God, as an expression of his omniscience, was absolute, and, coupled with the fact of his similarly absolute non-materiality, unwavering.

As we progress, we shall chance to look into this entire scheme further. For now, what we must note is that, irrespective of whether he was the divine will, an analog, or even a product thereof, the Son did, as Scripture witnessed, the same things as did the Father, and thus willed the same things as the Father. He was, as the book of Wisdom (7:25) stated, the “unspotted mirror of the energy or working of God.”⁵⁶⁶ Like the Father, he was absolutely incorporeal, and as such was not subject to change. Notwithstanding the internal hierarchy in the Trinity, the “omnipotence of the Father and the Son” was “one and the same,”⁵⁶⁷ and so, with respect to the broader chain of being we have described, the Son was on the same ontological level as the Father. Although the Son was presented as the externalized will of the Father, the relationship between Father and Son nevertheless was characterized by absolute identity of volitive action. There simply was no room for a concept even of *potential* disharmony of purposes inside the Trinity. The Son was both Wisdom and the image of the will of God, and, as one that like the Father was incorporeal in the absolute, he was omniscient and eternally steadfast in his purpose, and not subject to deliberative choice born of ignorance or a wavering generated by the inherent instability of material nature.⁵⁶⁸ In this respect, if one considered that there was a

⁵⁶⁵ *Princ.* 1.2.10 (PG 11:141AB): “...it is through wisdom, which is Christ, that God holds power over all things, not only by his own authority as Master, but also by the voluntary service of his subjects” (“...per sapientiam enim, quae est Christus, tenet Deus omnium potentatum, non solum dominantis auctoritate, verum etiam subiectorum spontaneo famulatu”).

⁵⁶⁶ *Princ.* 1.2.12. From Wis. 7:26: “ἔσοπτρον ἀκηλίδωτον τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐνεργείας.”

⁵⁶⁷ *Princ.* 1.2.10 (PG 11:141B): “...unam et eandem omnipotentiam Patris et Filii esse.”

⁵⁶⁸ Ignorance, materiality, and instability can all be interrelated if one understands materiality as a hindrance to true knowledge, which in turn creates ignorance, and leads to deliberation, wrong choice, and change. Part of the human journey to perfection was to obtain Wisdom: “...such as have been deemed

distinction between God and creation, then the Son in Origen's contemplations would without doubt have had to be placed on the divine side of that distinction.

CREATION: THE SPHERE OF CHANGE

In contrast to the divine realm, in which the persons of the Trinity were characterized by perfect non-materiality, infinite knowledge, and absolute oneness and steadfastness of purpose, the created world represented the domain of instability, change, and conflict. This proneness to instability had its origin in a combination of three factors: the created nature of souls, and the influence on them of the material nature of the universe. We note that there was not in Origen a concrete sense of a beginning to the universe.⁵⁶⁹ Rather, it was presented as existing from everlasting and flowing through an interminable, karmic succession of lapses and restorations. The lapses had been precipitated by the faltering of the created rational elements in the world, namely the souls, from their state of primordial submission and oneness with God, and the restorations were the result of their subsequent repentance and self-correction. This cycle of descents and ascents was not the unfolding of an inexorable cosmic fatalism, but rather

worthy of advancing to this degree through the sanctification of the Holy Spirit obtaining in addition the gift of wisdom by the power of the working of God's Spirit" (*Princ.* 1.3.8).

⁵⁶⁹ I must make clear here that although in passages such as *Princ.* 3.5.1 Origen talks of a "definite time" of the beginning of existence for this age, which encapsulates the *current* fall and restoration that the souls are passing through, there is, elsewhere, also a sense that there may be other ages that possibly preceded and will follow this one (see e.g. *Princ.* 2.3.5). In *Princ.* 3.5.3, Origen raised the point that, because God's omnipotent nature could never have been dormant and without movement, there was never "a time when goodness did not do good and omnipotence did not exercise its power." From this reasonable premise, however, some argued that there must always have existed an object of his virtue and omnipotence, namely the world, which, they then mistakenly concluded, was without beginning. Origen asserted that this world did indeed have a beginning, and added the "logical answer" that preserved "the rule of piety," namely that "God did not begin to work for the first time when he made this visible world, but that just as after the dissolution of this world there will be another one, so also we believe that there were others before this one existed."

the fruit of the souls' free will,⁵⁷⁰ which Origen held as absolutely sacrosanct for his entire theological system was committed to upholding free will and rejecting all notion of deterministic oppression in the universe. To appreciate the cosmic proportions of the repercussions of the souls' fall, one must understand that Origen did not view them as the animating principles in the human make-up only, but as preexisting powers that in their fall had come to animate and govern all the material entities in creation, from the beasts to the heavenly bodies, according to rational dictate. Thus, in this karmic system the deeds of a soul in a given incarnation would determine its destination in the next, with the entire succession of incarnations being subordinate to a grand, and possibly unending (admittedly, Origen is unclear on this), cycle of movements away from and then back to God.

THE INTELLIGENT BEINGS

The *intelligent beings* or *minds* were those intellectual entities that, “by an act of his will,” God created in the heavenly sphere in primordial time.⁵⁷¹ As minds, they were images of God, for God himself was the “mind and fount from which originated all intellectual existence or mind”⁵⁷² for no other reason than “himself, that is, his goodness.”⁵⁷³ As intelligent beings, the primary attribute of the minds was intellection, and the original object of their contemplation was God himself.⁵⁷⁴ These were the first of

⁵⁷⁰ *Princ.* 2.3.4: “For souls are not driven on some revolving course which brings them into the same cycle again after many ages, with the result that they do or desire this or that, but they direct the course of their deeds towards whatever end the freedom of their individual minds may aim at.”

⁵⁷¹ *Princ.* 2.9.1 (PG 11:225C): “τῷ βουλήματι αὐτοῦ.”

⁵⁷² *Princ.* 1.1.6 (PG 11:125A): “mens ac fons ex quo initium totius intellectualis naturae vel mentis est.”

⁵⁷³ *Princ.* 2.9.6 (PG 11:230B): “nullam habuit aliam creandi causam nisi propter seipsum, id est bonitatem suam.”

⁵⁷⁴ Cf. *Princ.* 3.6.3. For the sake of precision, this passage had to do with the End of the world and the consummation of the plight of mind/soul. Origen saw the End as the reestablishment of what had applied at

all the creatures that God made, and their coming into existence corresponded to the fashioning of what in the opening passage of the creation story were called the “heaven and the earth”—a reference not to firmament and dry land but to those ideal entities after which their earthly namesakes were named.⁵⁷⁵ The Platonism was evident in this explanation, but Origen would differ from Plato in that there would be no separation of the ideal from the material cosmos. As we shall see, the minds that God created in the beginning, and which represented the original world, were *themselves* to become the visible world of material creation as a result of their fall.⁵⁷⁶

As creatures, the nature of the minds was “neither their own nor eternal” but was “given by God.” Any good that existed in them was not there “by nature, but as a result of their Creator’s beneficence.” Most importantly, their being creatures also meant that the minds “were made when before they did not exist,” and this imparted to them an inherent instability; the shift from prior inexistence to existence made them “of necessity subject to change and alteration.”⁵⁷⁷ As was the case with their divine archetype—namely God, the supreme mind—the created minds also exercised, besides their powers of intellection, the faculty of will, which was of absolutely central importance to Origen’s system. It was part of God’s specific endowment to the minds that they have the power of free and voluntary movement. Only through these the good that was in the minds “might

the beginning (cf. *Princ.* 1.6.2: “The end is always like the beginning”), one of the key characteristics of which was God’s restoration as sole object of intellection in the minds.

⁵⁷⁵ *Princ.* 2.9.1.

⁵⁷⁶ *Princ.* 2.3.6. Origen found support for this theory from the creation story itself, which talked of the heaven and the earth being formed on the first day, and firmament and dry land being formed on the second (Gen. 1:1-8). Thus, he combined the biblical account with a Platonist metaphysics in his cosmogony.

⁵⁷⁷ *Princ.* 2.9.2 (PG 11:226C): “factae sunt cum ante non essent, hoc ipso quia non erant, et esse coeperunt, necessario convertibiles et mutabiles substiterunt.”

become their own, since it was preserved by their own free will.”⁵⁷⁸ That the minds had to exercise will in order to appropriate virtue spoke to their fragmented nature. In the divine mind, knowledge, virtue, and will were all simultaneous. For Greek thought, such simultaneity was the mark of the philosophical life, in which true knowledge bore virtue, and will was a concern only where there was ignorance. However, Origen understood the created minds as in a state of potential mutability and fragmented operation. They were endowed with virtue and, being in the presence of God, were given full knowledge, yet volition was required as a distinct act in order for them to appropriate that virtue and knowledge and make it their own. To be sure, the fact that, as we shall see in the next section, the minds also had a peculiar association with unstable matter which made their exertion of volitional effort to remain close to God all the more imperative. Nevertheless, Origen viewed these requisite exertions not as a disadvantage, but as a positive thing, for it provided the minds with the opportunity to exercise freedom. Willing was an action by which the minds, images as they were of the supremely incorporeal divine mind, both imitated their divine archetype and at the same time stood against the inherent determinism of the material world. Any deprivation of the minds’ ability freely to choose virtue by themselves Origen saw as a grave incursion of compulsion into the life of God’s creation and, ultimately, as an indictment against his absolute justice.

From this state of primordial closeness to God, Origen described how over time the minds began to wane in their volitional and intellectual energies. Instead of vigilance and the pursuit of virtue, the effort required to preserve the good began to take its toll.

⁵⁷⁸ *Princ.* 2.9.2. Cf. *Princ.* 3.1.20, where, taking his inspiration from Phil. 2:13 (“To will and to work are of God”), he argued: “...What we received from God was the power of movement in general and it is we who use this power for the worse or for the better, so we have received the power of working, by virtue of our being living creatures, and from the Creator the power of willing, but it is we who use the power of willing either for the noblest purposes or for the opposite ones, and likewise the power of working.”

This set off in the minds a process of withdrawal from the good and their gradual immersion into evil, which was nothing other than the lack of good.⁵⁷⁹ Here Origen was proposing something quite different from what both the Gnostics and the neo-Platonists had argued for as the cause behind the disruption to primordial harmony. The fall of the minds was caused neither by ignorance nor a misguided curiosity. There was not even a mention of a lack of knowledge among the minds or of a naive quest on their part to fathom secrets that they lacked the ability to comprehend, as the Gnostics had described. Neither was there something comparable to the daring and *tolma* that (the early) Plotinus had talked of. Rather, the minds fell away out of a faltering of will born of sheer “sloth and weariness of taking trouble to preserve the good, coupled with disregard and neglect of better things.”⁵⁸⁰ There is no reason to suspect that Origen was engaging in allegory here, or that he was anything but sincere in accepting this as cosmic history. Yet the myth of the minds’ fall seemed also to be a statement on spiritual life as it had been lived in the past, apart from Christ, and its inability to produce anything other than listless ennui unless one looked beyond merely theoretical rationalism to a life inspired by faith in God’s revelation. By promoting the will as the ultimate arbiter, Origen was moving beyond the classical Greek model⁵⁸¹ of the self-sufficiency of knowledge to produce virtue and advocating a response of faith and love to the supra-rational revelation made by God to humans. Of course, the minds in the cosmogonic myth had no real inkling of a specific revelation that they were called to respond to, but as Origen’s account unfolded, one would be revealed in the work of the Christ. Only the action of free will could

⁵⁷⁹ *Princ.* 2.9.2.

⁵⁸⁰ *Princ.* 2.9.2 (PG 11:226D): “desidia et laboris taedium in servando bono, et aversio ac negligentia meliorum.”

⁵⁸¹ See, e.g., Plato’s *Meno* (77b-78b). Cf. Diogenes Laertius (*Lives* 2.31) on Socrates: “There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance.”

overcome the systems of oppression that Origen had vowed to combat. These, one feels, must in Origen’s mind have included the view that the will must be subordinate to rationalist necessity and other predictable systems of rules that could only produce boredom, weariness, and apathy. To be sure, Origen was not rejecting outright the correlation between knowledge and right choice—on the contrary, the erudite Origen would be the defender *par excellence* of knowledge and learning—but only affirming the importance, for creatures, of the will, enacted as free assent to faith, as the ultimate factor in whether the minds appropriated and made their own the virtue and knowledge that had been instilled in them from without. It was by their voluntary submission to the Word of God that the souls showed themselves to be “receptive of his wisdom.”⁵⁸² For it was “through Wisdom, which is Christ, that God holds power over all things, not only by his own authority as Master, but also by the voluntary service of his subjects.”⁵⁸³

From their initial closeness to God, therefore, there began in the minds a process of descent that Origen envisaged as a cooling. Scripture had always associated the divine with fire, and fervency with zeal for God,⁵⁸⁴ but here the minds were turning cold toward him. It was on this basis that Origen began to refer to fallen minds as *souls*,⁵⁸⁵ because, he argued, the term *psyche* was derived from ψύχεται (*to be made cold*).⁵⁸⁶ Scripture, he averred, was replete with references to the lower nature of soul.⁵⁸⁷ Without doubt, there were echoes here of the neo-Platonist conception of the primeval dissent, separation, and

⁵⁸² *Princ.* 2.3.7.

⁵⁸³ *Princ.* 1.2.10 (PG 11:141AB): “Per sapientiam enim, quae est Christus, tenet Deus omnium potentatum, non solum dominantis auctoritate, verum etiam subjectorum spontaneo famulatu.”

⁵⁸⁴ E.g., Heb. 12:29: “Our God is a consuming fire”; Heb 1:7: “Who maketh his angels spirits and his ministers a burning fire”; Ex. 3:2: “The angel of the Lord appeared in a flame of fire in a bush”; Rom. 12:11: “fervent in spirit”; inter alia.

⁵⁸⁵ *Princ.* 2.8.3: “Mind when it fell was made soul, and soul in its turn when furnished with virtues will become mind.”

⁵⁸⁶ *Princ.* 2.8.3.

⁵⁸⁷ *Princ.* 2.8.2.

subsequent downward spiral of the souls, which were a lower manifestation of Soul, which in turn had come forth from Nous (*mind*), the higher hypostasis. But there were also crucial differences. The souls in Origen were not new hypostases that were born of and then separated from mind, but were at all times one and the same entity as the minds, just a degenerate transformation thereof. Because of their laxity and poor choice, the minds/souls were plunged into a process that clouded, and in the worst cases extinguished,⁵⁸⁸ their original intellectual faculties. According to Rufinus, Origen defined soul as “an existence possessing imagination and desire [substantia φανταστική et ὀρητική], which qualities can be expressed in Latin...as *capable of feeling* and *movement* [potest sensibilis et mobilis].”⁵⁸⁹ This was in keeping with philosophical precedent,⁵⁹⁰ but it also presented, again in broad agreement with neo-Platonist postulation, the traits of soul as a crucial step down from those purely rational activities of mind. This was reinforced by his comparison of the responses of irrational and rational beings to stimuli. An irrational soul reacted impulsively to images it received from the imagination. Oppositely, the rational soul had “something besides its imaginative nature, namely reason, which judges the images.”⁵⁹¹ This distinction spoke to the basic problem of the fallen souls: the loss of their original rationality and their consequent lapse into varying degrees of ignorance, which left them at the mercy of their impulses and unable effectively to discern between good and evil. The degree of fall among the different souls

⁵⁸⁸ *Princ.* 2.10.3. Here, Origen interpreted the “outer darkness” (Matt. 8:12) not as a place but as a “description of those who through their immersion in the darkness of deep ignorance have become separated from every gleam of reason and intelligence.”

⁵⁸⁹ *Princ.* 2.8.1.

⁵⁹⁰ Cf. Aristotle (*De an.* 3.9 [432^a15-17]): “The soul of animals is characterized by two faculties, the faculty of discrimination, which is the work of thought and sense, and the faculty of originating local movement;” Philo (*Leg.* 2.7 [23]): “The soul is a nature which has taken to itself imagination and desire” (“ψυχή δέ ἐστι φύσις προσειληφύια φαντασίαν καὶ ὀρηγήν”).

⁵⁹¹ *Princ.* 3.1.3 (PG:11:252A): “Τὸ μέντοι λογικὸν ζῶον καὶ λόγον ἔχει πρὸς τῇ φανταστικῇ φύσει, τὸν κρίνοντα τὰς φαντασίας.”

varied, so that some retained a residual intellectual faculty that Origen called *spirit*,⁵⁹² and which gave them a relative advantage in acting in virtue.

The great diversity in the levels of disobedience and apostasy that took hold among the plethora of souls is what gave rise to the spectacular variety that one could witness in the created world.⁵⁹³ In all this, however, God remained unimpeachable. It was neither he, nor fate, nor chance, but the souls themselves, with their freely made choices, who brought about their own apostasy and catastrophe,⁵⁹⁴ and the magnitude of the resultant lapse down the ontological chain that an individual soul experienced corresponded, in a natural, just, and exact manner, to the magnitude of its own voluntary turn away from God:

“This...was the cause of diversity among rational creatures, a cause that takes its origin not from the will or judgment of the Creator, but from the decision of the creature’s own freedom. God, however, who then felt it just to arrange his creation according to merit, gathered the diversities of minds into the harmony of a single world, so as to furnish, as it were, out of these diverse vessels or souls or minds, one house, in which there must be ‘not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth, and some unto honor and some unto dishonor’ [2 Tim 2:20].”⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹² *Princ.* 2.10.7.

⁵⁹³ *Princ.* 2.1.1: “Now since the world is so very varied and comprises so great a diversity of rational beings, what else can we assign as the cause of its existence except the diversity in the fall of those who decline from unity in dissimilar ways.”

⁵⁹⁴ *Princ.* 3.5.5: “This arrangement, I say, some men have not understood; and because they have not perceived that this variety of arrangement has been instituted by God as a result of previous causes arising from free will, they have supposed that everything in this world is governed either by chance movements or by fateful necessity and that nothing is within the power of our will. As a result they have been unable to free God’s providence from the imputation of blame.”

⁵⁹⁵ *Princ.* 2.9.6 (PG 11:230C): “Et haec existit causa...diversitatis inter rationabiles creaturas, non ex conditoris voluntate vel iudicio originem trahens, sed propriae libertatis arbitrio. Deus vero cui jam

In his just and righteous providence, God's work remained to ensure that these multifarious, disparate, and volitively autonomous parts could come together in a system, the world, without breaching the free will of the constituent beings therein but maintaining a strict and just meritocracy. Only God could superintend a system of such complexity,⁵⁹⁶ and in this respect, one could view the world not as a chaotic agglomeration of discordant parts but as a body composed of "many members"⁵⁹⁷ that was held together by the "power and reason of God as by one soul."⁵⁹⁸

BODY

One of the most salient characteristics of the world that resulted from the fall of the souls was its materiality. Yet Origen's precise account of the origin of matter, its appearance in his theology which till now had been dominated by the plight of the souls, and the nature of its relationship with the souls all require some analysis and systemization. *Hyle* or *matter* was that theoretical substrate which underlay all bodies. The great variety of bodies that made up the world was produced by the mingling of matter with the four qualities—heat, cold, dryness, and wetness. Matter was theoretically distinct from the qualities but it was never "found actually existing apart from them."⁵⁹⁹ Thus, matter always existed as a constituent of bodies, which themselves represented the

creaturam suam pro merito dispensare justum videbatur, diversitates mentium in unius mundi consonantiam traxit, quo velut unam domum, in qua inesse deberent non solum vasa aurea et argentea, sed et lignea et fictilia, et alia quidem ad honorem, alia autem ad contumeliam, ex istis diversis vasis, vel animis, vel mentibus ornaret."

⁵⁹⁶ *Princ.* 3.1.14: "For souls are, so to speak, innumerable, and their habits are innumerable, and equally so are their movements, their purposes, their inclinations and their impulses, of which there is only one perfect superintendent, who has full knowledge both of the times and the appropriate aids and the paths and the ways, namely, the God and Father of the universe."

⁵⁹⁷ 1 Cor. 12:12.

⁵⁹⁸ *Princ.* 2.1.3. Origen's invocation of *world soul*, so beloved of the Stoics, might be taken here as a statement on how far he would allow their determinism.

⁵⁹⁹ *Princ.* 2.1.4. Cf. *Timaeus* 51-A.

combination of matter with qualities. However, his thought on the relation of bodies with the souls was not as straightforward. In some passages, he seemed to indicate that souls came into contact with bodies only because of their laxity and subsequent turn to evil. As long as a soul continued to abide in the good it would have had “no experience of union with a body.”⁶⁰⁰ Souls in and of themselves were bodiless, this line of thinking proclaimed, and in this respect the implication was that they differed from God, who also was bodiless, only in the fact that souls, unlike God, were creatures.⁶⁰¹

Taken in isolation, one might take these comments as proof of an incipient dualism in Origen. The souls’ coalescence with bodies on account of their disobedience and moral apostasy made matter seem concomitant with sin and thus as lying outside of God’s creative sphere. After all, God was the source only of good things, and not few were those thinkers of Origen’s time who separated matter from the things created by God and invested it with an ontological status that was antipodal to that of God himself.⁶⁰² However, a more complete reading of the master shows he was no dualist. Scripture had declared that God created all things by “number and measure,”⁶⁰³ and Origen took this as evidence that God had created both the souls *and* matter: *number* pointed to the precise number of minds that God in his providence had created and was able to oversee and provide for, while *measure* was a reference to the analogous quantity of matter he had fashioned ahead of time for the production of the physical world.⁶⁰⁴

⁶⁰⁰ *Princ.* 1.8.4.

⁶⁰¹ *Princ.* 1.7.1: “All souls and all rational natures, whether holy or wicked, were made or created. All these are incorporeal in respect of their proper nature, but though incorporeal they are nevertheless made.”

⁶⁰² See, for example, Hellenistic perceptions of Plato’s teaching such as Diog. Laert. 3.69: “He set forth two universal principles, God and matter, and he calls God mind and cause; he held that matter is devoid of form and unlimited, and that composite things arise out of it.”

⁶⁰³ Wis. 11:20.

⁶⁰⁴ *Princ.* 2.9.1. In the Greek fragment of this passage on the creation of the intelligent beings is the controversial detail that Origen put a ceiling on their number to as many as God “could grasp and keep in

Moreover, at various points he began to talk of the original incorporeality of souls as more of a speculative abstraction than a concrete reality. In this more subtle view, he held that souls, while theoretically distinct, could never realistically be considered separate from matter. He explained:

“While the original creation was of rational beings, it is only in idea and thought that a material substance is separable from them, and that though this substance seems to have been produced for them or after them, yet never have they lived or do they live without it; for we shall be right in believing that life without a body is found in the Trinity alone.”⁶⁰⁵

A soul was bodiless only “in idea and thought,” for pure bodilessness was a quality that belonged to God alone. Remarkably, Origen would take this claim much further, implying that to consider the soul as separate from matter, because of that certain logical priority it held over it, was as misguided as considering the Father as separate from the Son and Holy Spirit on account of his being their origin and source.⁶⁰⁶ In addition, if one accepted that they were separate, and that the soul existed prior to matter, then it followed that matter was created from nothingness and that it would naturally “cease to exist when the need it had served had passed away.”⁶⁰⁷ Given that all things in this universe worked toward one and the same end, it followed that if one type of being could be shown to exist without body, then it would be possible for all things to do so.⁶⁰⁸ Such a conclusion

hand and subject to his providence.” Origen considered that God’s power had to be finite “for if the divine power were infinite, of necessity it could not even understand itself, since the infinite is by its nature incomprehensible.” For a thing to be comprehensible, it had to have a beginning and an end (*Princ.* 3.5.2).

⁶⁰⁵ *Princ.* 2.2.2 (PG 11:187B): “materiam vero substantiam opinione quidem et intellectu solo separari ab eis, et pro ipsis vel post ipsas effectam videri, sed nunquam sine ipsa eas vel vixisse vel vivere, solius namque Trinitatis incorporea vita existere recte putabitur.”

⁶⁰⁶ *Princ.* 2.2.1.

⁶⁰⁷ *Princ.* 2.2.1 (PG 11:187A): “ita et esse desineret, cum ususejus ministerii praeterisset.”

⁶⁰⁸ *Princ.* 2.3.2.

would have pointed to the end of matter in the restored state of the souls. But this went against the witness of Scripture, which proclaimed that matter would persevere in the hereafter. According to Paul, what in this world was corruptible and mortal, namely the body, would in its redeemed state not cease to exist but put on incorruption and immortality.⁶⁰⁹

We have to be clear here. The body which Origen associated with the soul was not limited to the flesh that humans possessed in their earthly life, but was the material substrate, ever varying in its qualities, that was always coupled with the soul irrespective of its ontological status, and always reflecting, either through its own rarefaction or densification, the spiritual state of the soul with which it was associated. He explained:

“Material substance possesses such a nature that it can undergo every kind of transformation. When therefore it is drawn down to lower beings it is formed into the grosser and more solid condition of body and serves to distinguish the visible species of this world in all their variety. But when it ministers to more perfect and blessed beings, it shines in the splendor of celestial bodies, and adorns either the angels of God or the sons of the resurrection with the garments of a spiritual body.”⁶¹⁰

A soul was always coupled with matter, which, depending on the soul’s state of virtue, would vary between heavy and rarefied. On the question of how many incarnations a soul would undergo before its final restoration, the *Peri Archon* gave a somewhat garbled

⁶⁰⁹ *Princ.* 2.3.2. The reference was to 1 Cor. 15:53-56.

⁶¹⁰ *Princ.* 2.2.2 (PG 11:187BC): “materialis ista substantia hujus mundi habens naturam quae ex omnibus ad omnia transformatur, cum ad inferiores quosque trahitur, in crassiorem corporis statum solidioremque formatur, ita ut visibiles istas mundi species variasque distinguat; cum vero perfectioribus ministrat et beatoribus, in fulgore coelestium corporum micat, et spiritualis corporis indumentis vel angelos Dei, vel filios resurrectionis exornat.”

account. In one passage, which has been preserved in the Greek, it suggested several transmigrations of the soul, through a variety of positions on the ontological scale, before its final restoration.⁶¹¹ How Origen imagined the seamless migration of the soul from body to body, so that it never was left bodiless, was not explained. Elsewhere, however, he suggested that at death, the body would be “corrupted and scattered,” and, like a seed, be raised up at the resurrection and given exalted form in accordance with the virtue of its soul, or be subjected to punishments, which Origen described variously.⁶¹² We cannot here dwell on these vexing incongruities, but simply note that at the time of restoration matter would abandon the “grosser” state it had assumed through its association with souls which, through laxity and disobedience toward God, had passed to a lower level of being, and it would, through association with souls resplendent with virtue, once again return to its original condition which was “so pure and refined that we must think of it as being like the ether, as it were of a heavenly purity and clearness.”⁶¹³

Thus did Origen deal with incipient dualism. He posited that God created both the souls and the bodies, the association between which existed *ab principio*. In this light, while matter was not in itself the cause behind the lapse of souls from their original closeness to God, its being patient of “every kind of transformation” pointed to its inherent instability, and its crude densification with the downward spiral of the errant

⁶¹¹ *Princ.* 1.8.4 (Gk.) describes the trajectory of soul most vividly: “By some inclination toward evil these souls lose their wings and come into bodies, first of men; then through their association with the irrational passions, after the allotted span of human life they are changed into beasts from which they sink to the level of insensitive nature. Thus that which is by nature fine and mobile, namely the soul, first becomes heavy and weighed down, and because of its wickedness comes to dwell in a human body; after that, when the faculty of reason is extinguished, it lives the life of an irrational animal; and finally even the gracious gift of sensation is withdrawn and it changes into the insensate life of a plant. From this condition it rises again through the same stages and is restored to its heavenly place. On earth by means of virtue souls grow wings and soar aloft, but when in heaven their wings fall off through evil and they sink down and become earthbound and are mingled with the gross nature of matter.”

⁶¹² *Princ.* 2.10.3-8.

⁶¹³ *Princ.* 1.6.4 (PG 11:170C): “ita pura erit atque purgata, ut aetheris in modum et coelestis cuiusdam puritatis atque possit intelligi.” Cf. *Princ.* 3.6.4.

soul made it synonymous with mortality itself. In this context, Origen pointed to another aspect of the symbiosis between soul and body. Over and against those anti-materialists of his time, who argued that the soul's proper mode of life was to live free of body because the latter was the medium through which "death can have its effect,"⁶¹⁴ Origen took the opposite position that the role of the soul was not to separate itself from body but to act as "clothing of the body" and "an ornament" which covered and concealed its mortal nature.⁶¹⁵ Thus, although non-material only in theory, we still can begin to see the mind/soul as the locus of the freedom that characterized God, its divine archetype, operating in the world and directed against what would otherwise have been the inexorable determinism of pure materiality. Soul sanctified matter by leading it and forcing it to act against its own character, but instead to follow the soul and act freely and non-deterministically. Considered this way, the wearying exertions required of minds/souls in primordial time and their ultimate fall become more understandable.

At the same time, if one believed that when souls had been fully restored bodies would be put away and matter be destroyed, then it followed that, if by their God-given power of free will souls were again to fall away from God, matter would have to be created a second time because the variety that makes up a world could in no way be produced without matter.⁶¹⁶ Thus, apart from the aforementioned evidence of Scripture which upheld that matter would endure, the theory of a final destruction of matter seemed implausible in Origen's eyes also because, without a continued association with matter, the rational souls would seem to hold their final exalted position "forever irremovably," and "forget that they had been placed in their final state of blessedness by the grace of

⁶¹⁴ *Princ.* 2.3.2.

⁶¹⁵ *Princ.* 2.3.2.

⁶¹⁶ *Princ.* 2.3.3.

God and not by their own goodness.”⁶¹⁷ The rational souls sanctified and exalted matter, leading it to act against its own deterministic manner, while matter, paradoxically, acted as a kind of guarantor of the continued free will of the souls. By continuing to be associated with souls, matter provided them with an abiding theoretical avenue of change and volitive exertion away, thus affording their free will real and actuable potency. From here we see how souls stood in contrast to God. As we saw above, souls once did not exist “and then began to exist,” and therefore were “of necessity subject to change and alteration.”⁶¹⁸ Their associated materiality was the avenue, though not the cause, of expressing this change and alteration. The association corroborated by Origen’s insistence that God was non-material, which in turn reinforced his immutability.

THE CHRIST

In this context of cosmic fallenness and restoration, Origen saw the work and purpose of Christ as the pivotal event which changed the course of the universe. Yet, preceding the physical Incarnation and earthly mission of Christ was an entire prehistory which Origen described as having taken place in the world of the minds and prepared the way for the coming of the Son of God in the flesh. It was there that Origen laid down the foundations of a Christology and theory of redemption that brought together various trajectories in his thought into a unique, though ultimately highly problematic, synthesis. The Incarnation was at its core the natural product of the love that God had for his creatures. In contrast to what the Gnostics may have claimed about the creator being an evil deity who was unconnected to the God revealed in Christ, Origen affirmed the view

⁶¹⁷ *Princ.* 2.3.3 (PG 11:192A): “ignorent se Dei gratia et non sua virtute in illo fine beatitudinis constitisse.”

⁶¹⁸ *Princ.* 2.9.2.

that all things had been made through the Son of God (Col. 1:16) and that his creatures were the objects of his love (Wis. 11:24). Out of this love, God granted to all the rational beings that he had created a “participation in himself...proportionate to the loving affection with which it had clung to him.”⁶¹⁹ As we saw, however, the “loving affection” that the souls exhibited back toward their creator varied, from warmer to feebler, and this solely “by reason of the faculty of free will.”⁶²⁰ And so they fell, to varying degrees, according to their scale of apathy toward God.

However, out of all of the souls that had been created, one of the souls—the very one talked of in Christ’s words, “No man taketh away my soul”⁶²¹—did not fall away. Rather, it clung to God with determination, from the very beginning of creation and ever after, in a union “that was inseparable and indissoluble.”⁶²² It was not uncommon in the thought of late antiquity for love to be seen as a species of volition⁶²³ and, in this respect, Origen was no exception; the love that the extraordinary soul displayed toward God was a matter of its will. But the reason why this and no other soul displayed such love remained unexplained by Origen. This soul had neither an ontological advantage over the others—it was a soul like they were—nor any guiding knowledge or insight that was superior to that possessed by the other souls. In fact, Origen’s clear purpose had been to establish the meritocratic nature of that soul’s pending participation in the divine. Any advantage that this particular soul held over the others would have called into question the deservedness of the favor that the soul was, as we shall see, about to be shown. Once

⁶¹⁹ *Princ.* 2.6.3 (PG 11:211B): “participationem sui universis rationabilibus creaturis invisibiliter praebuit, ita ut tantum ex eo unusquisque participii sumeret, quanto erga cum dilectionis inhaesisset affectu.”

⁶²⁰ *Princ.* 2.6.3 (PG 11:211BC): “pro liberi arbitrii facultate.”

⁶²¹ John 10:17-18.

⁶²² *Princ.* 2.6.3 (PG 11:211C): “inseparabiliter ei atque indissociabiliter inhaerens.”

⁶²³ Diogenes Laertius 7.106. Apart from love (*ἀγάπησις*), the other species of will for Zeno were benevolence (*εὐνοία*), goodwill (*εὐμένεια*), and affection (*ἀσπασμός*).

again, Origen simply was pointing to the primacy of will as ultimate determinant in his understanding of the relations of creatures with God. In a system of revealed religion, it could not be any other way. The only bridge between human cognitive ability and the absolute knowledge of the divine was an act of will, love, and faith. There was neither a tempter, nor a notion of inherent evil that might have explained the counter-rational turn of the souls, so why only one from among the plethora of equally endowed and equally informed souls exercised such faith and stayed true to God could only remain a mystery. Neither was the degree and distribution of the lapse of the souls statistically determined. To be sure, Origen's depiction of the variety in the world as the result of the varied falls of the souls certainly seemed patient of a statistical interpretation, but without doubt he would have viewed statistical necessity as just another form of the compulsion that he found so repugnant. In the end, as incomprehensible as it might appear, we can only envisage the volitive behavior of the virtuous soul as being part of a system of truly unforced, possibly random, choices within a general context of divine providence that was both perfectly respectful of the free will of individual agents therein and strictly merit-based.⁶²⁴

⁶²⁴ Michael Frede (*Will*, 2011) identified three conceptions of willing in ancient thought. The first, which he attributed to Aristotle, understood will as the expression of the rational faculty of the soul, which contrasted with desire, the expression of the irrational part of the soul. This was not necessarily free will, but rather rationality in necessary action. Second was the Stoic view that, rejecting Aristotle's partitioning of the soul, amounted to what for Frede was the first unambiguous articulation of a theory of free will. Here, the unitary mind assented or not to suggestions that rose up from within it. The type of suggestions that arose were a reflection of the state of mind, which in turn was the end result of a chain of causality, in line with the generally deterministic Stoic worldview. The third was the neo-Peripatetic view, represented by such thinkers as Alexander of Aphrodisias, which, dissatisfied with what it saw as the residual determinism in the Stoic position, argued that will was free only if, when one chose to perform a given deed, it could just as well have chosen a different one. This was the "principle of alternate possibilities." Without entering into too much analysis here, it seems to me that, by Frede's measure, Origen generally was an adherent of a Stoic view. We saw how it fell to mind to respond to various external stimuli (*Princ.* 3.1.3). Yet, in his description of the action of Christ's soul, which had no determined advantage over the other souls which all lapsed, Origen seemed to be inclining toward a view close to that of Frede's Alexander. It almost resembled the view that Frede found particularly objectionable (p. 151), namely that "we are able to make

In line, therefore, with God’s intention to grant a participation in himself proportionately to a soul’s response to God, this lone soul would become, as a reward for its virtue, “the soul of the Wisdom and Word of God and of the truth and the true light.”⁶²⁵ Other souls, which had exhibited at least some warmth toward God and thus mitigated their degree of lapse, would have kept some of their virtuous traits as well, but this soul received the Son wholly and completely, and entered into his light and splendor. To a pre-eminent degree it was made “one spirit” with him according to Paul’s⁶²⁶ promise.⁶²⁷ In the Incarnation, whereby the Son of God took on a human body, this soul became the mediating principle between God and the flesh, for it was not possible for the divine nature to mingle directly with a body without there being a medium.⁶²⁸ The soul, being a rational existence, was able both to enter the word, wisdom, and truth that were found in the divine, but also in turn to receive the Son of God wholly in itself. So complete was this mutual embrace between the Son of God and the soul of Jesus that Origen articulated what was a nascent doctrine of *communicatio idiomatum*: the soul, and the body coupled with it, could legitimately be called the Son of God and power of God, Christ and the wisdom of God; and the Son of God, on the other hand, could be called Jesus and the Son of man. In like manner, the Son of God was said to have died, whereas he who was said to come in the glory of God the Father was also called the Son of man. In short, “throughout the whole of Scripture, while the divine nature was spoken of in human terms the human nature is in turn adorned with marks that belong to the divine

absolute and unconditioned choices which have no further explanation.” The soul of Christ seemed to be exercising an absolute volition of mysterious origin.

⁶²⁵ *Princ.* 2.6.3 (PG 11:211C): “utpote sapientiae et verbo Dei et veritati ac luci verae.”

⁶²⁶ 1 Cor. 6:17: “he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him.”

⁶²⁷ *Princ.* 2.6.3.

⁶²⁸ *Princ.* 2.6.3. We are reminded of Origen’s view in *Princ.* 2.3.2 that “as...Christ is the clothing of the soul, so by an intelligible kind of reasoning the soul is said to be the clothing of the body; for it is an ornament of the body, covering and concealing its mortal nature.”

prerogative.”⁶²⁹ Thus, Origen argued, the passage, “They shall both be in one flesh,”⁶³⁰ applied more properly to the Word of God and his soul than it did to a man and his wife. After this union of the Son with his soul, there was no longer potential for discord, and it was impossible for the soul of Christ to sin. By “firmness of purpose, immensity of affection, and an inextinguishable warmth of love,” he explained, “all susceptibility to change or alteration was destroyed.” This was because “what formerly depended upon the will was by the influence of long custom changed into nature.”⁶³¹ The force of habit had transformed the concerted action of will into an extension of nature. This was a kind of union with the divine that other created souls simply were not privy to,⁶³² although in theory they could have been. In the same vein, Origen even added the striking claim that “as the Son and the Father are one, so also the soul which the Son assumed and the Son himself are one.”⁶³³

Here, we must make a digression and note that, to any historian of Christian doctrine, Origen’s thoughts thus far on Christ and the Incarnation must give pause, particularly because in them one can espy theological trajectories that both spoke to contentious questions of his day, but which also can be viewed as precedent to what were to become matters of enormous disagreement in the centuries that followed. The most

⁶²⁹ *Princ.* 2.6.3 (PG 11:212A): “per omnem Scripturam tam divina natura humanis vocabulis appellatur, quam humana natura divinae nuncupationis insignibus decoratur.”

⁶³⁰ Matt 19:5-6; Gen. 2:24.

⁶³¹ *Princ.* 2.6.5 (PG 11:213BC): “anima Christi ita elegit diligere iustitiam, ut pro immensitate dilectionis inconvertibiliter ei atque inseparabiliter inhæreret, ita ut propositi firmitas, et affectus immensitas, et dilectionis inextinguibilis calor, omnem sensum conversionis atque immutationis abscinderet, et quod in arbitrio erat positum, longi usus affectu jam versum sit in naturam.” Of course, one of the earliest articulations of a theory of habituated virtue was Aristotle’s *Eth. nic.*

⁶³² In *Princ.* 4.4.4, Origen stated that no human was free of transgression, and so the relationship that Peter, Paul and the saints had with God could not be compared to the union of the Son of God with the soul that was in Jesus because the soul that was in Jesus was without sin and “chose the good, before it knew the evil” (Is. 7:15-16).

⁶³³ *Princ.* 4.4.4 (Gk.): “Ἵσπερ ὁ Υἱὸς καὶ ὁ Πατὴρ ἐν εἰσίν, οὕτω καὶ ἦν εἰληφεν ὁ Υἱὸς ψυχὴν, καὶ αὐτός, ἐν εἰσίν.” This fragment is preserved in Theodoret’s *Dial.* II (PG 83:197AB).

obvious of these was centered on his description of the mode of union of the Son of God with the soul of Jesus. On one level, Origen clearly was ascribing to Christ a divine dimension, and thus offering a rebuttal to the *psilanthropism* of such sects as the Ebionites, who propounded a low Christology and a view of Jesus as merely a human. On the other hand, his understanding of the unification into one entity of what were two clear agents, the Son of God and the pre-existing soul of Jesus, on what was fundamentally a moral and volitional basis, seemed to pioneer a Christological view that others such as Nestorius would later be accused of championing. Ironically, whereas Nestorius' explanation of why that particular human, viz. Jesus, was selected for the extraordinary favors of the Son of God would be tainted by a sense of divine caprice, Origen's view, for all its karmic spectacularism in the eyes of later generations, would at least preserve a sense of meritocracy and justice by arguing that the causes of the favor shown to Jesus' soul lay in its commendable behavior in primordial time.⁶³⁴

Nevertheless, perhaps the most notorious theological tendency that Origen gave voice to would remain that which was contained in his comment that the oneness of the soul of Jesus with the Son of God resembled that of the Father and the Son. This appears

⁶³⁴ On the other hand, we must also note that Origen stands outside the dichotomy that Joseph Lienhard ("The 'Arian' Controversy: Some Categories Reconsidered," in *TS* 48[1987]: 415-37) proposed between theories of *miahypostatism* and *dyohypostatism* that came to a head in the fourth century. There (426-7), Lienhard argued that it was the miahypostatists who were more likely to consider the human nature of Christ, because they had to explain the biblical passages that suggested the Son's subordination to the Father. Oppositely, the dyohypostatists in this theory, who in the fourth century came mainly from the anti-Nicene camp, would not have felt such a need because they already saw the Son as subordinate. In fact, Arius would preach a proto-Apollinarism, where in Christ the subordinate Logos took the place of a human soul. Origen defies this kind of categorization, because he was clearly a dyohypostatist—he saw the Son as other from the Father—but not one who saw only the will as linking Son to Father as the extreme Arius was to do. Yet, at the same time, he had a strong sense of the human nature of the Christ. His problem would be that he would set up a volitional connection between the two natures, which positioned him more as a proto-Nestorian than a proto-Arian.

to have been an isolated statement⁶³⁵—perhaps it was no more than a rhetorical flourish—but, taken in abstraction from whatever else Origen had already said on the subject of the Son’s relation to the Father, it opened the way for the intimation that his oneness with the Father was a matter of will, a volitive union. For some, there would be kerygmatic allure in presenting the Son as the moral exemplar who earned his sonship through virtue, and pioneered the way for other creatures. The fact remained, however, that if oneness of nature between the soul of Jesus and the Son of God had been a matter of volitional habit, then this had obvious ramifications for the true deity of the Son if this same paradigm were projected onto the intra-Trinitarian discussion. It was precisely this type of analogy, which in time came to be expanded into a comparison between the unity in the Trinity to the concord between volitive agents in creation at large, that would become, as we shall see in the next chapter, a great specter that struck horror in those defenders of the Council of Nicea who saw in their opponents’ every mention of volitional harmony in the Trinity an attempt to question the Son’s true divinity. These would become some of the unsavory fruits of Origen’s hearty embrace of will as the great guarantor of fairness and justice in his theology.

The souls’ fall away from God and God’s plan that they be returned back to their original state of closeness to God, without of course violating their free will, imparted to the world an inherently cyclic life as it flowed from primordial lapse back to eschatological restoration. The fall and separation from God provoked in the souls a sense of pain because of their “unstable and disordered condition”—it was as if they were

⁶³⁵ However, we also must note that the contentious passage was a lone Greek fragment preserved by Theodoret (*Dial.* 2) that has been included in *Princ.* 4.4.4. We cannot be sure whether Rufinus had smoothed away other such statements, or that the preserved fragment was not a modification of Origen’s original words.

limbs torn away from their body⁶³⁶—and when the cosmic cycle had reached its lowest ebb, then the Son of God, united with the soul of Jesus and its body, came into the world to save it. For Origen the most salient proof of this disorder in the world was the sense of discord that had come to characterize the relations between the rulers among the human race and their subjects. Both social strata had been overcome by weakness, their capacity respectively to rule and to obey had been “corrupted and profaned,”⁶³⁷ and as a result the world had been pushed to the very edge of destruction.

In this context, Origen tellingly viewed the work of Christ in terms that had at their center the potentially opposed notions of the primacy of will and the cultivation of obedience. In coming, Christ’s purpose was to restore to the rulers the ability to rule, and to their subjects the capacity to obey. In both instances, he did this through his own example. By coming into the world, Christ, in accordance with Scripture, established his own rule and would continue to reign until he had put his enemies under his feet (1 Cor. 15:27). Thus he restored the corrupted laws of government, and by the example of his own rule he taught the rulers “the arts of control.”⁶³⁸ On the other hand, he also taught humans the virtue of obedience. By emptying himself, taking the form of a servant, and being obedient even unto death, he taught submission and obedience to those who “could in no other way obtain salvation except through obedience.”⁶³⁹ In being obedient, he first

⁶³⁶ *Princ.* 2.10.5 (PG 11:238A): “Just as, when the limbs of the body are loosened and torn away from their respective connections, we feel an intense and excruciating pain, so when the soul is found apart from the order and connection and harmony in which it was created by God for good action and useful experience and not at concord with itself in the connection of its rational movements, it must be supposed to bear the penalty and torture of its own want of cohesion and to experience the punishment due to its unstable and disordered condition (et inconstantiae suae, atque inordinationis sentire supplicium).”

⁶³⁷ *Princ.* 3.5.6 (PG 11:331A): “corruptam profanamque.”

⁶³⁸ *Princ.* 3.5.6 (PG 11:331A): “regendi...moderamina.”

⁶³⁹ *Princ.* 3.5.6 (PG 11:331A): “ut obedientiam doceret eos qui non aliter nisi per obedientiam salutem consequi poterant.”

fulfilled in himself “what he wished to be fulfilled by others.”⁶⁴⁰ And once all things had been subjected to him, he would, in accordance with Paul’s words,⁶⁴¹ subject himself, and all those who were included in him, back to the Father, and thus complete the consummation and restoration of the cosmos.⁶⁴² This subjection was to reveal “the blessedness of our perfection,” and it would represent the “crowning glory” of his work because he offered to the Father “not only the sum total of all ruling and reigning,” which he had amended throughout the universe, “but also the laws, corrected and renewed, of the obedience and subjection due from the human race.”⁶⁴³

Origen was emphatic that, at least in its purest and most ideal application, this glorious subjection and renewed system of governance among humans was not to be imposed in a manner that perhaps might have characterized the previous, “unamended” system of dominion. On the contrary, this submission would be characterized by reason, enlightenment and free assent, and achieved “through certain means and courses of discipline and periods of time.” The world would not be subject to God “by the pressure of some necessity that compels it...nor by the use of force,” but “by word, by reason, by teaching, by the exhortation to better things, by the best methods of education.”⁶⁴⁴ To be sure, this was Origen’s rejection of force and necessity at its finest, seeming even to be falling in line with classical Greek thinking by presenting the will to do the good as a function of knowledge and understanding. After all, the cessation of evil-doing was “the

⁶⁴⁰ *Princ.* 3.5.6 (PG 11:331B): “in semetipso prius complens quod ab aliis volebat impleri.”

⁶⁴¹ 1 Cor. 15:28.

⁶⁴² *Princ.* 3.5.6.

⁶⁴³ *Princ.* 3.5.7 (PG 11:332A): “non intelligentes quod subjectio Christi ad Patrem beatitudinem nostrae perfectionis ostendit, et suscepti ab eo operis palmam declarat, cum non solum regendi ac regnandi summam quam in universam emendaverit creaturam, verum etiam obedientiae et subjectionis correctae reparataque humani generis Patri offerat instituta.”

⁶⁴⁴ *Princ.* 3.5.8 (PG 11:332B): “Verum certis quibusque et modis, et disciplinis, et temporibus subjectio ista complebitur; non necessitate aliqua ad subjectionem cogente, ne per vim subditus fiat omnis mundus Deo, sed verbo, ratione, doctrina, provocatione meliorum, institutionibus optimis...”

beginning of an impulse towards virtue,⁶⁴⁵ and passion in the human soul was a “likening to the irrational.”⁶⁴⁶ A rational being, moreover, that failed to adhere to the “ends and ordinances laid down by reason” was said to be sinning because it was departing from what was “just and right.”⁶⁴⁷ Thus it followed quite logically that only through reason could one be led to virtue. The role of Christ, therefore, was to teach obedience precisely through inaugurating a life that was based on true knowledge, and pointing out a “course of healing and improvement.”⁶⁴⁸

Yet here there was also tension. On the one hand, this “process of instruction and rational training” allowed those, who with purer mind had devoted themselves in this present life to the higher pursuits, to attain to a “capacity for divine wisdom” and to advance to a “richer understanding of truth.” But this same process also proved “very severe...and full of pain” to those souls that refused to obey the Word of God.⁶⁴⁹ The reference to such pain and suffering may have been a reference to those souls’ continued estrangement from God, as those limbs torn from their body. By choosing to disobey, they would be subject to their continued downward spiral, a prospect Origen had already painted in the direst and most painful terms. However, this bleak prospect could also have been a part of what Origen conceded was the other, less savory, aspect of the pedagogical process that Christ had introduced, namely the parallel need for “such merited and

⁶⁴⁵ This is a Gk. fragment preserved in Gregory of Nyssa’s *De Hom. Opif.* 28 (PG 44:232C), which Paul Koetschau placed at *Princ.* 1.8.4: “ἀρχὴν τῆς κατ’ ἀρετὴν ἐστὶν ὁμοίως.” It was in this context, too, that Origen would insist (*ibid.*) that “Among irrational beings virtue does not exist” (“ἀρετὴ δὲ ἐν ἀλόγοις οὐκ ἔστιν”).

⁶⁴⁶ *Princ.* 1.8.4 (PG 44:232B): “ἀνθρωπίνης δὲ ψυχῆς πάθος, ἢ πρὸς τὸ ἄλογόν ἐστιν ὁμοίωσις.”

⁶⁴⁷ *Princ.* 1.5.2 (PG 11:157C): “Nunc deinde sciendum est, quia omne quod rationabile est et rationis terminos statutaque declinat, sine dubio per praevaricationem recti justique efficitur in peccato.”

⁶⁴⁸ *Princ.* 2.3.1 (PG 11:188B): “curatio...et emendatio.”

⁶⁴⁹ *Princ.* 2.3.1 (PG 11:188B): “curatio aliqua et emendatio erit, asperior quidem et doloris plena erga eos qui verbo Dei obedire noluerunt; per eruditionem vero rationabilemque institutionem, per quam possent ad locupletiores proficere veritatis intellectum ut qui in praesenti vita in haec se studia dediderunt, et mentibus purgatiores effecti, capaces jam hinc divinae sapientiae perrexerunt.”

appropriate threatenings”⁶⁵⁰ toward those souls which contemptuously neglected their own salvation. Origen may have believed that free will was the final arbiter in divine-human relations, but at this point he had come to the impasse: what was to happen if certain souls kept refusing to be obedient. These souls Origen had no choice but to commit to the inscrutable mystery of God’s ways, although he remained adamant that, throughout all, free will would always be preserved. We quote the master at length:

“But how, consistently with the preservation of free will in all rational creatures, each person ought to be dealt with, that is, who they are whom the Word of God discovers to be prepared and capable and so instructs; who they are whom he puts off for a time; who they are from whom the word is utterly hidden and who are destined to be far away from the hearing of it; who again they are that despise the word when it is declared and preached to them and consequently are visited with God’s corrections and chastisements and pressed into salvation and whose conversion is as it were compelled and extorted; who they are for whom God even provides special occasions for salvation, so that sometimes a man has obtained an assured salvation when his faith was revealed by a mere answer; from what causes or on what occasions these things happen, or what the divine wisdom sees as it looks into these men or what movements of theirs will lead God to arrange all these things thus, is known to God alone and to his only begotten Son, through whom all things are created and restored, and to the Holy Spirit, through whom all

⁶⁵⁰ Princ. 3.5.8 (PG 11:332B): “comminationibus quoque dignis et competentibus.”

things are sanctified, who proceedeth from the Father himself, to whom is the glory forever and ever, Amen.”⁶⁵¹

In the end, there was no clear answer. Origen could only commit to God’s judgment the mystery of how recalcitrant disobedience among the creatures would be reconciled with the cosmos’ path back to God.⁶⁵²

CONCLUSION

In a context during which the place of will in theology was very much a live subject among the Gnostics and neo-Platonists, but largely ignored by Christian thinkers such as Irenaeus, Origen embraced the importance of will, and especially the notion of free will in rational creatures, seeing in it a bulwark by which he would do battle against the oppression of the Stoicizing determinism he associated with the materialist worldview which had been embraced in certain quarters of Christian thought. This valorization of free will allowed him to establish a cosmic meritocracy and to present the fallen nature of the world as the logical and just consequence of misdeeds freely committed by rational agents in previous incarnations. Unlike the Gnostics, who put the location of the disruption to the cosmic order in the divine sphere, Origen placed it firmly in the purview of the created beings. By pointing to the poor choices of the created rational agents as the

⁶⁵¹ *Princ.* 3.5.8 (PG 11:332C-333A): “Quomodo autem servata in omnibus rationabilibus creaturis arbitrii libertate unusquisque debeat dispensari, id est, quos velat jam paratos et capaces sermo Dei et inveniatur et instituat, quos autem interim differat, a quibus vero penitus occultetur, et longe eorum a se fieri dispenset auditum, quosque rursum contemnentes indicatum sibi et praedicatum verbum Dei correptionibus quibusnam vero etiam occasiones quasdam praesert salutis, ita ut interdum etiam ex responsione sola fide probata indubitata quis ceperit salutem; quibus haec ex causis vel quibus occasionebus fiant; quidve in his intro inspiciens divina sapientia, vel quos motus propositi eorum videns haec universa dispenset, soli Deo cognitum est et Unigenito ejus, per quem creata ac reparata sunt universa, et Spiritui sancto per quem cuncta sanctificatur, qui ab ipso Patre procedit, cui est gloria in aeterna. Amen.”

⁶⁵² Adolf von Harnack also observed this ultimate conflict in Origen: “That freedom will only be a semblance, if the spirit *must* finally attain unto its end, Origen did not observe” (*Outlines of the History of Dogma* [Beacon Hill, Boston: Beacon Press, 1957], p. 157).

cause behind the fallen nature of the world, Origen was thus able to affirm the goodness of the Creator and his creation and reject Gnostic talk of an evil Demiurge. Though created and ontologically inferior, the minds, even in their fallen state, weakly reflected God, the supreme mind who had created them—so much so that Origen invoked the example of will proceeding from mind as an image of the divine begetting of the Son from the Father without fission or fracture. God's pure incorporeality placed him wholly outside the determinism and compulsion of the material world. And the implication was that, when the created mind/soul, as a reflection of the divine mind, employed its own faculties of intellection and especially volition, it too acted as a locus of relative freedom from the materialist determinism that surrounded it. Thus envisaged, human free-will was metaphysically grounded in the similarity the human mind had to its archetype in God, the supreme mind.

Building on this volitionistic framework that he had established, Origen in the course of his exposition introduced certain principles and premises that would prove enormously significant to later theology. The first of these was the notion that commonality of action and willing denoted commonality of nature. We saw this intimated in Origen's presentation of the Son as either the will of the Father, or a reflection, or even a production thereof. Focusing on the principle of will as index of nature checked the suggestions of the Son's (and Spirit's) inferiority with respect to the Father that focusing solely on Origen's sense of hierarchy might otherwise have inculcated. In the divide between Creator and created, the Son and Spirit were on the side of the Creator; the oneness of purpose that Origen ascribed to the divine Persons in his theology sufficiently established their co-divinity with the Father. This will prove

significant for the fourth century, where we will see attempts to shun the highly contentious and, for many, *materializing* ousia language and promote instead the language of the commonality of will as an index of oneness. I will argue that this was not an attempt to argue for the potentiality of volitive conflict in the Trinity, as for example the Gnostics might have imagined, but an effort at extrapolating back from the absolute oneness of purpose in the Trinity, which was observable both in Scripture and spiritual experience, to a type of oneness that otherwise remained indefinable and transcendent.

Alongside this principle was that complex of ideas that grew out of Origen's problematic Christology. First, there was the presentation of two clear agents in Christ, held together in a moral union, and more specifically the *Nicomachean* system wherein the volitional effort on the part of the soul of Christ to do the good led to the eventual appropriation of the good into its very nature through the power of habit. When this met with what can only be understood, from our safely distant vantage point, as Origen's rhetorical flourish on the resultant oneness of the Word and the human soul in Christ being comparable to the oneness of the Persons of the Trinity, the mix for later generations became explosive. In the heat of the disputes in the fourth century, it is not hard to see how any mention of volition in the Trinity was quickly interpreted as code for a theory of the Son's having grown, through obedience and habituation, from a lesser status into his divine rank. We shall see how these play out in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

THE DISPUTE OVER ARIUS

In this final chapter, we will focus on the theologically fecund fourth century, which confessedly has functioned as something of a final cause for this study, drawing it along to its crescendo in the conflict provoked by the teaching of Arius. Although, as we have already seen, the will was a key element in several of the Trinitarian theologies that we have examined thus far, it was in the course of this tumultuous debate that it was identified explicitly as a problem. When the Council of Sardica, which was called in 343 to respond to the perceived challenge that the Council of Antioch (341) posed to Nicaea, issued statements excoriating the “blasphemous and perverse” opinion that the passage from the gospel of John (10:30), “I and My Father are one,” signified the “concord and harmony” between the Father and the Son, it was articulating its conviction that, drawing from human experience, the will was too erratic a basis on which to formulate a vision of the oneness between the Father and the Son. As we shall see, Sardica was responding to the formula, *oneness according to symphonia*, which had been put forward by the Council of Antioch. But it was interpreting Antioch’s words—in my view, most unfairly—in the light of what we will see had been the early Arius’ radical teaching on the will as it pertained to the Holy Trinity. I have viewed the will as a purposive movement of mind, and suggested that in Greek thought conflicts between willing agents were manifestations of cognitive disparity. A lack of knowledge on the part of at least one of the agents was what lay behind volitional disharmony. In this respect, I will argue

that Arius, and especially the earliest Arius, was a specific case in point. In him, for the first time, we will see the incursion into the precincts of Trinitarian theology itself of a strongly volitionist theory that viewed the will as a mutable and contingent category and, for a number of reasons, even included a reflexive vector into what in the Christian thinkers we have seen thus far had been a strictly unidirectional movement of the will in the Godhead. As already intimated by Sardica, we will also see the committed attempts of his most stringent Nicene opponents to repel Arius precisely because—and here was the irony—they had accepted his premise of the fundamentally contingent nature of will. Thus, like him, they held that the inclusion of will would lead to a Son not only ontologically inferior to the Father but subject potentially to ignorance, error, and sin, which is why they, unlike him, rejected it altogether.

Thus far, my examination of the will in Trinitarian discourse has been threefold. First, I have considered the role of will in the Father's begetting of the Son. In Justin, Tertullian, and Origen, the Father's precedent will was an affirmation of divine sovereignty, but more importantly it also formed an integral part of a psychological understanding of the begetting of the Son, in which the generation was likened to how the human mind moves by will to put forward an idea from within itself. This paradigm was intended to demonstrate the Son's likeness and closeness to the Father, of whose will and wisdom he was the perfect, externalized expression. In non-Christian theologies, like that of the Valentinian Gnostics, we saw a divergent impulse that emphasized the precedent will of the primal deity but was part of a scheme that placed, as even Tertullian had observed, generator and generate at a distance from one another. This "distancing" would

become the ultimate cause of the strife that racked the divine sphere which in the Gnostic view then led to the generation of the material world.

In this chapter, we will see how, early in the debate, Arius framed the precedent will of the Father as contingent, a matter of choice, thus making the Son's existence similarly contingent and therefore of a lower ontological kind than that of the unconditionally existent Father. Thus, the Father's precedent will became synonymous with his lordship over the Son, as over all creation, and the subsequent conditionality of the Son's being put him ultimately at the same level with the common creatures. In this respect, there will be a certain correlation between Arius and the thinking of the Valentinians. Notably, the most strident supporters of the Council of Nicaea, who were also the most vociferous opponents of anything resembling a concession to Arianism, will seem, we note, to accept Arius' correlation of will, contingency, and lordship, which is why they sought to expunge any mention of the will from the divine begetting. However, from within the moderate Nicene camp, a number of whom had originally been from groups that for a time had displayed caution toward Nicaea, emerged the view, which was to win the day, that a sense of the divine will in the begetting was imperative because it yielded the most satisfying account of revelation, preserved a proper sense of theological order, and served as both an affirmation of divine sovereignty and a safeguard against neo-Platonist emanationism. Faced with the problem of how to free the notion of precedent will of the connotations of ontological superiority with which Arius had charged it, and which both sides seemed to accept, the only recourse was to appeal to the transcendence and fundamental inexplicability of the divine nature.

Secondly, we have examined questions of volitional directionality in the divine sphere. In such thinkers as Justin, Tertullian, and Origen, the Son as Logos was understood to be the hypostatized expression of the Father's wisdom and will, and as such he moved outward in a volitionally unidirectional movement that revealed to the world the will of God and the saving knowledge that might elicit from rational creation its free obedience and volitional alignment. Yet, we also saw theological systems that, instead of envisioning unidirectional volitional movement outward from the primal deity, put forward ideations of reflexive movement in the divine realm in which the will also worked back toward the divine source as the responsive will of its subordinates and inferiors. The motor of this interplay was the cognitive disparity between volitive agents that was ultimately born of their ontological alterity. In Valentinianism, plurality, division, and even disturbance in the divine sphere were the direct result of the "distancing" of generator from generate that Tertullian espied in the Valentinian account of generation (*probole*) and the inevitable volitional disharmony between the two that was resolved only by the revelation of deeper understanding and the subsequent restoration of concord. The fruit, of course, of the turmoil that passed was the created world, of which Gnosticism in general had a dim view. In the early Plotinus, however, this sense of misdirected reflexive will, *tolma*, became the apparatus through which primordial oneness devolved into plurality in the divine realm. Although Christian authors differed from Plotinus and did not view the begetting of the Son as any kind of lapse, this reflexive volitive action he preached could be seen as taking the place of the precedent will that Christianity talked of, only that all initiative to movement was in Plotinus ascribed to the subordinate sphere.

To be sure, we have also argued that the later Plotinus, probably influenced by his own struggles against the world-rejecting disposition of the Valentinians, talked less of *tolma* in his later formulations and more of a rational necessity, in which volitional action was seen as a manifestation of ignorance. In this devaluation of the will he resembled that other great warrior against Gnosticism, Irenaeus, in whom there was little mention of the will at all in his Trinitarian theology. There the emphasis was presenting the Son and Spirit as extensions of the Father—most graphically, as his “hands”—and by means of this corporeal image avoiding the sense of generative ordering in the Trinity. In Origen, who also struggled against Gnosticism, there was the converse strategy of embracing the will wholeheartedly, but taking the primordial conflict that was born of ignorance and contingent will out of the divine sphere and placing it directly inside the created realm, namely in sphere of the souls, where a karmic system of free-will and deserved consequence powered the movement of both the cosmic cycle and the scheme of salvation and redemption. It is in this account of the realm of the souls that we see in Origen one of the fullest attempts to address the question of the human soul and will in Christ.

In this chapter, we will see in the early theology of Arius the apogee, if only a brief one, of this sense of reflexive will in Christian theology, with him viewing—at least in his earliest and most extreme period—the Son’s unity with the Father exclusively as a moral union, a oneness of will in a relation of obedience. This was the direct result of the Son’s ontological inferiority to the Father, as Arius had preached it. We must note, too, that in the limited body of his writings that has reached us there is no mention of a human

mind in Christ, and I will assume that there was a kernel of truth to the accusations⁶⁵³ leveled against him and that the earliest Arius reinforced his vision of ontological stratification in the Godhead by viewing all the signs in Scripture of human weakness and finitude as evidence of the Son's ontological inferiority.⁶⁵⁴ Thus, as the product of the Father's contingent precedent will, the Son was lesser than the Father, and therefore shared obedience with the other rational creatures as the sole mode of being one with the Father. Rational creatures lacked the Father's cognitive perfection, and so through willing acts of obedience, as faith-motivated rational extrapolations, they made up for what they lacked in knowledge. The Son's perfect obedience to the Father was in turn exemplary for the obedience of all rational creatures. Yet, the early Arius disclosed, for the Son's obedience to have any paradigmatic power, and resting as it did on contingent will, it had to be subject to at least the theoretical possibility of failure—a conclusion that was to be widely received with shock, even, it seems, among Arius' supporters. As it would turn out, the theoretical possibility of the Son's falling away from the Father was to prove secondary to Arius' primary concern for cosmological order, and, very early in the debates, he would drop the notion altogether. Nevertheless, the memory of what he had preached on the matter would linger on, affecting attitudes to any mention of will, as we saw in the Council of Sardica.

Thirdly and finally, we have also looked at will as volitive movement outward from the Godhead, by which God works in the world. Although the proposition of a force, not strictly subject to reason and potentially arbitrary, actively determining the

⁶⁵³ See, e.g., Alexander of Alexandria's *Letter to Alexander*, preserved in Theodoret's *Hist. eccl.* 1.3.

⁶⁵⁴ Though this is not a material detail to the overall scope of this study, in the following pages we will chance to examine some of the points of disagreement in the speculations over Arius' beliefs on the human soul in Christ.

course of the universe may have proved problematic for some schools of thought of the time, this was the aspect of will least subject to controversy among Christians because they accepted the biblical view of God as working in the world. However, one of the key issues during the debates would remain how to understand this singular volitive action in the world in the light of the doctrine of the Trinity. In brief, the view that came to predominate was that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit had one singular outward will, which was indicative of the identity of their essence (*ousia*). My contention will be that the formula promulgated by Antioch, oneness according to concord (*symphonia*), was an early formulation in this direction, and certainly not a reissue of the early Arian position of contingent will as sole mode of oneness between Father and Son, which even he had abandoned, and which had been condemned by Sardica.

After a drawn out period of sorting wheat from chaff, the excess provoked by Arius on both sides of the debate was duly jettisoned, and, I will argue, the acceptable limits of will as a factor in Trinitarian theology were delineated. For the question of will was one of the difficulties, such as personhood, the nature of divinity, and the act of begetting itself, that surrounded the more general problem of plurality in the Godhead that Christianity professed, especially a plurality expressed in terms of a begetting of one divine person by another, and complicated further by the belief that this begotten person had assumed human nature. It is impossible to make a pronouncement on the *official* fourth century Christian resolution to the question of will, because neither of the Councils that all came to recognize as binding, namely Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381), made specific mention of it in its formal doctrinal statements. My analyses of necessity

can only be extrapolations from the writings of those authors who enjoyed the broadest approval of the time, and were connected with the proceedings at the Councils.

THE BEGINNINGS

The precise order of events marking the beginning of the conflict over the Holy Trinity, which was to preoccupy most of the fourth century, is not clear. From the chronicles of Socrates Scholasticus we learn that the dispute began at a gathering of the clergy in Alexandria, at which Alexander, the bishop of the city, was to deliver a lecture on the mystery of the unity of the Holy Trinity. Most scholars agree this must have been around 318.⁶⁵⁵ At some point during the speech, the presbyter Arius raised his voice in protest, charging that the prelate was “teaching the same view as Sabellius the Libyan.” “If the Father begat the Son,” Arius continued, “he that was begotten had a beginning of existence: and from this it is evident that there was a time when the Son was not. It therefore necessarily follows, that he had his substance from nothing.”⁶⁵⁶ Sozomen gives a slightly different version of events. According to him, it was Arius who, unprovoked, had first begun to preach in the churches these things that “no one before him had ever suggested,”⁶⁵⁷ and as a result caused much commotion.

At the heart of this nascent conflict, of course, was the doctrine of the Trinity, specifically how to reconcile the plurality of divine persons in the Godhead, as revelation had made them known, with the philosophical need to preserve monotheism. From this basic datum each side was to draw its diverging theological and soteriological

⁶⁵⁵ Hans-Georg Opitz established the still prevalent view that it was in 318 that Alexander called the Synod that condemned Arius. Although there have been some challenges to this chronology, it continues to hold sway. See David M. Gwynn, *The Eusebians* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 59-69.

⁶⁵⁶ *Hist. eccl.* 1.5 (NPNF² 2:3).

⁶⁵⁷ *Hist. eccl.* 1.15 (NPNF² 2:251).

conclusions. Arius was to understand monotheism as being synonymous with personal monotheism; for him the Father would be the *monos theos*. Emphasizing the Father's ontological primacy, he would conclude unavoidably that the Son was inferior to, and in a sense a creature of, the Father. Insisting thus on the distinct existences of Father and Son, the problem for Arius would become how to envision the relationship between them, which the Son's title as Son of God made clear had to be close. In his earliest attempt at a solution, Arius would propose volition as the medium of relation between Father and Son, and his argument would run something like this: possessed of free will as creatures are, and in volitional relation with the Father in the only way that creatures could be, the Son was perfectly obedient in all things to the will of the Father, yet was theoretically capable even of virtue and vice. Arius' opponents would reject his implication of the Son's createdness and especially the notion of his moral contingency as blasphemous and unbecoming of what they considered to be the Son's indisputable divinity. So the question in its most basic rendition was about what constituted divinity, and, if the Son were possessed of it, whether he was divine in the same way that the Father was. To our enduring difficulty, as ones trying to retrace these events, this central theological question quickly became mired in a confusion of related, though probably unforeseen, issues to which the various disputants, it seems, responded sometimes too hastily, to judge from their subsequent readjustments and retreats from only previously held positions.

As this initial war of words between Arius and his adversaries intensified, we learn from Sozomen that the litigants pleaded their respective cases to Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria. Alexandria at this time was still being racked by an earlier rift

provoked by the followers of Melitius,⁶⁵⁸ so the bishop deemed it more prudent in this instance to allow the parties to debate their cases openly, in an ecclesiastical setting, so that “persuasion rather than...force” might win the day.⁶⁵⁹ He convened a special hearing, over which he himself would preside, that formally would give ear to each side and settle the issue by arbitration. After the second session, the bishop finally ruled against Arius, whom he then instructed to renounce his position and receive the verdict of the council. Wedded to his convictions, and probably buoyed by the knowledge that there were many who shared them, Arius not only refused,⁶⁶⁰ but also denounced his bishop and accused him of Sabellianism.⁶⁶¹

Pandemonium ensued. The previous battle lines hardened while sentiment over Arius’ theology and perceived maltreatment soared, quickly spreading “throughout all Egypt, Libya, and the upper Thebes.”⁶⁶² Openly coming to his support, Arius’ advocates expressed their discontent by worshiping separately from those congregations affiliated with Alexander, whose authority and theology they had begun to revile.⁶⁶³ Confronted by full-scale rebellion, the bishop had little choice but to call a regional council of some one hundred bishops from Egypt and Libya and anathematize both Arius “for his shameless avowal of these heresies,” and “all such as have countenanced them.”⁶⁶⁴

With all his avenues closing in Alexandria, Arius and his cohort sent legations to the bishops of other provinces, requesting their opinions on the beliefs for which Arius

⁶⁵⁸ Melitius and his supporters just years previously had formed their own breakaway Church in Egypt because, they charged, Alexander’s predecessor Peter had capitulated during Diocletian’s persecution, and, as a result, he, his successors, and those that had communion with them could only be regarded as having also fallen away from the true Church.

⁶⁵⁹ Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 1.15 (NPNF² 2:251).

⁶⁶⁰ Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 1.15 (NPNF² 2:251).

⁶⁶¹ Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.5.

⁶⁶² Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.6.

⁶⁶³ See Alexander’s *Epistle to Alexander* (apud Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 1.3 [NPNF² 3:35]).

⁶⁶⁴ Alexander, *Epistle to Bishops Everywhere* (apud Socrates *Hist. eccl.* 1.6 [NPNF² 2:4]).

was being punished. If they found Arius' positions agreeable, they were asked to appeal his case to Alexander; if they did not, they were asked to explain why. Thus, Sozomen noted, the tenets of Arius and his confreres were "universally disseminated, and the questions they had started became matters of debate among all the bishops."⁶⁶⁵ As it spread beyond Egypt, knowledge of the dispute in Alexandria "excited many to a consideration of the question; and thus from a little spark a large fire was kindled"⁶⁶⁶ that was to rage in the life of the Church for close to a century.

THE *THALIA*

It was in these circumstances that certain circles close to Eusebius, the bishop of Nicomedia, learned of the dispute in Egypt. Ostensibly motivated by sentiments of theological solidarity with Arius,⁶⁶⁷ although there is evidence that these were strongly mingled with grievances against Alexander of a decidedly political nature,⁶⁶⁸ they urged Arius to commit his thoughts to paper systematically. Arius complied and composed the *Thalia* ("Banquet"), a long, and—to judge from Athanasius' denunciation, decades later,

⁶⁶⁵ Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 1.15.

⁶⁶⁶ Socrates *Hist. eccl.* 1.6.

⁶⁶⁷ Telling is the fact that, in his letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia (*apud* Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 1.4), Arius addressed him as "my fellow-Lucianist," suggesting their common discipleship under Lucian of Antioch. Philostorgius (*Hist. eccl.* 2.14) enumerated Eusebius of Nicomedia, Maris of Chalcedon, Theognis of Nicaea, Leontius, later bishop of Antioch, among others—all supporters of Arius—among the disciples of Lucian. What Lucian's views had been remains unclear. Epiphanius' (*Pan.* 23/43) account of him being a disciple of Marcion and accepting a strongly Gnostic system of three metaphysical principles—God, the Demiurge, and the Evil One—seems completely unreliable. Alexander, however, reported (Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 1:3 [*NPNF*² 3:38]) that Lucian had separated himself, "during a period of many years," from the bishops who ejected Paul of Samosata. His martyrdom in 312 earned him the respect both of his disciples and their opponents. Sozomen (*Hist. eccl.* 3.5) reports that the fourth Creed issued at the Council of Antioch in 342 (see Athanasius' *Syn.* 25) was simply the publication of a Creed written by the late Lucian.

⁶⁶⁸ Judging from the pointedness of Alexander's views (see: Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.6 [*NPNF*² 2:3]) on Eusebius' having left his first see of Berytus (Beirut) for the politically more influential one of Nicomedia (which, in the formation of the Tetrarchy in 293, Diocletian had made the capital of the East and seat of the senior *Augustus*), it is possible that, even before the issue with Arius had arisen, there had already been tension between the two prelates over the propriety of this transfer. Tellingly, the question of episcopal transferences was an issue that Nicaea eventually was forced to address.

of the dissolute poetic style of one Sotades the Egyptian that it allegedly mimicked—at least partly metric piece⁶⁶⁹ that articulated Arius’ theological and metaphysical views. The precise timing of its composition has been the point of considerable speculation, with the crucial focus being on whether Arius was among his sympathizers who lived outside of Alexandria when he wrote it. I am inclined to accept the view that Arius wrote the *Thalia* in Alexandria before he was able to meet with his allies abroad, namely, in the interim between his initial condemnation by the local synod and his final expulsion from the city. This position explains best the early divergences between some of Arius’ views and those of his allies, which, it seems, were harmonized only after they had met in person.⁶⁷⁰ The work has survived in fragments,⁶⁷¹ with the two largest citations coming

⁶⁶⁹ R. Williams (*Arius*, 98-99) observes how the fragment Athanasius presents in *Syn.* 15 is entirely metrical whereas that in *C. Ar.* 1:5-6 is not, except for the opening quotation that is of the same meter as that in *Syn.* 15. From this, Williams fairly construes that the *Thalia* was either partially metered, or that in the *C. Ar.* Athanasius is paraphrasing what may well have been an entirely metered piece.

⁶⁷⁰ On the dating of the *Thalia*, I lean toward Charles Kannengiesser’s (Charles Kannengiesser, “Où et quand Arius composa-t-il la *Thalie*?” in *Kyriakon* [ed. Patrick Granfield and Josef A. Jungmann: Münster Westfalen: Verlag Aschendorff, 1970], I: 346-351) suggestion that Athanasius’ *Syn.* 15 (Ἄλλ’ ἐκβληθεὶς καὶ ἐπιτριβεὶς Ἄρειος παρὰ τῶν περὶ Εὐσέβιον συνέστηκεν ἑαυτοῦ τὴν αἵρεσιν ἐν χάρατι...) should be understood as “Mais, jété dehors et poussé par les Eusébiens, Arius consigna sa proper hérésie par écrit...” This leads to his subsequent argument, which I also accept, that the time of the production of the *Thalia* should be put in the interval *between* his initial ecclesiastical censure by Alexander and his final abandonment of Alexandria. Kannengiesser’s view is accepted by Rudolf Lorenz (Rudolf Lorenz, *Arius Judaizans?* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979] 49-52), and it opposes the proposition that Arius penned the *Thalia* sometime *after* he had arrived in Eusebius’ Nicomedia. The opposing idea, namely that Arius wrote in Nicomedia, is reflected in the translation in *NPNF*² 4:457 (“However, after his expulsion, when he was with Eusebius and his fellows, he drew up his heresy upon paper...”), and shared by e.g. J. Quasten (Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* Vol. III [Utrecht/Antwerp: Spectrum Publishers, 1960], 11) and T. Kopecek (Thomas Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism* [Cambridge, Mass.: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979], 18-19). Rowan Williams (Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2001], 66) holds that the work was probably composed in Palestine, because Alexander suggests in his letter to Alexander of Thessalonica (Theodoret, *Hist. Eccl.* 1.3) that Arius had left the city already. It could well be true that Arius had already left Alexandria by the time of Alexander’s writing to his namesake, for it is clear that Alexander is unaware of Arius’ whereabouts, but there is no evidence to suggest that the *Thalia* had not already been written before Arius left Egypt. Alexander makes no specific mention of the *Thalia*, but, as we shall see, the theological views he ascribes to Arius are very close to what he expresses there. I am adamant on this point because it seems to me highly unlikely that the *Thalia* could have been produced under the patronage or direct influence of Arius’ allies outside of Egypt because they did not seem ever to have espoused some of its most characteristic theological positions.

⁶⁷¹ The bulk of the fragments of the *Thalia* come from Athanasius: *Syn.* 15, *C. Ar.* 1:2-10, *Decr.* 16, *Dion.* 6, *inter alia*.

from Athanasius' *Syn.* 15 and his *C. Ar.* 1.5-6. The first fragment is an unmingled block of text, which I will quote in its entirety below as unquestionably representing Arius' formal views. The second, however, is interwoven with Athanasius' own commentary. It is impractical to cite extensively, but also burdened by a number of complications: it is difficult to distinguish what are direct quotations of Arius from what might be Athanasius' extrapolations of an "Arian" position; its theological content differs from that of *Syn.* 15 fragment, which suggests either that it represents other parts of the *Thalia*, or that it might embody informal positions of Arius, or his followers, that were expressed, I suspect in haste, in the heat of the verbal disputes that must have marked the early days of the controversy. With all these factors in mind, we will begin by citing the *Syn.* 15 fragment in full, complementing it with information from *C. Ar.* 1.5-6 and elsewhere, in an attempt to piece together a coherent picture of Arius' theological concerns in the *Thalia*. We begin:

God Himself then, in His own nature, is ineffable by all men. Equal or like Himself He alone has none, or one in glory. And Ingenerate we call Him, because of him who is generate by nature. We praise him as without beginning because of him who has a beginning. And adore him as everlasting, because of Him who in time has come to be. The Unbegun made the Son a beginning of things originated; and advanced him as a Son to himself by adoption. He has nothing proper to God in proper subsistence. For he is not equal, no, nor one in essence with him.⁶⁷²

Wise is God, for he is the teacher of Wisdom. There is full proof that God is invisible to all beings; both to things which are through the Son, and to the Son he

⁶⁷² PG 26:705D-708A: "Ἴδιον οὐδὲν ἔχει τοῦ Θεοῦ καθ' ὑπόστασιν ιδιότητος· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἴσος, ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ὁμοούσιος αὐτῷ."

is invisible. I will say it expressly, how by the Son is seen the Invisible; by that power by which God sees, and in his own measure, the Son endures to see the Father, as is lawful. Thus there is a Triad, not in equal glories. Not intermingling with each other are their subsistences. One more glorious than the other in their glories unto immensity. Foreign from the Son in essence is the Father, for he is without beginning. Understand that the Monad was; but the Dyad was not, before it was in existence. It follows at once that, though the Son was not, the Father was God. Hence the Son, not being (for he existed at the will of the Father), is God Only-begotten, and he is alien from either. Wisdom existed as Wisdom by the will of the Wise God. Hence He is conceived in numberless conceptions: Spirit, Power, Wisdom, God's glory, Truth, Image, and Word. Understand that He is conceived to be Radiance and Light. One equal to the Son, the Superior is able to beget; but one more excellent, or superior, or greater, he is not able. At God's will the Son is what and whatsoever he is. And when and since he was, from that time He has subsisted from God. He, being a strong God, praises in his degree the Superior. To speak in brief, God is ineffable to his Son. For he is to himself what he is, that is, unspeakable, so that nothing which is called comprehensible does the Son know to speak about;⁶⁷³ for it is impossible for him to investigate the Father, who is by himself. For the Son does not know his own essence, for, being Son, he really existed at the will of the Father. What argument then allows, that he who is from the Father should know his own parent by comprehension? For it is

⁶⁷³ Though the Greek reads, “ὥστε οὐδὲν τῶν λεγομένων κατὰ τε κατάληψιν συνίει ἐξειπεῖν ὁ Υἱός,” the implication is that there is nothing *in the Father* that is comprehensible so that the Son may be able to speak of it.

plain that for that which hath a beginning to conceive how the Unbegun is, or to grasp the idea, is not possible.⁶⁷⁴

THE UNKNOWN GOD AND THE CENTRALITY OF WILL

Prominent in the lengthy passage above was the effusion of pronouncements on God the Father's unknowability and invocations of his will as lying behind all action in the divine sphere. These were not desultory and unsystematic, but part of a layered and sophisticated plan that, resting on discernible theological precedent, laid out a coherent, albeit ultimately unorthodox, understanding of the Trinity, in which the centrality of will as a theological factor was attendant to Arius' far-reaching theory on the knowledge of God and divine predication. As we shall see, a key element in this theory of will was the sense of cognitive asymmetry between the agents in the system—a system wherein a directive act of absolute volition, which had its center in, and was the expression of, the supreme and inscrutable knowledge and foresight of the Father, interplayed with the responses of subordinate agents whose understanding and cognitive powers were but

⁶⁷⁴ Athanasius, *Syn.* 15 (NPNF² 4:457-8 [PG 26:765D-768C]): “Αὐτός γοῦν ὁ Θεὸς καθὼ ἐστὶν ἄρρητος ἅπασιν ὑπάρχει. ἴσον οὐδὲ ὅμοιον, οὐχ ὁμόδοξον ἔχει μόνος οὗτος. Ἀγέννητον δὲ αὐτὸν φαμεν διὰ τὸν τὴν φύσιν γεννητόν· τοῦτον ἀναρχον ἀνυμνοῦμεν διὰ τὸν ἀρχὴν ἔχοντα, αἰδιον δὲ αὐτὸν σέβομεν διὰ τὸν ἐν χρόνοις γεγονότα. Ἀρχὴν τὸν Υἱὸν ἔδηκε τῶν γενητῶν ὁ ἀναρχος καὶ ἠνεγκεν εἰς Υἱὸν ἑαυτῷ τόνδε τεκνοποιήσας, ἴδιον οὐδὲν ἔχει τοῦ Θεοῦ καθ' ὑπόστασιν ιδιότητος, οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἴσος, ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ὁμοούσιος αὐτῷ. Σοφὸς δὲ ἐστὶν ὁ Θεός, ὅτι τῆς σοφίας διδάσκαλος αὐτός. Ἰκανὴ δὲ ἀπόδειξις ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς ἀόρατος ἅπασιν, τοῖς τε διὰ Υἱοῦ καὶ αὐτῷ τῷ Υἱῷ ἀόρατος ὁ αὐτός. ἠρητῶς δὲ λέξω, πῶς τῷ υἱῷ ὁράται ὁ ἀόρατος· τῆ δυνάμει ἢ δύναται ὁ Θεὸς ἰδεῖν· ἰδίους τε μέτροις ὑπομένει ὁ Υἱὸς ἰδεῖν τὸν Πατέρα, ὡς θεμὶς ἐστίν. Ἦγουν Τριάς ἐστὶ δόξαις οὐχ ὁμοίαις, ἀνεπιμικτοὶ ἑαυταῖς εἰσιν αἱ ὑποστάσεις αὐτῶν, μία τῆς μιᾶς ἐνδοξοτέρα δόξαις ἐπ' ἄπειρον. Ξένος τοῦ Υἱοῦ κατ' οὐσίαν ὁ Πατήρ, ὅτι ἀναρχος ὑπάρχει. Σύνες ὅτι ἢ μονὰς ἦν, ἢ δυὰς δὲ οὐκ ἦν, πρὶν ὑπάρξῃ. Αὐτίκα γοῦν Υἱοῦ μὴ ὄντος ὁ Πατήρ Θεὸς ἐστὶ. Λοιπὸν ὁ Υἱὸς οὐκ ὦν (ὑπήρξε δὲ θελήσει πατρῶα) μονογενὴς Θεὸς ἐστὶ καὶ ἑκατέρων ἀλλότριος οὗτος. Ἡ Σοφία σοφία ὑπήρξε σοφοῦ Θεοῦ θελήσει. Ἐπινοεῖται γοῦν μυριάς ὄσαις ἐπινοίαις Πνεῦμα, δυνάμις, σοφία, δόξα Θεοῦ, ἀλήθειά τε καὶ εἰκὼν καὶ λόγος οὗτος. Σύνες ὅτι καὶ ἀπαύγασμα καὶ φῶς ἐπινοεῖται. ἴσον μὲν τοῦ Υἱοῦ γεννᾶν δυνατός ἐστὶν ὁ κρείττων, διαφορώτερον δὲ ἢ κρείττονα ἢ μείζονα οὐχί. Θεοῦ θελήσει ὁ Υἱὸς ἠλικός καὶ ὅσος ἐστίν, ἐξ ὅτε καὶ ἀφ' οὗ καὶ ἀπὸ τότε ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ ὑπέστη, ἰσχυρὸς Θεὸς ὦν τὸν κρείττονα ἐκ μέρους ὑμνεῖ. Συνελόντι εἰπεῖν τῷ Υἱῷ ὁ Θεὸς ἄρρητος ὑπάρχει· ἐστὶ γὰρ ἑαυτῷ ὅ ἐστι τοῦτ' ἐστὶν ἄλεκτος, ὥστε οὐδὲν τῶν λεγομένων κατὰ τε κατάληψιν συνίει ἐξαιρεῖν ὁ Υἱός. Ἀδύνατα γὰρ αὐτῷ τὸν Πατέρα τε ἐξιχνιάσει, ὅς ἐστιν ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ. Αὐτός γὰρ ὁ Υἱὸς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ οὐσίαν οὐκ οἶδεν, Υἱὸς γὰρ ὦν θελήσει Πατρός ὑπήρξεν ἀληθῶς. Τίς γοῦν λόγος συγχωρεῖ τὸν ἐκ πατρὸς ὄντα αὐτὸν τὸν γεννησάντα γινῶναι ἐν καταλήψει; Δῆλον γὰρ ὅτι τὸ ἀρχὴν ἔχον, τὸν ἀναρχον, ὡς ἐστὶν, ἐμπερινοῆσαι ἢ ἐμπεριδράξασθαι οὐχ οἶόν τέ ἐστιν.”

relative. These responses were volitive actions that complemented the subordinate agents' deficit of knowledge, acts of faith that the supreme will expressed by the Father was the truth, with which they then aligned their own wills.

Arius' Trinity was a hierarchy—"a Triad, not in equal glories"—at whose peak reigned God the Father.⁶⁷⁵ The importance of this sense of hierarchy to Arius' thought cannot be overemphasized. He considered the language of begetter and begotten in Christian theology tailor-made for the kind of stratified ontology he preached and which already enjoyed considerable appeal in the broader intellectual setting, and he was bewildered by his bishop Alexander's insistence on the ontological parity and ever-coexistence of Father and Son.⁶⁷⁶ This scale of unequal glories correlated in Arius' mind with an analogous ontological and epistemological gradation among the divine hypostases. The higher one went up the order of the hierarchy, from the Holy Spirit through the Son to the Father, the closer one approached the peak of all existence—the Father—and the deeper one entered a realm that transcended all categories of cognition. This framework, which organized itself around an epistemology of the divine, reflected a theological trend enshrined by neo-Platonists like Plotinus with their image of an ascent

⁶⁷⁵ Arius talked of a *Triad*, but his focus was specifically on the relation between the Father and the Son. The position of the Spirit in this Triad was left unexplored, at least in the fragments of the *Thalia* that have reached us, and we can only assume, on the basis of the "not equal in glories," that Arius viewed its status as similar to or lower than that of the Son.

⁶⁷⁶ Characteristic was Arius' complaint—which Opitz dates to 318, i.e. very early in the controversy—to Eusebius of Nicomedia against Alexander's epigrammatic "God always, the Son always" (*ἀεὶ Θεὸς ἀεὶ Υἱός*), which Arius found so disagreeable (Theodoret, *Hist. Eccl.* 1.4). His correspondent (Athanasius, *Syn.* 17) affirmed Arius, and elaborated that it was clear to all that things which were produced were nonexistent prior to their coming into being, and that generate things of necessity had a beginning to their being. Eusebius of Caesarea (Opitz, III, Urk. 3), too, found the doctrine of the eternal coexistence of Father and Son contrary to established principle: the Father must needs have preexisted the Son for one was ingenerate, the other not. That which is first and higher in the order surpasses the second in both glory and honor because he is the cause of the both the being and the way-of-being of the second. Of course, such a principle had already been laid down in the deep past, e.g. Plato's *Phaedr.* (245d) (Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff): "That is because anything that has a beginning comes from some source; but there is no source for this, since a source that got its start from something else would not longer be the source."

into the clouds of intellectual transcendence as one engaged, in their order, the three metaphysical hypostases that underlay reality. The Father, as the highest hypostasis in the Trinity and pinnacle of all being, was infinitely transcendent. Arius on this point was clear. God the Father was “ineffable,” “unspeakable,” “invisible,” and characterized by an otherness that even the Son lacked the wherewithal to penetrate.⁶⁷⁷ Unknowability was God the Father’s most salient trait. It was axiomatic, a belief long held in the broader culture in its ruminations on the divine,⁶⁷⁸ and thus one not requiring any special explanation by Arius or proof besides simple assertion, even from the opening line of our passage: “God himself then, in his nature, is ineffable by all men.”

At the same time, the Father’s unknowability confirmed his uncausedness. As Justin had once remarked: “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.”⁶⁷⁹ It was widely held that the mensurability of a thing implied the anterior existence of a measurer, its nameability the prior subsistence of a namer.⁶⁸⁰ The Father

⁶⁷⁷ The Arian historian Philostorgius (*Hist. eccl.* 2.3 [PG 65:468A]) reviled Arius for holding the position that the Son did not know the Father. He added that Secundus, Theognis, and the disciples of Lucian of Antioch, namely Leontius, Antonius, and, notably, Eusebius of Nicomedia, did not accept Arius’ view on this either.

⁶⁷⁸ See e.g. Plato’s *Crat.* 400d (C.D.C. Reeve): “The first and finest line of investigation, which as intelligent people we must acknowledge is this, that we admit that we know nothing about the gods themselves or about the names they call themselves—although it is clear they call themselves by true ones. The second best line on the correctness of names is to say, as is customary in our prayers, that we hope the gods are pleased by the names we give them, since we know no others.”

⁶⁷⁹ Justin, *2 Apol.* 6.

⁶⁸⁰ See, e.g., the Gnostic *Apocryphon of John* 4:5-19 (Berlin Codex): “It is not appropriate to think about It as God or that It is something similar. For It surpasses divinity. It is a dominion having nothing to rule over It. For there is nothing existing before It nor does It have need of them. It does not need life. For It is eternal. It does not need anything. For It cannot be made perfect as though It were deficient and only required perfecting. Rather It is always totally perfect. It is light. It cannot be limited because there is nothing before It to limit It. It is inscrutable for there is no one before It to scrutinize It. It is immeasurable because there is no other to measure It as though (anything) exists before It. It is invisible because there is no one to see It. (It is) an eternity existing forever. (It is) ineffable because no one has comprehended It in order to speak about It. (It is) the one whose name cannot be spoken because no one exists before It to name It.” From Karen L. King’s *Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press,

was unknown and unnamable because there was simply no one ontologically prior to him who could name him.⁶⁸¹

Of course, the Son, as his title suggested, was close to the Father. Nevertheless, ontologically speaking, as “beginning of things originated” he was on the side of generated things, which all had their origin in inexistence. Before God became Father, he simply was, alone, *monos*.⁶⁸² Phonic similarity allowed Arius to identify the *monos* God with the *monad*, or the primal, absolute one of philosophical thought, which lay at the base of reality and existence. This “Monad was,” he explained, “but the Dyad was not, before it was in existence.”⁶⁸³ If the Father was the Monad, then the Son was the Dyad—that other metaphysical principle that by Arius’ time had come to be understood as having coming after and subordinate to the Monad.⁶⁸⁴ Likening the Son to the Dyad was useful in that it afforded the Son the ontological status that was his due without compromising the principles of the Father’s ontological superiority that Arius had laid out. For the Son was the highest of things generated by God, a superior to whom it was

2006) pp.28, 30. Cf. Aristides, *Apol.* (Syr.) 1 (*ANF* 9:264): “Everything which has a name is kindred to things created.”

⁶⁸¹ We note Arius’ assertion (*Syn.* 15 [NPNF² 4:458] and *C. Ar.* 1.5 [NPNF² 4:309]) that the Son did not even know his own essence. This is consistent with the principle because the Son did not generate himself.

⁶⁸² This line of argumentation comes from the *Thalia* fragment in *C. Ar.* 1.5, which reads: *Οὐκ ἀεὶ ὁ Θεὸς Πατὴρ ἦν· ἀλλ’ ἦν ὅτε ὁ Θεὸς μόνος ἦν, καὶ οὐπω Πατὴρ ἦν ὕστερον δὲ ἐπιγέγονε Πατὴρ.* (“God was not always a Father; but, once, God was alone, and not yet a Father, but afterwards He became a Father.”)

⁶⁸³ *Syn.* 15.

⁶⁸⁴ The Monad and Dyad were designations for what the older thinkers held to be the two basic metaphysical elements whose complex interplays and combinations stood behind the whole of existence. Their reality was discernible in the multifarious polar opposites that permeated the entire spectrum of the phenomena: hot and cold, light and dark, male and female and, especially for the more abstracted types of Greek thought, form and matter, *inter alia*. So, in one respect, by subjugating the Monad to the Dyad, Arius was simply availing himself of a philosophically monistic line of thinking first revived in neo-Pythagorean circles around 1st c. B.C. and eventually appropriated by neo-Platonists such as Plotinus (e.g. *Enn.* 5.1.5), which held that the Monad caused the Dyad. This opposed the older dualistic view, suggested by Plato and the Pythagoreans of his time, that the Monad and the Dyad were parallel, independent entities. This idea of God the Father as the Monad was fundamental to Arius’ thought and reappeared in his Epistle to Alexander (*Syn.* 16): “ἀλλ’ ὡς μονὰς καὶ ἀρχὴ πάντων, οὕτως ὁ Θεὸς πρὸ πάντων ἐστί. Διὸ καὶ πρὸ τοῦ Υἱοῦ ἐστίν...” For an enlightening study on the understanding of the relationship between the Monad and the Dyad through Plotinus, see: John Rist, “Monism: Plotinus and Some Predecessors,” *HSCP* 69 (1965): 329-344.

impossible for the Father to produce, but there was a time, before his origination, when he did not exist,⁶⁸⁵ and this created an ontological opposition between him and the Father, making him, in his mode of existence, the very anti-paradigm of the Father. Thus, on account of the Son, who was generate, possessed of a beginning, and come to be in time, the Father had to be understood to be ingenerate, unbegun, and timeless.⁶⁸⁶ To be sure, this was not a logical must; there was no rational principle that a generator had of necessity the opposite traits from the thing it generated. But Arius here was again simply falling in line with the long accepted practice of applying such processes of negation from created things when postulating on the nature of the ultimate principle of the cosmos.⁶⁸⁷ That Arius put forth the Son as that point of contrast reiterated one of the *Thalia*'s central points, namely, that the Son was ontologically inferior to the Father, and was more properly to be considered on a par with creation at large, with which he shared a common alienness to God's nature.⁶⁸⁸ Arius' opponents complained from the first that he was drawing from Scripture the wrong conclusions about the nature of the Son because he was focusing on what the Son endured according to the human nature he assumed and ignoring those statements in Writ that put him ontologically on a par with the Father.⁶⁸⁹ Whether indeed Arius did as Alexander claimed and ascribed the apparent

⁶⁸⁵ *C. Ar.* 1.5 (NPNF² 4:308-9): "‘God was not always a Father;’ but ‘once God was alone, and not yet a Father, but afterwards He became a Father.’ ‘The Son was not always;’ for, whereas all things were made out of nothing, and all existing creatures and works were made, so the Word of God Himself was ‘made out of nothing,’ and ‘once He was not,’ and ‘He was not before His origination,’ but He as others ‘had an origin of creation.’ ‘For God,’ he says, ‘was alone, and the Word as yet was not, nor the Wisdom.’"

⁶⁸⁶ *Syn.* 15: "‘Αγέννητον δὲ αὐτὸν φάμεν διὰ τὸν τῆν φύσιν γεννητὸν· τοῦτον ἀναρχὸν ἀνυμνοῦμεν διὰ τὸν ἀρχὴν ἔχοντα, αἰδιὸν δὲ αὐτὸν σέβομεν διὰ τὸν ἐν χρόνοις γεγονότα. Ἀρχὴν τὸν υἱὸν ἔθηκε τῶν γενητῶν ὁ ἀναρχος.”

⁶⁸⁷ The classic example of this theological method, wherein one strips away all created concepts from one's understanding of God, can be found in the discussion of the One in Plato's *Parmenides* (137c-142a).

⁶⁸⁸ *Syn.* 15.

⁶⁸⁹ See, e.g., Alexander of Alexandria's *Letter to Alexander* (Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 1.3 [NPNF² 3:35]): "‘They pick out every passage which refers to the dispensation of salvation, and to his humiliation for our sake; they endeavor to collect from them their own impious assertion, while they evade all those which declare his eternal divinity, and the unceasing glory which he possesses with the Father.’"

weakness or frailty that Scripture attributed to Christ back to the pre-incarnate nature of the divine Son has remained a point of great speculation among scholars, particularly because we have no direct evidence from the pen of Arius himself that supports the accusation. To be sure, besides Alexander’s witness, all we have is Arius’ silence on the question of a human soul in Christ and the strongly stratified understanding of the Trinity that he puts forward, which seems to support the idea of Christ’s sufferings as the evidence of the Son’s volitive contingency.⁶⁹⁰ Nevertheless, whether or not Arius acknowledged a human soul in Christ, and whether this influenced his views on the Son’s volitional contingency is not ultimately a key concern—first, because we know from elsewhere that the Scriptural witness of Christ’s suffering and temptations would have been but auxiliary evidence for a thesis of contingency that was already in place; and,

⁶⁹⁰ The other piece of evidence that has interested scholars is a passage from a statement of faith of the anti-Nicene Eudoxius, which is contained August Hahn’s *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der Alten Kirche* (Breslau: Verlag von E. Morgenstern, 1897), pp. 261-3: “σαρκωθέντα, οὐκ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα· οὔτε γὰρ ψυχὴν ἀνθρωπίνην ἀνείληφεν, ἀλλὰ σὰρξ γέγονεν, ἵνα διὰ σαρκὸς τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ὡς διὰ παραπετάσματος θεὸς ἡμῖν χρηματίσῃ· οὐ δύο φύσεις, ἐπεὶ μὴ τέλειος ἦν ἄνθρωπος, ἀλλ’ ἀπὸ ψυχῆς θεὸς ἐν σαρκί· μία τὸ ὅλον κατὰ σύνθεσιν φύσις· παθητὸς δι’ οἰκονομίαν· οὔτε γὰρ ψυχῆς ἢ σώματος παθόντος τὸν κόσμον σώσειν ἐδύνατό” (“...who became flesh but not a human. For neither did he take a human soul, but became flesh so that God be revealed to humans in the flesh as through a curtain; not two natures, because he was not a complete human, but instead of a soul [it was] God in the flesh. The whole was one by composition. For neither could the world be saved by the suffering of a soul or body”). Aloys Grillmeyer, S.J. (*Christ in Christian Tradition*, Vol. 1 [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975], p. 244) called this statement both “the clearest Arian formula of the incarnation” and a “central Arian formula,” which was “already strongly reminiscent of Apollinarius of Laodicea.” R.P.C. Hanson (*The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318-381* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005], p. 112), too, saw this passage as a glance “into the heart of Arianism, and added that “The Arians want to have a God who can suffer, but they cannot attribute suffering to the High God, and this is what (with some reason) they believed the Homoousian doctrine would entail.” David M. Gwynn (*The Eusebians: The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the ‘Arian Controversy.’* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007], p. 201), on the other hand, looks on academic claims of a collective Arian position more as falling in line with a rhetorical construct put forward by Athanasius than a reflection of reality. Moreover, he also argues (*ibid.* p. 201, n. 87) that the question of a human soul in Christ “was simply not a central point at issue for either Arius or Athanasius.” To complicate the question further, we must also note that, in his efforts to establish the reality of the Son against the Sabellianizing Marcellus, Eusebius of Caesarea (*Eccl. Theol.* 1.20.41-3 [PG 24:877AB]) denied a human soul in Christ. His thinking was that, by having the Son take the place of the human soul, he could ascribe to the Son actions that could not have been the Father’s, and thus to establish their distinctness. Clearly, Eusebius’ thinking was clumsy and, in light of the long Christological inquiries of the centuries that were to follow, inadequate. Nevertheless, despite his advocacy of no human soul in Christ, Eusebius made every effort never to ascribe the human weakness exhibited by Christ back to him in his divinity (see e.g. *Dem. ev.* 4.13 [PG 22:284D-288D]).

secondly, because this study will take the position that this entire line of thinking on the Son's potentially being disobedient to the Father that has been attributed to Arius was soon to be abandoned by him anyway. What is important to note is that Arius brought to Scripture his own hermeneutic presuppositions which determined that the Son's begottenness meant that he both had a beginning and was born in time. These to Arius' mind correlated with the conditionality of creatures, but contrasted with the incontingency of the Father, who, unlike the Son and creation in general, was unbegotten, without beginning, and outside of time (or, more literally, *timeless*). In short, Arius concluded that the Father's being without beginning meant he was "foreign to the Son in essence (*κατ' οὐσίαν*)."⁶⁹¹

⁶⁹¹ *Syn.* 15. Arius' invocation of the term *ousia* here seemed quite sudden, and it may have been because it already had come up in the discussions prior to his writing the *Thalia*. Of course, the meaning of this contentious term here was not clear, especially since, as Christopher Stead (*Divine Substance*, [Oxford, UK: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1977] 224.) points out so correctly regarding the early debates over Arius, "...*Ousia* was used in a wide variety of senses, which the users themselves largely failed to recognize, by all parties to the dispute." The fact that Arius also introduced it here in an adverbial prepositional phrase, without an article, does little to help us to pinpoint its precise meaning. I will consider four options, not to posit which one I think Arius intended exactly, but to cast our nets sufficiently widely so as to form a general picture of what Arius might have meant: (1) Firstly, we might take *ousia* as denoting a subsistent, being, or distinct entity, in the sense of *πρώτη οὐσία*. Thus the Father and the Son could not have been one and the same being because the one was without beginning, while the other had a beginning. The same being could not have been both originate and unoriginate. The fact that in the very next line Arius mentioned the Monad as existing before the Dyad (a passage to which we shall return) seemed to confirm that the sequentiality, as Arius saw it, of their existence proved that Father and Son were distinct subsistences. (2) Secondly, if we take *ousia* as corresponding to *type of being*, or genus, then the point similarly became that the Father and Son must have been of different *ousiae* for the same reason: an unoriginate being could not have been of the same type of being as an originate one. (3) Thirdly, if we perceive *ousia* to be the *whatness* of a thing, then again too, the Father, defined, among other ways, as the unoriginate being, could not have the same *ousia* as the Son, among whose definitions would have been included the fact of his origination. Thus, if the Father and Son were not only different types of being but also possessed of different *whatnesses*, then this only legitimated Arius' tactic of using the Son as the anti-paradigm of the Father. (4) Lastly, if we push the term in a more materialistic direction and take *ousia* to mean the *stuff* of which a thing is composed, then sameness in *ousia* again could not work to Arius' mind because the stuff making up the Father was without origin, while that of which the Son was constituted was originate. I add preemptively that the fact that, as we shall see, Arius laid so much emphasis on the volitional nature of the casual relationship between Father and Son seemed to be an effort at precluding any sense of change or diminution of the Father that the fissuring of the divine stuff would have suggested (Stead [*ibid.*], too, raises this last point).

Arius' stratified theological framework shared much with that of neo-Platonists like Plotinus, especially in its charting of the ascent into ontological and cognitive transcendence as one considered, in an upward movement, the persons of the Trinity. Yet, another mechanism, which we have not yet explored, played an equally decisive role in the grand scheme of his theology. It was one that can only have taken its inspiration from the biblical image of a deity active in the affairs of the world. Thus Arius' thought departed radically from the philosophical vision of a remote, impersonal divinity and a serene, rigidly rational architecture of existence, and opened a prominent place for what was, alongside divine unknowability, a second pillar in the theology of the *Thalia*: the divine will. In Arius' mind, this ascent into transcendence and unknowability "unto immensity," as one considered the Persons in turn, corresponded to a chain of active causality, the motor of which was not, as in the Plotinian scheme, a natural overflowing of divine being,⁶⁹² but a specific movement of the divine Will that had its seat in the Father. Apart from its biblical inspiration, this turn to will was also a natural extension of the principles of divine transcendence that Arius had put in place. A God so completely ineffable and indescribable, who was unfettered by any external restriction or convention, could not be discovered through human speculation but only through God's own self-revelation. Moreover, what motivated the primordial divine movement from *monos Theos* to plurality in the divine sphere, from the Monad to the Dyad, from the state of pre-Fatherhood to actual Fatherhood,⁶⁹³ could not but remain shrouded in mystery. God was sovereign, and was free of any compulsion in his movement, and his underlying

⁶⁹² E.g. *Enn.* V.2.1.

⁶⁹³ See the *Thalia* fragment in *C. Ar.* 1.5, which reads: *Οὐκ ἀεὶ ὁ Θεὸς Πατήρ ἦν· ἀλλ' ἦν ὅτε ὁ Θεὸς μόνος ἦν, καὶ οὐπω Πατήρ ἦν ὕστερον δὲ ἐπιγέγονε Πατήρ.* ("God was not always a Father; but, once, God was alone, and not yet a Father, but afterwards He became a Father.")

motivations were beyond speculation. All divine knowledge presupposed God's initiative, and God's good pleasure lay behind the subsistence of all things, even the Son and the Spirit. Thus Arius pushed home, with no less than four explicit statements in the fragment above, that the Son, the first of all generate beings, "existed at the will of the Father,"⁶⁹⁴ whom the Son did not know.⁶⁹⁵ This precedent and initiating will of the all-transcendent Father was the metaphysical lynchpin of Arius' theology. It set in motion and sustained the cosmos, and all, even the Son, were subordinate to it. What was unknowable, inscrutable, and transcendent became known to its inferiors because it willed it, and did so through what was necessarily a set of subordinate relations. Thus Arius' theology must take its place among those theistic voluntarist theologies in history that, in emphasizing the anonymity and intellectual transcendence of God, put forward the divine will as the final arbiter in theological reflection. And the problem he encountered was the objection of much of the Church to his making the Son the first of many external objects of this divine volitional process.

THE RESPONSIVE WILL OF THE SON

The Father determined not only *whether* the Son would exist, but also *how* he existed. It was at God's will that "the Son is what and whatsoever he is."⁶⁹⁶ He ordained which of his own attributes he would manifest in the Son in a divine act that was both generative of the Son and but also revelatory of the Father:

⁶⁹⁴ The other three were: "Wisdom existed as Wisdom by the will of the wise God"; "At God's will the Son is what and whatsoever He is"; "For, being Son, He really existed, at the will of the Father."

⁶⁹⁵ *Syn. 15 (NPNF² 4:458)*: "To speak in brief, God is ineffable to His Son."

⁶⁹⁶ *Syn. 15 (NPNF² 4:458)*.

“For God...was alone, and the Word as yet was not, nor the Wisdom. Then, wishing to form us, thereupon He made a certain one, and named Him Word and Wisdom and Son, that He might form us by means of Him.”⁶⁹⁷

Again, one could see the ontological significance of the naming act. Arius’ specific designation of the Father as the Son’s namer was yet another expression of his belief in the Father’s ontological priority over the Son. Moreover, the purposefulness of the generative act—“that he might form us by means of him”—focused attention on what we have already called the Father’s instigating or initiating will, which was absolute, and whose motivations surpassed human speculation. The Father’s rank as ontologically supreme and absolute unknowable went hand in hand with his status as willing cause of all other being. The Father himself was without cause, his inscrutability was absolute—no one could name him—, and his movement outward from himself, i.e. his self-revelation and relations with other beings, took place on the basis of his inscrutable will. Moreover, the Father’s will became a marker of his activity outside of himself, dealing with things that were contingent and not distinguished by the necessity that characterized his own being.⁶⁹⁸ Will, as a movement of the mind, in this case the divine mind, was perceived as an outward action that allowed the Father to maintain his uniqueness and

⁶⁹⁷ *C. Ar.* 1.5 (NPNF² 4:309 [PG 26:21AB]): Ἦν γὰρ...μόνος ὁ Θεός, καὶ οὐπω ἦν ὁ Λόγος καὶ ἡ Σοφία. Εἶτα θελήσας ἡμᾶς δημιουργῆσαι, τότε δὴ πεποίηκεν ἓνα τινά, καὶ ὠνόμασεν αὐτὸν Λόγον, καὶ Σοφίαν καὶ Υἱόν, ἵνα ἡμᾶς δι’ αὐτοῦ δημιουργήσῃ.”

⁶⁹⁸ Here we must draw attention to a comment by Arius’ supporter, Eusebius of Nicomedia, in his *Epistle to Paulinus, Bishop of Tyre*. (Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 1.5 [NPNF² 3:42]), where he argued that the term “begotten” was not exclusive to the Son, but that Scripture applied it to other beings as well (Is. 1:2; Deut. 32:28; Job 38:28). The expression *begotten*, Eusebius concluded, implied “simply that all things were formed according to his will.” Athanasius (*C. Ar.* 3.59 [NPNF² 4:426]), in the opposite camp, observed a similar link when he declared, “For he who says, ‘The Son came to be at the Divine will,’ has the same meaning as another who says, ‘Once He was not,’ and ‘The Son came to be out of nothing,’ and ‘He is a creature.’”

ontological isolation from other beings,⁶⁹⁹ keeping the willing agent at a remove from its object, and not allowing for one to extrapolate conclusions about the Father's nature based purely on the things he willed into being. As a movement of mind toward an end, will was also an expression of knowledge. This was a perfectly Greek correlation that had long maintained currency.⁷⁰⁰ Faulty knowledge begot errant will; perfect knowledge, will toward perfect ends. Because the omniscient Father was possessed of absolute, perfect, and transcendent knowledge, his will also was perfect, complete, inerrant, absolute, and transcendent.

Yet in this cloud of transcendence there was also something new: a series of positive statements on the attributes of the otherwise unknowable and invisible God. "Wisdom existed as Wisdom by the will of the Wise God," Arius declared, explaining that one knew that "God is wise because he is the teacher of Wisdom."⁷⁰¹ In other words, Arius was able to name the otherwise un-nameable God *wise* because, in generating the Son, he also allowed him to participate in certain of the Father's own attributes, which he

⁶⁹⁹ *Syn. 15 (NPNF² 4:458)*: "For he is to himself what he is, that is, unspeakable. So that nothing which is called comprehensible does the Son know to speak about; for it is impossible for Him to investigate the Father, who is by himself."

⁷⁰⁰ In the thought of the Greeks, will and knowledge or reason were closely intertwined. Plato's *Meno* made one of the earliest such correlations when it said: "It is clear then that those who do not know things to be bad do not desire what is bad, but they desire those things that they believe to be good but that are in fact bad. It follows that those who have no knowledge of these things and believe them to be good clearly desire good things" (77e). Aristotle (*Eth. nic.* 2.6 [1106^b36-1107^a2]) declared that "Excellence is a state concerned with choice, lying in a mean relative to us, this being determined by reason and in the way in which the man of practical wisdom would determine it." The Stoics warmly embraced this association, arguing that impressions activated impulses (Stobaeus, 2.86.17), while wrong action, for the Stoic Chrysippus, was the result of faulty judgment (Galen, *On Hippocrates' and Plato's Doctrines* 4.6.2). The determining power of reason and knowledge over volition led some Stoics to declare passion "no different from reason" (Plutarch, *On Moral Virtue* 446F) (For these Hellenistic sources, see A.A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987, repr. 1995). For the Stoic Zeno, will (*βούλησις*) was nothing other than a "rational appetite" (*εὐλογον ὄρεξιν*) (Diogenes Laertius 7. 106). Athanasius, too, took a similar position when he remarked: "I consider understanding and will to be the same" (*C. Ar.* 3.65 [NPNF² 4:429]).

⁷⁰¹ *Syn. 15 (NPNF² 4:457)*.

identified verbally. Moreover, according to Athanasius,⁷⁰² the reality for Arius was that there were two wisdoms: the first being the archetypal “attribute co-existent with God,” and the second, of course, being the Son himself, who was named Wisdom only on account of his participation in that particular quality of the Father. For the same reason, there were also two Words: first, the attribute proper to the Father; and second, the Son himself, who was Word by participation in that attribute. In this way, the Son was conceived in a host of conceptions—Spirit, Power, Wisdom, God’s glory, Truth, Image, Word, Radiance, Light⁷⁰³—for the Father not only generated the Son and conferred on him the participation in these attributes, it was he also who named him and identified these attributes for us. In this same vein, the Father also bestowed on the Son “that power by which God sees” so that, “in his own measure” and “as is lawful,”⁷⁰⁴ the Son was able to see the Father, who by nature was invisible both to the Son and all generate being.⁷⁰⁵

The Son, therefore, was a weak image of the Father, and to him also was given a weak vision of the same. Given, too, that the Son did not properly know even his own essence,⁷⁰⁶ his knowledge, bestowed on him by the Father, was but a faint reflection of the Father’s omniscience. The Son’s status as reflection of the Father warranted his being called *God*, but only under the understanding that “the Word is not the very God.”

“Though he is called God, yet he is not very God,” but, “by participation of grace, he, as

⁷⁰² *C. Ar.* 1:5 (*NPNF*² 4:309).

⁷⁰³ *Syn.* 15 (*NPNF*² 4:458).

⁷⁰⁴ *Syn.* 15 (*NPNF*² 4:457).

⁷⁰⁵ Curiously, Origen (*Princ.* 2.4.3) too, at least in how Rufinus rendered him, had insisted on the invisibility of God the Father to the Son. This, however, was not because of the Son’s inferiority, but because visibility was a trait of material bodies. As both Father and Son were non-material, visibility was inapplicable to them, and passages that talked of *seeing* the Father really only meant *understanding* the Father.

⁷⁰⁶ *C. Ar.* 1:6 (*NPNF*² 4:309).

others, is God only in name.”⁷⁰⁷ In like wise, he was not the “true power of God,” but one of those powers and hosts, like the locust and the caterpillar,⁷⁰⁸ of which God the Father was said by Scripture to be Lord.⁷⁰⁹

On another level, Arius also considered the Son’s primordial origin in things inexistent, and his subsequent passage into existence by the direct action and will of the Father, a most radical kind of ontological transformation, which rendered the Son’s nature, and the nature of all generate being in general, fundamentally mutable and contingent.⁷¹⁰ Unlike the unchanging Father, who stood above the cycles and vicissitudes of cosmic life, the Son was subject to change and adaptation. According to Athanasius, Arius had maintained that

“By nature, as all others, so the Word himself is alterable, and remains good by his own free will, while he chooseth. When, however, he wills, he can alter as we can, as being of an alterable nature.”⁷¹¹

⁷⁰⁷ *C. Ar.* 1:6 (NPNF² 4:309 [PG 26:21D-24A]): “...οὐδὲ Θεὸς ἀληθινός ἐστιν ὁ Λόγος. Εἰ δὲ καὶ λέγεται Θεός, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἀληθινός ἐστιν· ἀλλὰ μετοχὴ χάριτος, ὥσπερ καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι πάντες, οὕτω καὶ αὐτὸς λέγεται ὀνόματι μόνον Θεός.”

⁷⁰⁸ Joel 2:25.

⁷⁰⁹ *C. Ar.* 1:5 (NPNF² 4:309). As noted above, the portions of the *Thalia* contained in Athanasius’ *C. Ar.* 1:5 are not unalloyed text, but excerpts interspersed with paraphrases, explications, and extrapolations. One cannot know whether Arius in the *Thalia* indeed likened the Son to the locust and caterpillar of Joel, or whether this was not just an image brought forth in the heat of the debates. In any case, we cannot but note this statement’s considerable shock value.

⁷¹⁰ In his *Epistle to Alexander*, which Opitz dated at 324, Alexander of Alexandria (Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 1.3 [NPNF² 3:35-36]) saw clearly this connection between Arius’ premise of the Son’s generation from things existent and the mutability of the same: “God, they say, created all things out of that which was non-existent, and they include in the number of creatures, both rational and irrational, even the Son of God. Consistently with this doctrine they, as a necessary consequence, affirm that He is by nature liable to change, and capable both of virtue and of vice, and thus, by their hypothesis of his having been created out of that which was non-existent, they overthrow the testimony of the Divine Scriptures, which declare the immutability of the Word and the Divinity of the Wisdom of the Word, which Word and Wisdom is Christ.” The same principle can also be found in Origen (*Princ.* 2.9.2), who argued that the nature of the rational beings that God made was mutable because they were created: “...by this very fact that they did not exist and then began to exist they were of necessity subject to change and alteration” (trans. Butterworth).

⁷¹¹ *C. Ar.* 1:5 (NPNF² 4:309). The Greek reads: “Καὶ τῇ μὲν φύσει, ὥσπερ πάντες, οὕτω καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ Λόγος ἐστὶ τρεπτός, τῷ δὲ αὐτεξουσίῳ, ἕως βούλεται, μένει καλός” (PG 26:21C).

The specific workings of how Arius imagined this process of volition are not easy to pinpoint. In light of the connection between knowledge and willing that seemed so to infuse Arius' thought, it seems plausible to imagine Arius' understanding of the Son's will as a direct expression of the Son's knowledge, which we said was a lesser image of the Father's omniscience, and comprehend his volitive alignment with the Father to be his abiding focus on those divine attributes in which the Father had given him to participate. The task for an agent possessed of lesser knowledge than the Father, yet both generated by and participating in him, was: to discern, on the basis of its own relative but God-given knowledge, its own source, namely the Father, who was none other than the source of all truth and goodness; to remain always in absolute association with him; and never to allow one's own partial ignorance to lead one astray. Such a leading astray would also be an act of will, namely a movement of mind toward an end, but an end based on ignorance rather than the true knowledge come from the Father. Will, therefore, as a movement of mind toward truth, became the means of relating the ontologically divergent strata in this essentially neo-Platonic worldview that Arius, and much of late antiquity, were invested in. This was the modus of oneness that Arius envisaged as bonding the Son to the Father. It was a symphony, a concord of wills of discrete agents, where the subordinate recognized in the superior its own source and remained fixed on it.⁷¹²

⁷¹² Such a reconstruction would agree with the view of obedience and apostasy held more generally. For example, Athanasius held that the soul was where intelligence resided, and that "by it alone can God be contemplated and perceived"; it was "unlike men possessed of an intellect to deny God, its maker and artificer" (*C. Gent.* 30.3-4). By this intellectual power resident in the soul one exercised reflection and chose "by judgment the better of alternative reasonings." For "the hand is able to take hold of a sword-blade, and the mouth to taste poison, but neither knows that these are injurious, unless the intellect decide" (*C. Gent.* 31.2-3). Obedience to God was connected to knowledge. E. P. Meijering (*Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius: Synthesis or Antithesis?* [Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1968] 23) holds that, in

In accordance with this line of thinking, the very basis of the Son's glory and status was his compliance to the divine will. In fact, the Father had bestowed the title of Son on him ahead of time, at his generation, because he *foresaw* the obedience he would demonstrate throughout his heavenly existence and especially his ministry on earth. Therefore, "as foreknowing that he would be good, did God by anticipation bestow on him this glory, which afterwards, as man, he attained from virtue."⁷¹³ Alexander of Alexandria, too, attributed to Arius and his circle the belief that, "being begotten," the Son was of a "nature mutable and susceptible of change, as all other rational creatures are."⁷¹⁴ But from this premise of the mutability that the Son shared with other generate beings, Alexander sought also to show how Arius' teaching amounted to making the Son comparable *in all respects* to other generate beings. Thus Alexander, in the same epistle, also remarked:

"Some one accordingly asked them [Arius and his cohort] whether the Word of God could be changed, as the devil had been? And they feared not to say, 'Yes, he could; for being begotten, he is susceptible of change.'"⁷¹⁵

It is not clear whether this passage represented a bold and clear statement of belief on the part of the Arians, or an admission made perhaps in the heat of the moment during one of what must have been many impassioned confrontations early in the dispute. In another epistle, written some years later, Alexander of Alexandria upheld this same testimony,

this passage, Athanasius came very close to the Platonist position that people did not deliberately do evil but did so only out of ignorance.

⁷¹³ C. Ar. 1:5 (NPNF² 4:309).

⁷¹⁴ Alexander of Alexandria, *Epistle to the Hierarchs Everywhere* (Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.6 [NPNF² 2:4 (PG 67:45C)]): "ἐν ἧ καὶ τὰ πάντα καὶ αὐτὸν πεποίηκεν ὁ Θεός. Διὸ καὶ τρεπτὸς ἐστὶ καὶ ἀλλοιωτὸς τὴν φύσιν, ὡς καὶ πάντα τὰ λογικά."

⁷¹⁵ Alexander of Alexandria, *Epistle to the Hierarchs Everywhere* (Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.6 [NPNF² 2:4 (PG 67:48A)]): "Ἠρώτησε γοῦν τις αὐτούς, εἰ δύναται ὁ τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγος τραπήναι ὡς ὁ διάβολος ἐτραπήνῃ· καὶ οὐκ ἐφοβήθησαν εἰπεῖν, Ναὶ δύναται. Τρεπτῆς γὰρ φύσεώς ἐστι, γεννητὸς καὶ τρεπτὸς ὑπάρχων."

even including the detail that, for the Arians, the Son was in nature no different from the other sons of God. He was chosen because, “though mutable by nature, his painstaking character suffered no deterioration.” If a Peter or Paul did the same thing, he added, their sonship would have been the same as the Son’s.⁷¹⁶

Clearly the tendency among Arius’ opponents was to draw attention to those implications of Arius’ teaching which put the Son on an equal footing in all respects with the rest of generate being. Besides suggesting that Arius was belittling the Son by likening him, in the most extreme case, to the insects, it also emphasized the theoretical potential, in Arius’ teaching, of him sinning—clearly a shocking proposition. R.C. Gregg and D. E. Groh⁷¹⁷ proposed that Arius’ enemies took his teaching of a mutable Son in the directly opposite way from how he intended it. Arius laid emphasis on the Son’s mutability, they argued, not to stress the possibility of his falling away from God, but to present the volitive action of the Son as an endeavor in advancement that culminated in his adoption by the Father.⁷¹⁸ Alexander of Alexandria noted⁷¹⁹ how Arius and his confreres cited Ps. 44:7 (LXX)—“Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity”—in support of the concept of the Son’s progress toward the Father. This was perfectly consonant with their volitionist theology if one considered the Son’s striving for the Father an act of love and bore in mind the Stoic conception of *agapēsis* itself as nothing other than a species of will.⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁶ Alexander of Alexandria, *Epistle to Alexander* (apud Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 1.3 [NPNF² 3:36]).

⁷¹⁷ Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 18.

⁷¹⁸ *Syn.* 15 (NPNF² 4:457): “The Unbegun made the Son a beginning of things originated; and advanced Him as a Son to himself by adoption.”

⁷¹⁹ Alexander of Alexandria, *Epistle to Alexander* (apud Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 1.3 [NPNF² 3:36]).

⁷²⁰ Diogenes Laertius 7.106. Apart from love (*ἀγάπησις*), the other species of will for Zeno were benevolence (*εὔνοια*), goodwill (*εὐμένεια*), and affection (*ἀσπασμός*).

Gregg and Groh went on to suggest that Arius' focus on the Son's obedience to the Father formed the cornerstone of a vast soteriological theology that characterized early Arianism, in which the submission to the Father of the Son—as the representative of creation, its moral exemplar, and pioneer of its salvation—became the mechanism through which all creatures were shown the path they too should follow to their own deliverance. However, Arius' suggestion that the Son was mutable and, at least potentially, subject to sin was met with almost uniform outrage, and—and this we cannot emphasize enough—it led, as we shall see, to an almost immediate retreat by Arius on this point. As we shall see in the next section, in his later works Arius not only abandoned the idea of a morally contingent Son completely, but was to insist instead on his immutability, which suggested more a passing than an essential attachment to the soteriological theory advanced above. Arius' primary interests were metaphysical and were centered on how to posit the exact meaning of divinity, to reconcile revelation with the stratified neo-Platonist ontology he took as a given, and to establish a mechanism for relating these ontological strata while keeping them discrete from one another.⁷²¹ Despite this, the notion that the Son could sin, which in his most virulent opponents' eyes seemed to grow directly out of Arius' volitionist theology, had the effect of stigmatizing any mention of will in the internals of the Trinity, so that any expression of the notion of union based on, or—and here the distinction is critical—merely including, a symphony of

⁷²¹ Charles Kannengiesser, *Holy Scripture and Hellenistic Hermeneutics in Alexandrian Christology: the Arian Crisis* (Berkeley, Calif.: Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, 1982), 17: “The teachings of Arius are of an essentially metaphysical order. Even when one presents emerging Arianism as ‘A View of Salvation’ [Kannengiesser here cites Gregg and Groh], which responds to the practical questionings and concrete needs of believers, one is always brought back to the Arian concept of divinity.”

wills automatically became tantamount to preaching a morally contingent Christ and was dismissed as the continuation of Arianism by other means.

ARIUS' TURN

One of the great points of perplexity in this dispute is the speed and degree to which Arius seemed so completely to distance himself from these most egregious and shocking teachings he was said to have been promulgating. In his letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia, dated by Opitz at 318,⁷²² in which he complained to his friend over the injustice of his expulsion by Alexander and argued for the rectitude of his own position, he made no mention of the Son's mutability, let alone the potential of his falling away from the Father, but focused solely on the necessary precedence of the Father, as unbegotten, over the begotten Son:

“But we say and believe, and have taught, and do teach, that the Son is not unbegotten, nor in any way part of the unbegotten; and that He does not derive His subsistence from any matter; but that by will and counsel He has subsisted before time, and before ages, as perfect God, only begotten and unchangeable, and that before He was begotten, or created, or purposed, or established, He was not. For He was not unbegotten. We are persecuted, because we say that the Son has a beginning, but that God is without beginning. This is the cause of our persecution, and likewise, because we say that He is of the non-existent. And this we say, because He is neither part of God, nor of any essential being.”⁷²³

⁷²² Opitz, Urk. 1.

⁷²³ Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 1.4 (NPNF² 3:41 [PG 82:912BC]): “Ἡμεῖς δὲ τί λέγομεν καὶ φρονοῦμεν καὶ ἐδιδάξαμεν καὶ διδάσκομεν; Ὅτι ὁ Υἱὸς οὐκ ἔστιν ἀγέννητος, οὐδὲ μέρος ἀγεννήτου κατ’ οὐδένα τρόπον ἀλλ’ οὔτε ἐξ ὑποκειμένου τινός· ἀλλ’ ὅτι θελήματι καὶ βουλήν ὑπέστη πρὸ χρόνων καὶ πρὸ αἰώνων πλήρης Θεός, μονογενής,

There was no talk here of the Son's mutability or the possibility of him sinning. On the contrary, Arius now described him as *ἀναλλοίωτος*, *unchangeable*, i.e. unable to change. One could perhaps attempt to salvage a sense of mutability by arguing for a secondary meaning of the term, *unchanging*,⁷²⁴ and suggest that the Son chose or happened not to change, but the tenuousness of such an argument would only underline the degree of Arius' shift away from an unambiguous stance on the Son's moral contingency. There was the mention of will and counsel⁷²⁵ lying behind his subsistence, but it was not explicit to whose will and counsel Arius was referring, the Son's or the Father's. We could only surmise that it as the Father's, because, in Arius' thought throughout, the Son owed his existence to the will of the Father. With the Son being begotten and existing before time, the Father's priority over him could not properly be considered temporal, despite the fact that, in his formula on the Son's inexistence *before* his begetting, Arius, against the dictates of reason, persisted with the temporally charged preposition *before*. Finally, the Son's generation "before time, and before ages, as perfect God, only begotten and unchangeable" clearly placed him on a different ontological level from that of the rest of generate being. His real concerns here were ontological, to maintain the sense of proper order in theology: the Son was begotten, the Father not. The Son, therefore, had a beginning and, before his begetting, did not exist; the Father, as unbegotten, had existed always. Therefore, being so ontologically different, the Father and Son could not have been of the same *ousia*.

ἀναλλοίωτος, καὶ πρὶν γεννηθῆναι, ἤτοι κτισθῆναι, ἤτοι ὀρισθῆναι, ἢ θεμελιωθῆναι, οὐκ ἦν· ἀγέννητος γὰρ οὐκ ἦν. Διωκόμεθα δέ, ὅτι εἶπομεν· Ἀρχὴν ἔχει ὁ Υἱός, ὁ δὲ Θεὸς ἀναρχός ἐστι. Διὰ τοῦτο διωκόμεθα· καὶ ὅτι εἶπομεν ὅτι ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων ἐστίν. Οὕτω δὲ εἶπαμεν, καθότι οὐδὲ μέρος Θεοῦ, οὐδὲ ἐξ ὑποκειμένου τινός· διὰ τοῦτο διωκόμεθα."

⁷²⁴ See G.W.H. Lampe, *A Greek Patristic Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1961), pp. 110-111.

⁷²⁵ *NPNF*² 3:41 here has "by his own will and counsel," but this to me seems unjustified in light of the Gk., which says only, "θελήματι καὶ βουλήν." A comparison with what he writes to Alexander (see Athanasius' *Syn.* 16) suggests the will and counsel are the Father's.

Arius reiterated these same sentiments in his letter to Alexander of Alexandria in 320. Again, there was no hint of the Son's moral contingency, or even his likeness with the rest of generate being. Rather, he stated, in even stronger terms than before, the opposite: the Father

“begat an Only-begotten Son before eternal times, through whom He has made both the ages and the universe; and begat Him, not in semblance, but in truth; and that He made Him subsist at His own will, unalterable and unchangeable; perfect creature of God, but not as one of the creatures; offspring, but not as one of things begotten.”⁷²⁶

The Son was generated before time, unalterable and unchangeable, a perfect creature that was unlike all other creatures. If Arius had ever held to a doctrine of the Son's moral contingency and his volitive union with the Father from which he could potentially have fallen away in the same way that any creature could do, all this had vanished. His concern now was only in establishing the ontological primacy of the Father and the volitional initiative of the same in bringing the, at one point, inexistent Son into being. In doing so, I believe Arius was aligning himself more closely with the position held by his powerful allies abroad, with whom he by now had open communication. We already know from Philostorgius⁷²⁷ that the disciples of Lucian, including Eusebius of Nicomedia himself, rejected Arius' axiom that the Son did not know the Father, thus depriving him of the crucial fundament on which to build his system of volitional union between Father and Son. In accordance with how I have reconstructed Arius' theology on this point, if there

⁷²⁶ *Apud* Athanasius' *Syn.* 16 (*NPNF*² 4:458 [PG 26:709A]): “ὑποστήσαντα ἰδίῳ θελήματι ἄτρεπτον καὶ ἀναλλοίωτον κτίσμα τοῦ Θεοῦ τέλειον, ἀλλ' οὐχ ὡς ἐν τῶν κτισμάτων γέννημα, ἀλλ' οὐχ ὡς ἐν τῶν γεννημάτων.”

⁷²⁷ *Hist. eccl.* 2.3 (PG 65:468A).

was no ignorance of the Father, neither could there any longer be theoretically contingent oneness of Son with Father by means of will. Tellingly, the earliest correspondence we have by Arius' allies in support of him makes no mention of volitive unity. For example, in the preserved fragment⁷²⁸ of Eusebius of Nicomedia's reply to Arius, we see the bishop applauding Arius for his beliefs, and affirming only that it was clear to all things that were generated things did not exist prior to their generation but had a beginning. Similarly, in his letter to Euphrasion, Eusebius of Caesarea too expressed similar views, reaffirming that that which is first and better must precede the second, both in order and honor, as being the cause both of its being and way of being.⁷²⁹ The Son was God but not true God; only the Father was true God, because only he was without another before him.⁷³⁰ In neither was there any mention of the Son being in a volitional union with the Father from which the Son could fall away if he so willed. To be sure, these were fragmentary or incidental evidences yet, along with Arius' own silence on the matter, we can say with fairness that that aspect of the dispute seemed very early to have been laid to rest for Arius and his confreres.

THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA

The Council of Nicaea, convened in 325 by Constantine to resolve the deep theological fissures exposed by the Arian controversy, reaffirmed, over and against Arius and his supporters, the ontological parity of the Father and the Son, sealing it with the celebrated, though, for reasons we shall see below, also deeply controversial,

⁷²⁸ *Apud* Athanasius' *Syn.* 17.

⁷²⁹ Urk. 3.1 in Hans-Georg Opitz's *Urkunden zur Geschichte des Arianischen Streites, 318-328* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1934).

⁷³⁰ Opitz, Urk. 3.3.

homoousion. We note that the Creed that the Council promulgated made no specific mention of will—neither that of the Father in generating the Son, nor that of the Son in maintaining volitive union with the Father. It limited itself only to denouncing those

“who say ‘There was a time when he was not,’ and ‘He was not before he was begotten’ and ‘He was made from that which did not exist,’ and those who assert that he is of other substance (*hypostasis*) or essence (*ousia*) than the Father, or that he was created, or is susceptible of change.”⁷³¹

We note the denunciation of the idea that the Son was “susceptible of change,” but will, in any form, went unmentioned. However, besides the Creed, the Council also issued a formal letter to what in essence had been the party most aggrieved by the turmoil incited by Arius: the Church of Alexandria. Here the Council went much further. It condemned Arius by name, and it elaborated on the condemnations it had issued in the Creed, censuring

“all the blasphemous expressions he has uttered, in affirming that ‘the Son of God sprang from nothing,’ and that ‘there was a time when he was not;’ saying moreover that ‘the Son of God, by his free will was capable either of vice or virtue;’ and calling him a creature and a work.”⁷³²

In other words, the council declared heretical the notion that the Son was once inexistent, was of a different substance/essence from that of the Father, was a creature or work, and was susceptible to change. What the Council had described as susceptibility to change

⁷³¹ *Apud Socrates, Hist. eccl.* 1.8 (NPNF² 2:10 [PG 67:68B]): “Τοὺς δὲ λέγοντας, ὅτι Ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν, καὶ Πρὶν γεννηθῆναι οὐκ ἦν, καὶ ὅτι Ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων ἐγένετο, ἢ ἐξ ἑτέρας ὑποστάσεως ἢ οὐσίας φάσκοντας εἶναι, ἢ κτιστόν, ἢ τρεπτόν, ἢ ἀλλοιωτόν τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ.”

⁷³² *Socrates, Hist. eccl.* 1.9 (NPNF² 2:12 [PG 67:77C]): “καὶ τὰ ρήματα καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα τὰ βλάσφημα, οἷς ἐκέχρητο βλασφημιῶν, τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ λέγων ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων, καὶ εἶναι ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν· καὶ αὐτεξουσιότητι κακίας καὶ ἀρετῆς δεκτικὸν τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ λέγοντος, καὶ κτίσμα καὶ ποίημα ὀνομάζοντος.”

was here clarified as “by his free will capable either of vice or virtue.”⁷³³ It was clear that the Council had shut the door on the notion of the Son’s moral contingency. But my contention is that Arius, possibly at the urging of his allies, had already shut that same door years earlier. Thus, one could say that the Council was condemning a position once held by Arius, which had come to be associated with him in the popular consciousness, not necessarily one that he had continued to hold throughout. Nevertheless, in all its condemnations, the council neither denounced the idea that the Son was generated by the will of the Father, nor the idea, *per se*, that the Son remained in volitive harmony with the Father, but only that the Son might choose to do evil and turn away from him. These were important distinctions in light of what followed. Of course, and to the enduring suspicion of his foes, Arius was later readmitted into the Church only after signing a recantation and very general statement of belief that avoided all controversial positions.⁷³⁴

THE AFTERMATH OF NICAEA

In the discontented wake of Nicaea, there followed an infamous though theologically fecund succession of councils and counter-councils that was to last several decades as parties tried either to overturn, defend, or improve on Nicaea. The victorious faction, the supporters of the Council of Nicaea, or *Nicenes*, consisted of a coalition that ranged from theologically resolute ecclesiastics, who, bolstered by their triumph at the council, viewed the Nicene formula and the *homoousion* as the only appropriate way of expressing the eternal faith of the Church and its gainsayers as supporters of the

⁷³³ The *NPNF*² rendered “αὐτεξουσιότητι κακίας καὶ ἀρετῆς δεκτικὸν τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ” as “because possessed of free will, was capable either of vice or virtue.” I felt this too expansive a translation.

⁷³⁴ Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.26 (*NPNF*² 2:28).

theological vices of Arius, to those clerics who were interested simply in preserving the status quo and saw in the council the quickest path to closure and peace. Added to these were churchmen who, although initially mistrustful of Nicaea, out of weariness, as the turmoil dragged on, came to regard it as the only realistic basis for peace simply because it was the first and most prestigious of the councils called to solve the questions raised by Arius.⁷³⁵

The anti-Nicene faction was an uneasy agglomeration of parties that were opposed primarily to the *homoousion*. Besides Arius himself were those hierarchs led by Eusebius of Nicomedia who came to his support from the first, quite probably on account of a common connection to the martyred Lucian of Antioch,⁷³⁶ even though the evidence suggests that they did not espouse a number of Arius' key positions. Philostorgius, for example, reported that Eusebius of Nicomedia and others rejected his belief that the Son did not know the Father,⁷³⁷ which was a key element to his theory of the Son's contingent volitional union with the Father. Added to these was a significant number of ecclesiastics that might be described as theological conservatives, who held no special sympathy for Arius, but were driven by a deeply-seated aversion to the *homoousion*. Unlike terms like *hypostasis* (Heb 1:3) and *physis* (2 Pet 1:4), these viewed *ousia* and especially its awkward derivative *homoousion* ("having one and the same ousia") as an unbiblical neologism that created more difficulties than it solved. Some writers may have used it in the past, but it had never enjoyed universal acceptance, and its precise meaning was unclear. Firstly, derived from the feminine participle (*οὐσα*) of *to be* (*εἶναι*), it could

⁷³⁵ See, e.g., Athanasius' *Ep. Afr.* 2.

⁷³⁶ Philostorgius (*Hist. eccl.* 2.14) listed Eusebius of Nicomedia, Maris of Chalcedon, Theognis of Nicaea, Leontius, later bishop of Antioch, among others—all supporters of Arius—as disciples of Lucian.

⁷³⁷ Philostorgius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.3 (PG 65:468A).

denote an individual existence, as per Aristotle's notion of *first ousia*,⁷³⁸ in which case *homoousion* would have meant, problematically, that Father and Son were one and the same being or person—nothing short of Sabellianism and Modalism—a charge leveled, in some instances justly, at not a few of the Nicenes. Secondly, it could also denote a *type* of being, a genus, as per Aristotle's *second ousia*,⁷³⁹ in which case, if the Father and Son were said to be of the same genus, the fear was that, as with the Platonic concept of the *Ideas*, a divinity genus would have been conceived as standing above its Father and Son instantiations.⁷⁴⁰ A third option was to consider the *ousia* of a thing its *whatness*. If Father and Son were *homoousioi*, the problem would have been to explain why they had different names, for a name was simply the verbal articulation of a thing's *whatness*.⁷⁴¹ Finally, the problem with *ousia* was that it could also be used to denote physical matter, or the stuff from which a thing was made, in much the same way as *substance* is used in modern English.⁷⁴² Therefore, *homoousion* in this instance would have suggested a material divinity, found both in Stoicism⁷⁴³ and theologians like Tertullian, who was, incidentally, an early proponent of *ousia* language.

In addition to all these complications was a particular linguistic quirk that had developed because, in the Latin practice, *ousia* had come to be rendered *substantia*,

⁷³⁸ *Cat.* 5 (2^a11-12): “Οὐσία...πρώτως...λεγομένη.”

⁷³⁹ *Cat.* 5 (2^a14): “δευτέρα οὐσία.”

⁷⁴⁰ See, e.g., the protestations quoted by Athanasius in *Syn.* 51 (*NPNF*² 4:477): “‘If the Son is coessential with the Father, then an essence must be *previously* supposed, from which they have been generated; and that the one is not Father and the other Son, but they are brothers together.’”

⁷⁴¹ See, e.g. Aristotle's definition of a *definition* (*ὅρος*), namely “a phrase signifying a thing's essence [or *whatness*: τὸ τί ἦν]. It is rendered in the form either of a phrase in lieu of a name, or of a phrase in lieu of another phrase; for it is sometimes possible to define the meaning of a phrase as well.” (*Top.* 1.5 [101^b39-102^a2]).

⁷⁴² See, e.g., Clement of Alexandria (*Protr.* 4 [PG 8:153B]): “Προῦλθεν ἡ τέχνη, περιβέβληται τὸ σχῆμα· ἡ ἕλη καὶ τὸ πλούσιον τῆς οὐσίας πρὸς μὲν τὸ κέρδος ἀγώγιμον, μόνω δὲ τῷ σχήματι γίνεται σεβάσμιον.”

⁷⁴³ Most telling is Athenagoras' (*Leg.* 32.2 [PG 6:937A]) use of *ousia*, in its purely materialist sense, in his attempt to describe the Stoics' materializing interpretation of the deities of old: “Ζεὺς ἢ ζέουσα οὐσία κατὰ τοὺς Στωικοὺς, Ἥρα ὁ ἀήρ...Ποσειδῶν ἢ πόσις.”

instead of its more proper cognate *essentia*, even though, tragically, *substantia* corresponded more exactly to the Greek *hypostasis*.⁷⁴⁴ This did nothing to simplify communications between East and West, and, when, during the course of the debates, *ousia* and *hypostasis* each began to assume its own specific technical signification, not few were the instances where the one side thought the other Sabellian or tri-theist respectively.⁷⁴⁵ Finally, as if to crown all these complexities, there was also the irrepressible fact that the term *homoousion* had already been rejected at the Council of Antioch, called in 264 to denounce Paul of Samosata, then bishop of Antioch, whose particular heresy combined modalism with adoptionism. Athanasius would try to argue that the council had rejected it back then only because it was being used in a materialistic

⁷⁴⁴ At this point, we should also cite the witness of Socrates Scholasticus' *Hist. eccl.* 3.7 (NPNF² 2:81-2 [PG 67:393A-396B]) on the confusion over *ousia* and *hypostasis*: "It was there determined that such expressions as *ousia* and *hypostasis* ought not to be used in reference to God: for they argued that the word *ousia* is nowhere employed in the sacred Scriptures; and that the apostle has misapplied the term *hypostasis* (Heb. 1:3) owing to an inevitable necessity arising from the nature of the doctrine. They nevertheless decided that in refutation of the Sabellian error these terms were admissible, in default of more appropriate language, lest it should be supposed that one thing was indicated by a threefold designation; whereas we ought rather to believe that each of those named in the Trinity is God in his own proper person [ἐν ἰδίᾳ ὑποστάσει]. Such were the decisions of this Synod. If we may express our own judgment concerning substance and personality, it appears to us that the Greek philosophers have given us various definitions of *ousia*, but have not taken the slightest notice of *hypostasis*. Irenaeus the grammarian indeed, in his Alphabetical [Lexicon entitled] *Atticistes*, even declares it to be a barbarous term; for it is not to be found in any of the ancients, except occasionally in a sense quite different from that which is attached to it in the present day. Thus Sophocles, in his tragedy entitled *Phoenix*, uses it to signify 'treachery': in Menander it implies 'sauces' [τὰ καρυκείμενα]; as if one should call the 'sediment' [τὴν...τρύγα] at the bottom of a hogshead of wine *hypostasis*. But although the ancient philosophical writers scarcely noticed this word, the more modern ones have frequently used it instead of *ousia*. This term, as we before observed, has been variously defined: but can that which is capable of being circumscribed by a definition be applicable to God who is incomprehensible? Evagrius in his *Monachicus*, cautions us against rash and inconsiderate language in reference to God; forbidding all attempt to define the divinity, inasmuch as it is wholly simple in its nature: 'for,' says he, 'definition belongs only to things which are compound.' The same author further adds, 'Every proposition has either a 'genus' which is predicted, or a 'species,' or a 'differentia,' or a 'proprium,' or an 'accidens,' or that which is compounded of these: but none of these can be supposed to exist in the sacred Trinity. Let then what is inexplicable be adored in silence' [Πᾶσα πρότασις, φησίν, ἢ γένος ἔχει κατηγορούμενον, ἢ διαφορᾶν, ἢ εἶδος, ἢ ἴδιον, ἢ συμβεβηκός, ἢ τὸ ἐκ τούτων συγκείμενον, οὐδὲν δὲ ἐπὶ τῆς ἁγίας Τριάδος τῶν εἰρημένων ἔστι λαβεῖν. Σιωπῇ προσκυνεῖσθω τὸ ἀρόρητον]. Such is the reasoning of Evagrius, of whom we shall again speak hereafter."

⁷⁴⁵ Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.23 (NPNF² 2:27).

way.⁷⁴⁶ Hilary, however would understand its condemnation quite differently—an incongruity that only highlighted the degree of confusion surrounding the term—remarking that it was rejected because Paul had embraced it,⁷⁴⁷ in all likelihood, in a Sabellian way. For all these reasons, the term remained, in the eyes of many, a source of mistrust and confusion,⁷⁴⁸ contributing to what Socrates famously described as a “contest in the dark,” in which “neither party seemed to understand distinctly the grounds on which they calumniated one another.”⁷⁴⁹

In this highly volatile setting, there were also certain others who for various reasons—ideological, political—sought middle ground in the conflict. Eusebius of Caesarea could be described as such a one, at least for a time, since his shifts in line with the changing political winds might also betray wily opportunism. He was a representative of the bloc of the conservative eastern prelates. He held some common ground with the Lucianists, but was un beholden to them and acted independently of them. Perplexed by Alexander’s position⁷⁵⁰ and instinctively against the *homoousion*, Eusebius was one of Arius’ early supporters and shared many of the concerns of Arius and his confreres. However, in the interests of Church unity,⁷⁵¹ and no doubt swayed by his friendship with and admiration of the emperor Constantine and unwillingness to appear to cross him, he acceded to the Nicene formula only after obtaining certain clarifications from the council as to the intention behind the language of the creed. Following the council, he issued an

⁷⁴⁶ *Syn.* 45 (*NPNF*² 4:474).

⁷⁴⁷ Hilary, *Syn.* 86 (*NPNF*² 9:27).

⁷⁴⁸ Cf. Hilary’s (*Trin.* 4.4 [(*NPNF*² 9:71-2)]) useful summary of some of the resistance to the term.

⁷⁴⁹ Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.23 (*NPNF*² 2:27).

⁷⁵⁰ Opitz, *Urk.* 3.

⁷⁵¹ Though he wrote his *Vita Constantini* after the emperor’s death in 337, the sheer euphoria of its tone at the ascent to power of this new David must have captured his imagination even during the days of the council, strengthening his desire for church unity.

explanation to his flock, which has come down to us as the *Epistola Eusebii*,⁷⁵² on why his acceptance of Nicaea's ruling did not violate the tenets that he and they held so dear. His apology here reflected theological positions that he had already articulated in his earlier works, published well before the initial dispute in Alexandria, and provides us with an insight into the specific concerns of his faithful and those anti-Nicene elements more generally over attributing to the Father and Son oneness of *ousia*. It also demonstrated just how distant were the positions of many of the anti-Nicene party from those of Arius. As we will see, there was no trace here of the exaggerations associated with Arius himself, which had provided, and would continue to provide, so much shock value in the Nicene party's rhetoric. The concern of Eusebius was not to make a soteriological point by emphasizing the possibility of the Son falling away from the Father, but to explain the divine plurality of Trinitarianism while maintaining a sense of the divine order at whose peak the Father was located. In this endeavor, the category of will as a theological factor played its own special role.

Regarding the contentious *homoousion*, he began in the *Epistola*, Eusebius assured his correspondents that the special discussions that followed its introduction into the creed made clear to him that the term was meant to indicate only that the Son was "from the Father," as opposed, presumably, to being from some *tertium quid*, but not that the Son was "a part of his essence": the Son was "indeed from the Father, yet without being as if a part of him."⁷⁵³ Despite the fact that there was general confusion at the time over the terms *ousia* and *hypostasis*,⁷⁵⁴ and that it appears that here Eusebius was using

⁷⁵² *NPNF*² 4:73-76.

⁷⁵³ *Epistola Eusebii* 5 (*NPNF*² 4:75). This is also to be found in Theodoret's *Hist. eccl.* 1.9 (*NPNF*² 3:47-48).

⁷⁵⁴ Cf. Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 3.7 (*NPNF*² 2:81-82).

essence/*ousia* in the way *hypostasis* would come to be used later, viz. to signify a concrete existence or entity, it is clear that Eusebius was offering in his *Epistola* an, at best, tenuous explanation of how he understood the *homoousion*. It cannot be a surprise to us that, as time progressed and the political situation turned, Eusebius would turn against Nicaea. Nevertheless, the usefulness for us of the *Epistola* lies in the insights it affords us into his overriding theological priorities, which in this instance were twofold. His first concern was to ensure there was no metaphysical element, besides the Father and the Son whom he begot, by which the Father begot the Son. Failure to do so would have left him susceptible either to dualism or an infinite succession of intermediary elements after the manner of the third man. His second interest was to emphasize the distinction between Father and Son because there had to be theological order and adequate differentiation between uncaused and caused beings. The Son as caused could not be “a part of the Father” who was uncaused; he had to lie outside of him. Moreover, the thought that the simple being of the Father could even have parts was outright nonsensical.

Eusebius had already explored this line of thought in a passage in his *Demonstratio Evangelica* dealing with the image, in Heb 1:3, of the Son as the radiance of the Father’s glory. Of course, Eusebius could not but embrace the analogy, but he was quick also to point out that there were key differences between physical light and its radiance, and the relationship between the Father and the Son. To begin with, physical light was inseparable from its radiance, but the Son, however, existed in himself, “in His own essence apart from the Father.” Similarly, a ray coexisted together and simultaneously with the light, as “a kind of complement thereof.” But the Father,

conversely, preceded the Son in existence, because he alone was unbegotten. There was no complementarity here. Being perfect and having precedence as Father and cause of the Son, he received nothing toward the completeness of his own Godhead from the Son. Rather, it was the Son who received from the Father “both his being, and the character of his being.”⁷⁵⁵ Finally, a ray shone forth from the light because of something that was “an inseparable accident of its essence.” But the Son, by contrast, was the Father’s image “by intention and deliberate choice. God willed to beget a Son, and established a second light, in all things made like unto Himself.”⁷⁵⁶

The Father’s initiating will was all-important to this theological structure. It was the mediating principle between the Father’s primordial uncausedness and the causedness of the first generate being, the Son. In an amazing syllogism, Eusebius then explained that the Father’s Will and Power were “a kind of material and substratum of the genesis and constitution of the Universe.”⁷⁵⁷ In fact, the contention that anything could have come from things inexistent, as Arius had later postulated of the Son, was nonsensical for Eusebius, who considered that the Father’s very will itself constituted the substrate from which the Son had his existence. It was “no longer reasonable to say that anything that

⁷⁵⁵ Eusebius, *Dem. ev.* 4.3 (Ferrar). Gk (PG 22:256B): “Παρά τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τὸ εἶναι καὶ τὸ τοιούτῃ εἶναι εἰληφώς.”

⁷⁵⁶ Eusebius, *Dem. ev.* 4.3 (Ferrar). Athanasius (*Decr.* 12 [NPNF² 4:158]), of course, took the opposite position: “Who can even imagine that the radiance of light ever was not...Who is capable of separating the radiance from the sun?” Elsewhere (*Decr.* 24 [NPNF² 4:166]): “Who will presume to say that the radiance is unlike and foreign to the sun? rather who, thus considering the radiance relatively to the sun, and the identity of the light, would not say with confidence, ‘Truly the light and the radiance are one, and the one is manifested in the other, and the radiance is in the sun, so that whoso sees this, sees that also?’ but such a oneness and natural property, what should it be named by those who believe and see aright, but Offspring one in essence? and God’s Offspring what should we fittingly and suitably consider, but Word, and Wisdom, and Power? which it were a sin to say was foreign to the Father, or a crime even to imagine as other than with Him everlastingly.” In *Decr.* 27 (NPNF² 4:168), Athanasius even cited Origen, who said: “For when was that God, who, according to John, is called Light (for ‘God is Light’), without a radiance of his proper glory, that a man should presume to assert the Son’s origin of existence, as if before he was not?”

⁷⁵⁷ Eusebius, *Dem. ev.* 4.1 (Ferrar) (PG 22:252D): “Ἔλην ὡσπερ τινὰ καὶ οὐσίαν τῆς τῶν ὄλων γενέσεώς τε καὶ συστάσεως τῆν ἑαυτοῦ βουλὴν καὶ δύναμιν προβεβλημένως.”

exists must have come from the non-existent, for that which came from the non-existent would not be anything.”⁷⁵⁸ There was no *tertium quid* from which the Father generated the Son; the substrate from which the Son was generated was the very will of the Father himself.

Returning to the *Epistola*, we see that Eusebius next turned his attentions to the “begotten not made” in the Creed, explaining to his flock that it underscored that the Son was not a work resembling the things that came to be through him, but was “of an essence” that was “too high for the level of any work,” which the Father generated in a manner that was “inscrutable and incalculable to every originated nature.”⁷⁵⁹ Thus, the *homoousion* was not to be taken “in the way of bodies” or “mortal beings,” for there was no division of essence, affection, alteration or change in the Father’s essence and power. The term suggested only that the Son bore no “resemblance to the originated creatures,” but was “in every way assimilated”⁷⁶⁰ to the Father. He was not “of any other subsistence (*ὑποστάσεως*) and essence (*οὐσίας*), but was from the Father.”⁷⁶¹

Eusebius was again shutting-out a *third thing* in the relation between Father and Son, but was here also expressing his objection to the broader implications of the *homoousion*. Laden with its suggestions of materiality, it evoked processes of division, alteration etc., after the manner of analogous earthly processes. Besides its apparent disregard for proper theological order, Eusebius more basically saw in the Nicene formulation a futile attempt at delving into the mystery of the Son’s generation that could only produce conclusions that were entirely inadequate and misleading. The *homoousion*

⁷⁵⁸ Eusebius, *Dem. ev.* 4.1 (Ferrar) (PG 22:252D): “ὡς μηκέτι εὐλόγως φάναι δεῖν ἕξ οὐκ ὄντων εἶναί τι τῶν ὄντων· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἂν εἴη τι τὸ ἐκ μὴ ὄντος.”

⁷⁵⁹ *Epistola Eusebii* 6 (NPNF² 4:75).

⁷⁶⁰ “Κατὰ πάντα τρόπον ἀφομοιωθῆναι” (Opitz, Urk. 21.13).

⁷⁶¹ *Epistola Eusebii* 7 (NPNF² 4:76).

framed one's consideration of the Son's generation in categories that were unbecoming of its majesty. How the Son was generated lay beyond human understanding; all one could know was that he was not like the creatures. Eusebius would have felt more comfortable with a theology more measured in its goals: one that respected order by making a clear distinction between Father and the Son, and which did not impose feeble human principles onto this relation.

Here, Eusebius was again echoing positions he had already articulated in the *Demonstratio*, where he called on his readers to abandon, in their consideration of the generation of the Son, even the temporal patterns that characterize the conventional understanding of causality. Thus, he argued, the begotten Son was not

“at one time non-existent, and existent at another afterwards, but existent before eternal time, and pre-existent, and ever with the Father as His Son, and yet not unbegotten, but begotten from the Father unbegotten, being the only-begotten, the Word, and God of God, Who teaches that He was not cast forth from the being of the Father by separation, or scission, or division, but unspeakably and unthinkably to us brought into being from all time, nay rather before all times, by the Father's transcendent and inconceivable Will and Power. ‘For who shall describe his generation?’ he says, and ‘As no one knoweth the Father save the Son, so no one knoweth the Son save the Father that begat Him.’”⁷⁶²

⁷⁶² Eusebius, *Dem. ev.* 4.3 (tr. Ferrar) (PG 22:257AB): “Οὐ χρόνοις μὲν τισιν οὐκ ὄντα, ὕστερον δὲ ποτε γεγονότα, ἀλλὰ πρὸ χρόνων αἰωνίων ὄντα καὶ προόντα, καὶ τῷ Πατρὶ ὡς Υἱὸν διὰ παντὸς συνόντα, καὶ οὐκ ἀγέννητον ὄντα, γεννώμενον δ' ἐξ ἀγεννήτου Πατρὸς, μονογενῆ ὄντα, Λόγον τε καὶ Θεὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ, οὐ κατὰ διάστασιν ἢ τομῆν ἢ διαιρέσιν ἐκ τῆς τοῦ Πατρὸς οὐσίας προβεβλημένον, ἀρρήτως δὲ καὶ ἀνεπιλογίστως ἡμῖν ἐξ αἰῶνος, μᾶλλον δὲ πρὸ πάντων αἰώνων, ἐκ τῆς τοῦ Πατρὸς ἀνεκφράστου καὶ ἀπερινοήτου βουλῆς τε καὶ δυνάμεως οὐσιούμενον διδάσκοντα. «Τὴν γενεάν γὰρ αὐτοῦ», φησὶν, «τίς διηγῆσεται;» καὶ, «Ὡσπερ οὐδεὶς ἔγνω τὸν Πατέρα εἰ μὴ ὁ Υἱός, οὕτω καὶ τὸν Υἱὸν οὐδεὶς ἔγνω εἰ μὴ ὁ μόνος ὁ γεννήσας αὐτὸν Πατήρ.»”

Again, Eusebius wanted not to confuse the *ousia*—which I believe can only be taken to denote entity, or person—of the Father, which was ingenerate, with that of the Son, which was generate. But he also wanted to ensure that this generative process was not made the object of ham-handed human prying, for it lay completely beyond the realm of human understanding. Eusebius was prepared only to place a perimeter around the mystery: the Father was the source of the Son, but the specifics of that process were incomprehensible. This move, namely that of placing the comprehension of the Father’s generation of the Son firmly beyond the bounds of human understanding as a means of reconciling the seemingly contradictory characteristics of the relationship between Father and Son, was one that future theologians would increasingly find themselves led to.

To take stock for a moment of our findings, we can see that the idea of the Father’s precedent and initiating will was integral to Eusebius, and the doctrine that the Son was generated at the will of the Father remained intact. It had not been explicitly condemned at Nicaea, and Eusebius would have had no reason to abandon theological positions he had established well before it. The unfathomable purposes of God were not only the ultimate reason behind why he generated the Son, the Father’s will was given by Eusebius the status of metaphysical substratum from which the Son (and all being) was generated. *It* took the place of any proposed *tertium quid*. As it had been with others, having the Son as the object of the will of the Father was Eusebius’ strategy of ensuring that the Son would be a distinct entity from the Father. This did not mean that he was a creature, or that he had a beginning, or that there was a time when he did not exist, as Arius had claimed, but that, as begotten—and begotten through a process that was

inscrutable and impenetrable to created intellect—he had to be distinct from the uncaused Father.

On what had shown itself to be the more controversial issue of the Son's responsive, reflexive will, and whether, theoretically, he could choose to turn away from the Father and fall away, in the same way that humans can, Eusebius did not answer directly. However, the indirect evidence suggests that such a prospect was, in his thought, impossible. Firstly, as we saw, the Son was viewed as being unlike creation; he bore no "resemblance to the originated creatures," but was "in every way assimilated" to the Father.⁷⁶³ This closeness to the Father, to whom the Son was in every way assimilated, underlined both his exaltedness, and his standing, to Eusebius' mind, as fashioner and regulator of the cosmos, which left no room for the theoretical possibility of his ever being in volitive conflict with the Father. The universe could not have been in the control of an entity potentially at odds with God. Unlike as with Arius, who had propounded the Son's ignorance of the Father to underpin his theory of the Son's contingent volitive union with the Father, Eusebius followed the biblical lead and put forth the Son as the only one who knew the Father and was known by the same. There was simply no possibility of the Son being in disharmony with the Father. Moreover, the Son was the principle by which the entire cosmos was brought into being and held in union and order, and the suggestion in Eusebius was that the work of the Son was identifiable with the will of the Father. Thus would he say that the elements of the cosmos were subject to the

⁷⁶³ *Epistola Eusebii* 7 (NPNF² 4:76).

“Word of God and the Will and Power of God,” to the “awful will of God,” and “the power of the Word of God, Who is One and the same.”⁷⁶⁴ For, he declared,

“Be it rhythm, beauty, harmony, order, blending of qualities, substance, quality, quantity, the one Word of the universe holds all in union and order, and one creative power of God is at the head of all.”⁷⁶⁵

The Son had no disharmony with God; on the contrary, he was in constant volitional oneness. Whether this was a union of two distinct wills, or that the Son was simply the expression of the Father’s will is not clear. Such a level of distinction cannot be expected at this point. The fact was that the Son was at all times the true expression of the will of the Father, with whom there was never any disharmony of will. In this respect, Eusebius was proof of how far the rank and file Eastern position was from the designated “Arian” notion of a morally contingent Son. We must keep this firmly in mind now that we will turn to the all-important Council of Antioch, of which Eusebius was to be one of the inspiring forces.

THE COUNCIL OF ANTIOCH AND *ONENESS ACCORDING TO SYMPHONY*

Nicaea had left Arius and his allies defeated and humiliated. But its insistence on using the homoousion in its promulgations also produced a sense of dissatisfaction and unease among many of the conservative churchmen in the East. It was this sense of reserve, along with the political adeptness of some of the Lucianists and their allies, that helped to bring about a rapid reversal of fortunes for the supporters of Nicaea after what

⁷⁶⁴ Eusebius, *Dem. ev.* 4.5 (tr. Ferrar) (PG 22:260D): “Θεοῦ Λόγῳ καὶ Θεοῦ βουλῇ καὶ δυνάμει μαρτυρεῖ...νεύματι δ’ ἀρρήτῳ Θεοῦ πεπεδημένη, ἕνα πάλιν καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν Λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ παρίστησιν.”

⁷⁶⁵ Eusebius, *Dem. ev.* 4.5 (tr. Ferrar) (PG 22:260B): “εἴτε ῥυθμὸς, εἴτε κάλλος, εἴτε ἁρμονία, εἴτε τάξις, εἴτε σύγκρασις, εἴτε οὐσία, εἴτε ποιότης, εἴτε μέγεθος, πάντα εἰς ὁ τῶν ὄλων συνέχει καὶ διακοσμεῖ Λόγος, καὶ μία Θεοῦ δύναμις κοσμοποιὸς ἡγεῖται ἀπάντων.”

should have been their moment of triumph. After issuing a colorless and very general acceptance of the Nicene statement,⁷⁶⁶ both Eusebius of Nicomedia and Theognis of Nicaea were able to have themselves reinstated in 328, and they began almost immediately to agitate against the supporters of Nicaea.⁷⁶⁷ The first target would be the see of Antioch where presided Eustathius, who had been one of the key figures in the proceedings at the Council. The fact that Nicaea, in its sixth canon, had also affirmed the prerogatives of Antioch over the entire East, including Palestinian Caesarea, brought the conservative Eusebius of Caesarea back into alliance with the Lucianists as he sought to assert his own authority against the Antiochene prelate.⁷⁶⁸ Internally divided, with a tumultuous and mixed legacy, Antioch was an easy target. It had been the see of Paul of Samosata, but was also the host to the council that, only some fifty years previously, had denounced both him and the homoousion that he preached. Later, it had also been the base of Lucian, who, apart from having had his own conflicts with the church establishment,⁷⁶⁹ had also served as teacher of Arius' closest supporters and possibly even the man himself,⁷⁷⁰ before ending his life, in 312, in a glorious martyrdom that was respectfully acknowledged by all. Eustathius' hold over a good portion of his flock was thus tenuous at best.⁷⁷¹ A synod was quickly called in Antioch in 328 that saw the prelate expelled from his see on what Socrates claimed were charges of Sabellianism,⁷⁷² though

⁷⁶⁶ Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.14 (*NPNF*² 2:20).

⁷⁶⁷ Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.23 (*NPNF*² 2:26-7).

⁷⁶⁸ Sellers, R. V., *Eustathius of Antioch and his Place in the Early History of Christian Doctrine* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1928), pp. 32.

⁷⁶⁹ Alexander (*apud* Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 1:3 [*NPNF*² 3:38]) suggested that, following the controversy over Paul of Samosata, he had isolated himself from the leadership in Antioch for a number of years.

⁷⁷⁰ As we mentioned earlier, Arius (*apud* Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 1.4) famously had addressed Eusebius of Nicomedia as "fellow-Lucianist."

⁷⁷¹ In his *Vit. Const.* (59), Eusebius of Caesarea gives an account—clearly not impartial—of the city's supposedly deep divisions.

⁷⁷² Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.24 (*NPNF*² 2:27).

modern observers have noted the inconsistency of the contemporary commentators on the charges.⁷⁷³ A schism ensued that was to last for decades. The anti-Eustathian faction in Antioch requested that Eusebius of Caesarea be appointed successor, but, to the enormous admiration of Constantine, he declined in the interests of not exacerbating tensions in the city.⁷⁷⁴ A disciple of his, Paulinus, was appointed instead.

In quick time, attacks were also orchestrated against Alexander's successor, Athanasius, at the Council of Tyre (335), and, in Constantinople the following year, against another prominent Nicene, Marcellus of Ancyra, the latter also being accused of Sabellianism, a perhaps not unfair charge in this instance. With these chief Nicenes sidelined—and with Arius (336), Constantine (337), and Eusebius of Caesarea (339) also having died—the way was clear for a new beginning, a new Council that would restart proceedings in a way that the conservatives and their Lucianist allies would find more agreeable. Facilitating the venture was the fact that, with Constantine's three sons each taking rule over a portion of the empire, the emperorship in the East passed to Constantius, whose sympathies lay with the anti-Nicene party. Fatefully, his brother Constans assumed power in the West. He was firmly on the side of the Nicenes, and it was to his jurisdiction that Marcellus and Athanasius both fled following their exiles, with the latter also composing there his monumental *Orationes Contra Arianos*. While there, Athanasius was able also to convince Julius of Rome of the errors of his enemies, and the Roman bishop quickly dispatched a letter to the East accusing them of overturning Nicaea and siding with Arius. All this prompted the anti-Nicene party to

⁷⁷³ Sellers, R. V., *Eustathius of Antioch and his Place in the Early History of Christian Doctrine* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1928), pp. 42 ff.

⁷⁷⁴ Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.24 (*NPNF*² 2:27). Constantine was said to have been so impressed by Eusebius' selflessness that he declared Eusebius worthy of being bishop "not of one city, merely, but of almost the whole world."

gather in Antioch in 341, on the occasion of the dedication of the church of the holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem,⁷⁷⁵ known thereafter as the Council of the Dedication, and to issue new formulations of the faith that proved its orthodoxy and thus confront Julius' accusations.

The Council issued four statements of faith in succession. The opening sentence of the council's first declaration expressed the council members' distress at being labeled "followers of Arius." They declared that they had never been such, and remarked, "How could bishops, such as we, follow a presbyter?" Neither, they continued, had they ever accepted "any other faith beside that which has been handed down from the beginning." On the contrary, not only had they never been Arius' followers, rather it was they who had examined and verified *his* faith before readmitting him.⁷⁷⁶ The Council's second statement is of enormous theological importance for our purposes.⁷⁷⁷ Here it pronounced, among other things, that the Son was begotten of the Father before all ages; that he was God from God, and perfect from perfect; that he was both unalterable and unchangeable; that he was—and here we must make special note—the exact image (*ἀπαράλλακτον εἰκόνα*) of the Godhead (*θεότητος*), Essence (*οὐσίας*), Will (*βουλῆς*), Power (*δυνάμεως*), and Glory (*δόξης*) of the Father; that he was in the beginning with God; that he came to do not

⁷⁷⁵ An event still commemorated in the Orthodox Church on December 9/22.

⁷⁷⁶ Athanasius, *Syn. 22*. (NPNF² 4:461).

⁷⁷⁷ As R.P.C. Hanson (*The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: the Arian Controversy, 318-381* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1988], p. 290) put it, this second statement "represents the nearest approach we can make to discovering the views of the ordinary educated Eastern bishop who was no admirer of the extreme views of Arius but who had been shocked and disturbed by the apparent Sabellianism of N[icaea]." Lewis Ayres (*Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* [Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004], p. 120-1) considers Hanson's use of "Eastern" too broad, preferring instead to speak of many in Asia Minor, Syria, and Palestine, who followed a "broad 'Eusebian' line without necessarily having any great time for the particulars of a theology like Arius'."

his own will but that of him who sent him; and that the Holy Spirit was given to believers for comfort, sanctification, and initiation.⁷⁷⁸ Then, the council declared its belief in:

“...a Father who is truly Father, and a Son who is truly Son, and of the Holy Spirit who is truly Holy Spirit, the names not being given without meaning or effect, but denoting accurately the peculiar subsistence, order, and glory of each that is named [τὴν οἰκείαν ἐκάστου τῶν ὀνομαζομένων ὑπόστασιν τε καὶ τάξιν καὶ δόξαν], so that they are three in subsistence, and in agreement one [τῆ μὲν ὑποστάσει τρία, τῆ δὲ συμφωνίᾳ ἓν].”⁷⁷⁹

It concluded by anathematizing those who taught that “time, or season, or age,” preceded the generation of the Son, or that the Son was a creature, offspring, or work as one of the creatures, offsprings, or works.⁷⁸⁰

Here for the first time we had an explicit invocation of the notion of a symphonic oneness between the Father, the Son, and, notably, the Holy Spirit, whom it also identified as three according to *hypostasis*. The reference was brief, and in abstraction it is not immediately clear how exactly it was intended. It is certain that, given that it was included in only one of Antioch’s four statements, *oneness according to symphonia* was being put forward as but one of a number of alternatives to the controversial *homoousion*, although we also observe that it did not reject the language of *ousia* altogether but was prepared to call the Son the unalterable image of the Father’s *ousia* and will.

⁷⁷⁸ Athanasius, *Syn.* 23. (NPNF² 4:461). The Gk. (PG 26:721BC) reads: “...καὶ εἰς ἓνα Κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, τὸν Υἱὸν αὐτοῦ [i.e. τοῦ Θεοῦ], τὸν μονογενῆ Θεόν, δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα, τὸν γεννηθέντα πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς, Θεὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ, ὅλον ἐξ ὅλου, μόνον ἐκ μόνου, τέλειον ἐκ τελείου, βασιλέα ἐκ βασιλέως, Κύριον ἀπὸ Κυρίου, Λόγον ζῶντα, σοφίαν ζῶσαν, φῶς ἀληθινόν, ὁδόν, ἀλήθειαν, ἀνάστασιν, ποιμένα, θύραν, ἄτρεπτόν τε καὶ ἀναλλοίωτον· τῆς θεότητος, οὐσίας τε καὶ βουλής καὶ δυνάμεως, καὶ δόξης τοῦ Πατρὸς ἀπαράλλακτον εἰκόνα, τὸν πρωτότοκον πάσης κτίσεως, τὸν ὄντα ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, Λόγον Θεὸν κατὰ τὸ εἰρημένον ἐν τῷ Εὐαγγελίῳ...”

⁷⁷⁹ Athanasius, *Syn.* 23. (NPNF² 4:461). Gk.: PG 26:724B. For τάξιν I have preferred the term *order* over the *rank* that NPNF uses. My choice is in line with Lampe (p. 1372).

⁷⁸⁰ Athanasius, *Syn.* 23. (NPNF² 4:461).

Nevertheless, the reactions of the Nicene party to this new formula were swift and scathing. The Council of Sardica, which met some two years later and represented the general Nicene reaction to its Antiochene counterpart, roundly denounced it as a “foolish and lamentable position.” To the further disgust of those gathered at Sardica, it appears that in the meantime certain ones had begun to connect this volitive description of the oneness between Father and Son with John 17:21. The council declared:

“The words uttered by our Lord, ‘I and My Father are one,’ are by those men⁷⁸¹ explained as referring to the concord and harmony [*διὰ τὴν συμφωνίαν καὶ τὴν ὁμόνοιαν*], which prevail between the Father and the Son; but this is a blasphemous and perverse interpretation. We, as Catholics, unanimously condemned this foolish and lamentable opinion: for just as mortal men on a difference having arisen between them quarrel and afterwards are reconciled, so do such interpreters say that disputes and dissension are liable to arise between God the Father Almighty and His Son; a supposition which is altogether absurd and untenable. But we believe and maintain that those holy words, ‘I and My Father are one,’ point out the oneness of essence [lit. *hypostasis*], which is one and the same in the Father and in the Son [*διὰ τὴν τῆς ὑποστάσεως ἐνότητα, ἣτις ἐστὶ μία τοῦ Πατρὸς, καὶ μία τοῦ Υἱοῦ*].”⁷⁸²

⁷⁸¹ “Those men” referred to Valens and Ursacius, but the real target was the Council of Antioch, which had first articulated this position.

⁷⁸² Apud Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 2.6 (NPNF² 3:71) [PG 82:1013C-1016A]: “*Αὕτη δὲ αὐτῶν ἡ βλάσφημος καὶ διεφθαρμένη ἐρμηνεία, τούτου ἕνεκα εἰρηκέναι αὐτὸν φιλονεικοῦσιν «Ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ Πατὴρ ἐν ἑσμεν» διὰ τὴν συμφωνίαν καὶ τὴν ὁμόνοιαν. Κατέγνωμεν πάντες οἱ καθολικοὶ τῆς μωρᾶς καὶ οἰκτρᾶς αὐτῶν διανοίας. Ὡσπερ ἄνθρωποι θνητοὶ ἐπειδὴ διαφέρουσιν ἤρξαντο προσκεκρουκότες διχονοοῦσι καὶ εἰς διαλλαγὴν ἐπάνεισιν, οὕτως διάστασις καὶ διχόνοια μεταξὺ Πατρὸς Θεοῦ παντοκράτορος καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ εἶναι δύναται, λέγουσιν ὅπερ ἀποπώτατον καὶ νοῆσαι καὶ ὑπολαβεῖν. Ἡμεῖς δὲ καὶ πιστεύομεν καὶ διαβεβαιούμεθα καὶ οὕτω νοοῦμεν, ὅτι ἡ ἱερὰ φωνὴ ἐλάλησεν «Ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἐν ἑσμεν» καὶ διὰ τὴν τῆς ὑποστάσεως ἐνότητα, ἣτις ἐστὶ μία τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ μία τοῦ Υἱοῦ.*”

Here was Sardica’s syllogism: if one followed the *symphonists* and took Scripture’s testimonies on the oneness of the Father and the Son—whom to Sardica’s horror they identified as distinct *hypostases*, hence its own response with *τὴν τῆς ὑποστάσεως ἐνότητα*—as references to a volitional oneness, namely, an agreement, an identification, a symphony or alignment of the wills of the Father and Son, then this meant that one really was espousing a doctrine not only of the distinct and independent wills of the Father and Son, but also of a potential volitional conflict between them, as happens among “mortal men.”

Plainly, the council at Sardica was basing its thinking on human analogy. In people’s affairs, oneness was achieved only through concurrence and concord, and experience showed all too well just how frail, relative, and given to “disputes and dissension” such relations were. Such a possibility of conflict could not apply to the relation between Father and Son, and so, for the members of the council and staunchest supporters of the Nicene formula, any mention of will in the inner life of the Trinity automatically became doctrinally suspect. No thought was given to the possibility that willing in the divine sphere might be different from its human analogue, and one suspects that Sardica could only have taken even Antioch’s strenuous descriptions of the Son as the exact image of the Father’s will etc. as still open to contingency: the Son was the image of the Father’s will only as long as he chose to be obedient. Evidently, the binary nature of the act of willing—one either willed or not—afforded it, in the eyes of its detractors, a contingency that was absolute, stretching across all ontological lines. So much so that the council, later in this same statement, went to great lengths to show how John 17:21—that passage where Christ prayed the Father that his disciples be one in them

as he and the Father are one, and which the council clearly felt its opponents had used to analogize between human and divine modes of interpersonal oneness—precluded any suggestion of volitional harmony as the mode of union between Father and Son:

“So great is the ignorance and mental darkness of those whom we have mentioned, that they are unable to see the light of truth. They cannot comprehend the meaning of the words: ‘that they may be one in us.’⁷⁸³ It is obvious why the word ‘one’ was used; it was because the apostles received the Holy Spirit of God, and yet there were none amongst them who were the Spirit, neither was there any one of them who was Word, Wisdom, Power, or Only-begotten. ‘As Thou,’ He said, ‘and I are one, that they may be one in us.’ These holy words, ‘that they may be one in us,’ are strictly accurate: for the Lord did not say, ‘one in the same way that I and the Father are one,’ but He said, ‘that the disciples, being knit together and united, may be one in faith and in confession, and so in the grace and piety of God the Father, and by the indulgence and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, may be able to become one.’⁷⁸⁴”

We might find the above interpretation unsatisfying, especially given the fact that the very next verse, 17:22, of the same Johannine passage had Christ praying, “that they be one even as we are one,” which stood in tension with the council’s position that “the Lord did not say, ‘one in the same way that I and the Father are one.’” But all this served to

⁷⁸³ John 17:21.

⁷⁸⁴ Apud Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 2.6 (NPNF² 3:71-72 [PG 82:1016C]): “Τοσαύτη δὲ αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ ἄνοια, καὶ οὕτω παχεῖ σκότει ἢ διάνοια αὐτῶν ἐκτετύφλωται, ἵνα μὴ δυνηθῶσιν ἰδεῖν τὸ φῶς τῆς ἀληθείας. Οὐ συνιᾶσιν ᾧ λόγῳ εἰρηται «Ἴνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ἐν ᾧσι.» Σαφές ἐστὶ διὰ τί ἐν· ὅτι οἱ ἀπόστολοι Πνεῦμα ἅγιον τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔλαβον, ἀλλ’ ὅμως αὐτοὶ οὐκ ἦσαν Πνεῦμα, οὐδὲ τις αὐτῶν ἢ Λόγος, ἢ σοφία, ἢ δύναμις ἦν, οὐδὲ Μονογενῆς ἦν. «Ὡσπερ ἐγὼ,» φησὶν, «καὶ σὺ ἐν ἐσμεν, οὕτως καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ἐν ᾧσιν.» Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀκριβῶς διέστειλε ἡ θεία φωνή· Ἐν ἡμῖν ἐν ᾧσι, φησὶν. Οὐκ εἶπεν, Ὡσπερ ἡμεῖς ἐν ἐσμεν, ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ Πατήρ· ἀλλ’ ἵνα οἱ μαθηταὶ ἐν αὐτοῖς σύζυγοι καὶ ἠνωμένοι ἐν ᾧσι τῇ πίστει καὶ ὁμολογίᾳ, καὶ ἐν τῇ χάριτι καὶ εὐσεβείᾳ τῇ τοῦ Θεοῦ Πατρὸς, καὶ τῇ τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν συγχωρήσει καὶ ἀγάπῃ ἐν εἶναι δυνηθῶσιν.”

underscore the degree of aversion that the council felt toward any suggestion of an analogy between human modes of interpersonal unity, which in most social contexts were inevitably volitional, and divine ones.

Athanasius, too, was hostile to the Council of Antioch, summing it up as an expression of the “general and lasting odium” that characterized “their heresy.”⁷⁸⁵ Undoubtedly, much of his bitterness would have been provoked by the involvement of some of its key participants in his exile in 337, but it was also a fact that he was firmly opposed to the notion of the oneness of will that the Council preached. In an epistle to the African bishops written some time later, before reminding his correspondents of the most egregious Arian positions—viz., the Son being a mutable creature that had come forth from nothing; that there was a time when he was not⁷⁸⁶—he then denounced all notions of volitive union between Father and Son. For him, the suggestion that the Son acted out of obedience, and experienced moral progress because he possessed the quality of virtue, presupposed mutability and compoundness of nature in the Son, which, on the basis of Jn 10:30⁷⁸⁷ and Jn 14:9,⁷⁸⁸ would in turn impute complexity of nature to the Father.⁷⁸⁹ Moreover, anyone “assimilated to God by virtue and will” was liable to change; but it was only originate, created things, not God, that were given to change.⁷⁹⁰

However, when one compares what Antioch promulgated with the condemnations that were leveled against it, one cannot help but feel that this damning evaluation was unjustified. To suggest that the notion of *symphonia* entailed the possibility of internal

⁷⁸⁵ Athanasius, *Syn.* 22. (*NPNF*² 4:461).

⁷⁸⁶ *Ep. Afr.* 5 (*NPNF*² 4:491).

⁷⁸⁷ “I and the Father are one.”

⁷⁸⁸ “He who has seen me has seen the Father.”

⁷⁸⁹ *Ep. Afr.* 8 (*NPNF*² 4:493).

⁷⁹⁰ *Ep. Afr.* 7 (*NPNF*² 4:492).

conflict in the Trinity seemed not to take seriously the great lengths the council took to preclude such a reading. The Son, it stated, was “perfect from perfect” and “the exact image of the Godhead, Essence (*οὐσίας*), Will (*βουλῆς*), Power, and Glory of the Father,” and came down not do his own will, but the will of him that sent him (cf. John 4:38).⁷⁹¹ Sardica must have dismissed these statements as still beholden to a fundamentally contingent framework. Yet Antioch had also called the Son “both unalterable and unchangeable,”⁷⁹² and the information provided by Philostorgius⁷⁹³ that *even* Eusebius of Nicomedia and the other Lucianists—namely, the most extreme of the anti-Nicenes—rejected as a “most absurd error” Arius’ thesis that the Father was unknown to the Son, was corroborating evidence against the possibility, in their way of thinking, of a conflict of wills between Father and Son. We have seen repeatedly how in the Greek mind volitive conflict between parties was predicated on a disparity of knowledge. Philostorgius’ detail, then, lends support to the general conclusion that one can reach from a plain reading of the Council’s second statement alone, namely that the notion of a *symphonia* between Father and Son was never intended to include the potential for conflict between them as a corollary that served, for example, as a soteriological paradigm for humans’ obedience to God. It also was true that, despite its denunciations by the Nicene party and, in Athanasius, by one of the most celebrated personalities in Church history, the Council of Antioch has nevertheless gone down in history in quite honorable terms. Hilary, for example, saw it as an “assembly of the saints,” whose goal it

⁷⁹¹ Athanasius, *Syn.* 23. (*NPNF*² 4:461).

⁷⁹² Athanasius, *Syn.* 23. (*NPNF*² 4:461[PG 26:721BC]): “ἄτρεπτόν τε καὶ ἀναλλοίωτον.”

⁷⁹³ *Hist. eccl.* 2.3. Philostorgius had been outraged that Arius held God to be incomprehensible to his only-begotten Son but also to the human mind. This might raise again the old question of whether the Son was simply the super paradigm for humans, with all the potencies for lapse that such would have to entail. Such a possibility seems unlikely, given that every attempt was made in the statement to sever any analogizing on the Father-Son relation based on human relations.

was to strike a blow at those Sabellians who made “the triple nomenclature imply only one Person, so that the Father alone could be also called both Holy Spirit and Son.”⁷⁹⁴ Specifically on the language of *symphonia*, he considered it “free from objection,”⁷⁹⁵ and made the peculiar observation that it was probably more fitting that the council described the oneness in the Trinity in terms of agreement rather than essence, because its formula also included the Holy Spirit.⁷⁹⁶ Moreover, we must also note that the canons issued by the Council of Antioch (and the Council of Sardica) have been included in the corpus of canon law, and that even the anniversary of the Dedication of the Church of the holy Sepulcher, in whose honor the Council was named, has continued to be celebrated in the Orthodox Church to this day.⁷⁹⁷

Yet, a precise understanding of the term *τῆ συμφωνία ἐν* remains elusive.⁷⁹⁸ I have found it used one other time—in the so-called Macrostich Creed, which, as we shall see below, was essentially an addendum to proceedings at Antioch—and, to my knowledge, was not properly treated of by any of its contemporaries, although, given this study’s limitations, I cannot say that my examinations have been exhaustive. Nevertheless, passages in Ambrose and Gregory of Nazianzus, who were both chronologically removed from the proceedings at Antioch, have inspired in me a reading of the *τῆ συμφωνία ἐν* formula that diverges from the line taken by its immediate critics, and I believe helps us

⁷⁹⁴ Hilary, *Syn.* 32 (NPNF² 9:12-13).

⁷⁹⁵ Hilary, *Syn.* 32 (NPNF² 9:12-13).

⁷⁹⁶ Hilary, *Syn.* 32 (NPNF² 9:12-13). Hilary’s suggestion that the council would have used the homoousion if it were only talking about the Father and the Son is overly optimistic, and raises its own problems, given that the Council of Constantinople, 381, would make clear that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were all *homoousioi*. For now, we can only take Hilary’s words as an expression of understanding at what he perceived as the Council’s nimble sidestep of what at his time was the prickly debate on the ontological status of the Holy Spirit.

⁷⁹⁷ December 9/22.

⁷⁹⁸ As Lewis Ayres (*Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* [Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004], p. 120) notes, “The use of *συμφωνία* to describe the unity of the persons will of course seem wholly inadequate by the standards of later orthodoxy, but here we should probably note its minimalism: it is a term open to wide interpretation.”

to see the emergence of a theological line on the will that was eventually to win the day. Writing in 381, when the controversy was in its endgame, Ambrose, although not noted as one of the weighty theologians of his time, nevertheless made the poignant comment, regarding the relation of the Holy Spirit to the Father, that if one believes that the “Father wills the same that the Holy Spirit wills,” then one “must of necessity confess the oneness of the divine will and operation.”⁷⁹⁹ And, “If,” he added, “the Holy Spirit is of one will and operation with God the Father,” then “He is also of one substance, since the Creator is known by His works.” Thus, he concluded, the “confusion of Sabellius” and the “division of Arius” were avoided.⁸⁰⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus pursued a similar line, arguing that the unity of the Father and Son was based on the “single, self-identical movement and will of the divine being, if I may put it that way, and on identity of substance.”⁸⁰¹ Again, the strategy was to extrapolate identity of substance from palpable examples of its consequences, and thus overcome the Nicene difficulty in explaining the ramifications of the homoousion.

To be sure, both Ambrose and Gregory were making explicit a correlation between nature/substance and will that, as we saw in previous chapters, was at least as old as Origen and Tertullian. However, we must also make clear that, by referring to the Son as the “exact image (*ἀπαράλλακτον εἰκόνα*) of the Godhead (*θεότητος*), Essence

⁷⁹⁹ *Spir.* 2.141 (*NPNF*² 10:133 [PL 16:773A]): “aut si idem velle dixeris Patrem, quod vult Spiritus sanctus; necesse est ut unitatem voluntatis operationisque divinae vel invitus.”

⁸⁰⁰ *Spir.* 2.142 (*NPNF*² 10:133 [PL 16:773AB]): “Quod si unius et voluntatis et operationis est cum Patre Deo Spiritus sanctus, unius etiam substantiae est; quoniam ex operibus suis creator agnoscitur...Idem ergo est per substantiam atque virtutem; quia non est in divinitate vel Sabelliana confusio, vel Ariana discretio, vel terrena corporalisque mutatio.”

⁸⁰¹ *Or.* 20.7, trans. Brian E. Daley, S.J., *Gregory of Nazianzus* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 101. The Gk. (PG 35:1073A) reads “κατὰ τὸ ἐν καὶ ταυτὸ τῆς θεότητος, ἵνα οὕτως ὀνομάσω, κίνημά τε καὶ βούλημα, καὶ τὴν τῆς οὐσίας ταυτότητα.”

(οὐσία), Will (βουλῆς), Power (δυνάμειος), and Glory (δόξης) of the Father”⁸⁰² all in the same breath, the Antiochene Council itself seemed at least at some level to accept this very same association between *ousia* and the will too. Although, of course, the Council could not accept the *homoousion*, precisely because to its mind it made the Father and Son look like one and the same person—something it clearly considered that “exact image of the ousia” did not do—, the number of prior checks and restraints that it deployed in its statement on symphonic oneness lead me to conclude that the only interpretation left to us must have been something along the lines first laid out, at least in rudimentary form, by Origen and Tertullian and then rearticulated with greater clarity, years later, by Ambrose and Gregory. Thus, *oneness according to symphonia* was for Antioch not a means of framing the Son as an exemplar of meritorious creaturely obedience who was subject to the theoretical possibility of falling away from God, but an outward, strictly phenomenological index that pointed to a unique kind of oneness whose underlying ontological mechanics was otherwise unfathomable and futile to speculate on. All one could see and know was the perfect concord that existed between Father and Son, while the nature of the underlying relationship between them that created such concord remained unknowable. For this reason did the Council issue a condemnation of all analogies on the Son’s generation that were drawn from human experience of creations, offsprings, and works, for one knew empirically that these could not produce such perfect agreement between begetter and begotten. Ambrose and Gregory had the liberty of describing this unity as oneness of substance, because by their time the concerns surrounding the *homoousion* had been resolved. But the Council had consciously dismissed *identity* of ousia as unsuitable, because of what it saw as its unipersonalist

⁸⁰² Athanasius, *Syn. 23* (NPNF² 4:461 [PG 26:721BC]).

connotations, and was left with no name for the kind of oneness it was proposing besides the phenomenological descriptor *oneness according to symphonia*.

Still, *symphonia* was an unusual expression. As a composite term with a *συν*-prefix, it could easily be taken as going against the general flow of the classic models we have examined so far, which described a unidirectional movement of the Godhead outward from itself to which humans were called to turn, and taken instead to imply also a reflexive volitive motion from the Son back to the Father, which was generally the attitude one expected of creatures responding in obedience to God's exitus from himself. In the worst case, it would have evoked images of a prior misalignment of two distinct wills that had then become unified, albeit ever and unalterably so, in line with classically Arian adoptionism. While it is not possible to know why the Council opted for the term, what sways me against the council seeing *symphonia* as bi-directional, and not unidirectional, was the assurance in its creed that the Son came not to do his own will but that of the Father. Symphony here simply referred to observable sameness of will and purpose: all that the Son does was in agreement with what the Father does. This "unidirectional" reading of the statement is for me confirmed by how it was reworded in the *Macrostich* Creed of 344. In order to placate the prelates gathered at the Council of Sardica, who were so appalled by the notion of divine symphonia, the writers of the *Macrostich*, who gathered again in Antioch to explain the faith promulgated in 341, now talked not of *τῆ συμφωνία ἐν*, but *τῆς βασιλείας συμφωνίαν* ("symphonia of dominion").⁸⁰³ Clearly, the intention here was to preclude any sense of bi-directionality of volitive action, and emphasize that it referred to unidirectional, outward action, from the Father through the Son. Thus, we might conclude that the Son was the product of a generative

⁸⁰³ Apud Athanasius, *Syn.* 26 (PG 26:733C).

process from the Father that afforded him from eternity the same infinite knowledge as that of the Father, and, as such, he necessarily always willed the same as the Father, for there could be only one way for persons with perfect, transcendent knowledge to will.

Moreover, our assessment should include the subtle but important detail that the formula issued by Antioch explicitly applied the notion of symphony to all *three* hypostases, not just the Father and Son: τῆ μὲν ὑποστάσει τρία, τῆ δὲ συμφωνίᾳ ἓν. This was no small matter. For a buttress to Arius' notion of the contingent volitive oneness of the Son with the Father was the Scriptural witness of Christ's clearly human behavior, his anxiety and temptation at Gethsemane. Apparently having no doctrine of a human mind and soul in Christ,⁸⁰⁴ Arius attributed these manifestations back to the pre-incarnate nature of the Son himself as proof of his kinship with creation at large and his paradigmatically contingent volitional connection with God. With the Holy Spirit, however, there was no hermeneutic occasion of a temptation of the Spirit or a suggestion of its being united with God only as long as the Spirit wanted to be. Neither was there a statement on the creaturely status of the Spirit as one would later find among the followers of Macedonius.⁸⁰⁵ So the implication was again that there was no sense of a contingent volitional oneness between Father and Son in Antioch's formula.⁸⁰⁶

⁸⁰⁴ We have already examined (see n. 38, above) some of the complexities surrounding the question of how Arius understood the human nature that the Son assumed in the incarnation.

⁸⁰⁵ According to Socrates (*Hist. eccl.* 2.45 [NPNF² 2:74]), Macedonius began to deny the divinity of the Holy Spirit, whereas his ally Eustathius held of himself that he could neither admit that the Holy Spirit was God nor affirm him to be a creature.

⁸⁰⁶ The gradual movement from a position that talked only of the oneness of will as a way of avoiding the language of *ousia* to one that came to accept the language of *ousia* as intimately connected with the oneness of will is highlighted in the internal dispute in the Homoean camp, which was to arise some years later. According to Socrates Scholasticus (*Hist. eccl.* 2.40 [NPNF² 2:70]), "The Acacian party affirmed that the Son was like the Father as it respected his will only, and not his 'substance' or 'essence;' but the rest maintained that the likeness extended to both essence and will."

To summate, we see that Antioch was motivated by fears that the *homoousion* that Nicaea had promulgated ran the risk of making, among other things, the Father and Son (and Holy Spirit) appear to be one and the same person. Thus it promoted the rival concept of τῆ μὲν ὑποστάσει τρία, τῆ δὲ συμφωνίᾳ ἓν as an affirmation of the three distinct persons in the Trinity who were one in concord. This was not a statement of potential conflict in the Trinity, but a phenomenological index of an ontological relationship that Antioch was unwilling to describe at more depth than simply stating that the Son was the exact and unchanging image of the Father's *ousia* and will. To Antioch's mind, to call the Son the image of the Father's *ousia* was acceptable; to call him *homoousios* with the Father, however, was not, for the reasons we have described above. Pertaining to the will, however, it did not feel the same degree of reservation. As with the *ousia*, the Son was said also to be the unchanging image of the Father's will. But he was also said not to do his own will but the will of him that sent him, namely the Father, with whom moreover, he was one in *symphonia*. So although the *homoousios* may have been unsavory to the Antiochenes, the repeated affirmation of the identity of the Son's will with that of the Father indicate that it would not be unfair to suggest that Antioch would have accepted a designation of the Son as *homoboulos* with the Father, that is, possessed of exactly the same will as he. Unlike with the *homoousios*, there would be no danger of confusing the two persons with an hypothetical doctrine of *homoboulos*.

Finally, we note that Antioch left one particular matter unaddressed, namely the question of the Father's precedent will in getting the Son. For now we must only recall how "cosmological" models of the Trinity typically saw the generation of the Son as the first step in God's outward movement that culminated in the creation of the universe.

However, the Father's willing begetting of the Son almost always was taken by many in this period to suggest the Son's ontological inferiority, even though others considered it an indispensable safeguard against understanding the Son's generation as an unwilled overflowing of divine being. How this most fundamental of issues was resolved will form, fittingly, our final point of focus.

THE *MACROSTICH* CREED AND THE QUESTION OF THE WILLED BEGETTING

The Council of Antioch failed to win hearts among the Nicenes. The Council of Sardica that responded to it was utterly unconciliatory,⁸⁰⁷ issuing a statement of faith that many in the East would have seen as differing in nothing from what they perceived as the Sabellianism of Marcellus, and condemning an "Arianism" so broadly defined "that nearly every easterner who had ever heard of Origen was considered Arian."⁸⁰⁸ Still, at this time the politics were such that the anti-Nicenes had no choice but to offer the olive branch: Constantius was at war with the Persians and was in no mood for a confrontation with his brother in the West. Thus, in 344 the anti-Nicene prelates gathered again in Antioch to issue another Creed that, based on the work of Antioch, went to great lengths to explain the mind of that Council. Such was its extensiveness that this creed was to be known as the *Macrostich*, or long-versed Creed. As a note on the general context, we must also mention that this gathering also saw the ascent to the Antiochene throne of Leontius, who would later become the central figure of the most intractably anti-Nicene faction. This was not insignificant. The failure of the anti-Nicene camp to gain any kind

⁸⁰⁷ The Council had been intended as a general council with all sides in attendance, but, after the Nicene party insisted that Athanasius and Marcellus be seated, the bitterness between the two groups was such that the anti-Nicenes withdrew to Philippopolis.

⁸⁰⁸ Kopecek, Thomas A., *A History of Neo-Arianism, Volume 1* (Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979), p. 84.

of gesture from their opposites led to tensions in the anti-Nicene camp itself, as differing factions became inclined to divergent responses to the defenders of Nicaea. Three streams were beginning to appear, which posterity has identified and named, even though an individual's adherence to a particular group or groups could be a considerably fluid affair. The first, associated with Basil of Ancyra, the successor of the purged Marcellus, has become known as the party of the *Homoiousionists*, because in the course of the debates were prepared to give consideration to Nicaea's language of ousia and concede that the Father and Son were *like*, or even *same*, according to substance. Their stance stood in contrast with that of the supporters of Nicaea's homoousion, which denoted a *sameness* or *identity* of substance, or, in the eyes of the most ardent anti-Nicenes, worse, that Father and Son *were* the same substance. The difference was subtle, but their intention was to attempt, through the ὁμοιος κατ' οὐσίαν formula, to extend a hand to the Nicenes but also close the door on the Sabellianism that some associated with the homoousion.

The second party, which was to flourish under the sponsorship of the aforementioned Leontius of Antioch, consisted of those who came to feel that too many concessions had been made to the Nicene party, and promoted the more classically Arian position of a strongly stratified metaphysics, with the Son being declared unlike (ἀνόμοιος) the Father, whence their nickname of *Anomoeans*.⁸⁰⁹ As the disputes wore on, it was this group that came increasingly to be identified by outsiders as "the Arians." Among their number arose both Aetius and Eunomius, who, we must note, were strident proponents of

⁸⁰⁹ We note Socrates' (*Hist. eccl.* 2.45 [NPNF² 2:74]) detail on the Anomoeans that "they no longer concealed but openly declared that the Son was altogether unlike the Father, not merely in relation to his essence, but even as it respected his will; asserting boldly also, as Arius had already done, that he was made of nothing."

the traditionally Arian views on the Father’s absolute volitive primacy.⁸¹⁰ The third party, the thusly-named *Homoeans*, were the middle party which comprised those who generally preferred to say only that the Son was like the Father in all things (*ὅμοιος κατὰ πάντα*) and nothing more, all talk of *ousia* being put aside.⁸¹¹ Their emphasis on unity and amity over doctrinal exactitude and sophistication won them the favor of the emperors Constantius, after he had established sole rule, and Valens, with the high point of their influence being marked by the councils of Seleucia and Ariminum, held in 359.

At this time, conciliation was the order of the day, and, although the Macrosthich sought to avoid conflict by making a clear and detailed statement of its faith, it also stood fast on the matters its drafters considered important. Thus, it consciously avoided the language of *ousia*, advancing instead the more general *ὅμοιος κατὰ πάντα* formula. On the other hand, it reworded, as we saw above, the symphonic formula from *τῆ συμφωνία ἐν τῆς βασιλείας συμφωνίαν* (“symphony of dominion”)⁸¹² in order, I contend, to underline the unidirectional nature of the volitive action—outward from the Godhead, from the Father

⁸¹⁰ See e.g. Eunomius, *Apol.* 23: “...We must believe that the action which is the truest and most befitting God is his will, and that will is sufficient to bring into existence and redeem all things, as indeed the prophetic voice bears witness: ‘Whatever he willed to do, he did.’ God needs nothing in order to bring what he intends into existence; rather, at the same moment he intends it, whatever he willed comes to be”; *Apol.* 24: “Accordingly, if this argument has demonstrated that God’s will is an action, and that this action is not essence but that the Only-begotten exists by virtue of the will of the Father, then of necessity it is not with respect to the essence but with respect to the action (which is what the will is) that the Son preserves his similarity to the Father”; *Apol.* 14: “...Every non-existent thing has been begotten by the will of the one who brought him in to existence...”; *Apol.* 15: “...On the basis of the will of the one who made him we establish a distinction between the Only-begotten and all other things...” (All translations are from Richard Paul Vaggione’s *Eunomius: The Extant Works* [Oxford, UK: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1987]).

⁸¹¹ Illustrative is the concluding line of the Sirmian Confession read at Ariminum (apud Athanasius, *Syn.* 8 [NPNF² 4:454]): “But whereas the term ‘essence,’ has been adopted by the Fathers in simplicity, and gives offence as being misconceived by the people, and is not contained in the Scriptures, it has seemed good to remove it, that it be never in any case used of God again, because the divine Scriptures nowhere use it of Father and Son. But we say that the Son is like the Father in all things, as also the Holy Scriptures say and teach.” It also seems that among the Homoeans there was disagreement as to the degree of likeness between Father and Son. Thus Socrates (*Hist. eccl.* 2.40 [NPNF² 2:70]) reported that “The Acacian party affirmed that the Son was like the Father as it respected his will only, and not his ‘substance’ or ‘essence;’ but the rest maintained that the likeness extended to both essence and will.”

⁸¹² Apud Athanasius, *Syn.* 26 (PG 26:733C).

through the Son, including the divine action on the world—and preclude any notion of reflexive will from the Son back to the Father, as might have been construed from the original formula, in order to counter the accusations of Sardica. To these, however, it also added statements on the old theme of the Father’s initiating will, a matter left untouched in 341. Here the council stated that it condemned anyone who stated that the “the Son is Ingenerate; or that the Father begat the Son, not by choice or will [*οὐ βουλήσει οὐδὲ θελήσει*].”⁸¹³ It elaborated:

“And at the same time those who irreverently say that the Son has been generated not by choice or will [*οὐ βουλήσει οὐδὲ θελήσει*], thus encompassing God with a necessity [*ἀνάγκην*] which excludes choice and purpose [*ἀβούλητον καὶ ἀπροαίρετον*], so that He begat the Son unwillingly [*ἄκων*], we account as most irreligious and alien to the Church; in that they have dared to define such things concerning God, beside the common notions concerning Him, nay, beside the purport of divinely inspired Scripture. For we, knowing that God is absolute [*αὐτοκράτορα*] and sovereign over Himself [*Κύριον αὐτὸν ἑαυτοῦ*], have a religious judgment that He generated the Son voluntarily and freely [*ἐκουσίως...καὶ ἐθελοντήν*]; yet, as we have a reverent belief in the Son’s words concerning Himself (Prov 8:22), ‘The Lord created me a beginning of His ways for His works,’ we do not understand Him to have been originated like the creatures or works which through Him came to be.”⁸¹⁴

Here we had an invocation of precedent will to safeguard the sovereignty of God and against binding God the Father by “necessity” as one might find in certain emanationist

⁸¹³ Apud Athanasius, *Syn.* 26 (*NPNF*² 4:463 [PG 26:729A]).

⁸¹⁴ Apud Athanasius, *Syn.* 26 (*NPNF*² 4:463-464 [PG 26: 732D-733A]).

readings of Plotinus,⁸¹⁵ where the outward movement from primordial oneness was a matter of a natural overflow of the ebullience of being in the *Hen*. The anti-Nicene council at Sirmium (351) would reiterate the sentiment, condemning those who held that “the Son has been generated, the Father not wishing it [*μη̄ θελήσαντος*]” for “not by compulsion [*βιασθεῖς*], led by physical necessity [*ἀνάγκης φυσικῆς*], did the Father, as He wished not [*ὡς οὐκ ἤθελεν*], generate the Son, but he at once willed [*ἠβουλήθη*], and, after generating him from himself apart from time and passion, manifested him.” However, no doubt in anticipation of a Nicene protest that invoking the Father’s precedent will was tantamount to reducing the Son to the level of creatures, the council also took the additional step of prefacing this statement with another denunciation, against those who held that “the Son of God at the will [*βουλήσει*] of God has come to be, as one of the works [*ὡς ἐν τῶν ποιημάτων γεγονέναι*].”⁸¹⁶

ATHANASIUS ON THE FATHER’S PRECEDENT WILL

None of the concessions offered in the Macrostich was sufficient to win the trust of the Nicene camp. Older theological systems had, as we saw, remained open to a sense of intentionality in the Father’s generation of the Son. But Arius had poisoned the well with his early insistence on the contingency of will—both in the Son’s generation from things inexistent by the Father, and in the Son’s volitive unity with the Father thereafter—and, in the eyes of the Nicene party, made the notion of the Father’s precedent will in the begetting of the Son a mechanism synonymous with the creative act that had brought all previously inexistent entities into being. It was in this light that

⁸¹⁵ E.g. *Enn.* 5.7: “The *Nous* stands as the image of the *Hen*, firstly because there is a certain necessity that the first should have its offspring...”

⁸¹⁶ Apud Athanasius, *Syn.* 27 (*NPNF*² 4:465 [PG 26: 740B]).

Athanasius expressed such outrage at the notion of an act of will initiating the begetting of the Son. We have already laid to rest the question of the contingency of the Son's reflexive will back toward the Father and the possibility of him falling away from the Father. In fact, we have seen that this question had been largely resolved even during Arius' time, with Arius distancing himself from his own previously held position, though the outrage his initial position provoked was to live on. But the question of the Father's precedent in the begetting of the Son remained very much a live issue, and it will be in these final three thinkers, Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa, that we will trace its path to some kind of resolution as well.

Athanasius tackled the prickly question of the Father's precedent will toward the end of the third book of his anti-Arian *Oration*s. The notion that the Son "received his being at the will and pleasure of the Father" was of course widespread among the Arians during his time. But the expression was also being used by parties that Athanasius knew were not Arian, and this caused him great consternation. For this was a "new expression," and supreme caution was required in using it because it was "from the heretics, and the words of heretics are suspicious." To be sure, for the heretics the association between the Father's precedent will and the Son's inexistence prior to his generation was axiomatic. For them, Athanasius noted, "He who says, 'The Son came to be at the divine will,' has the same meaning as another who says, 'Once he was not,' and 'He is a creature.'"⁸¹⁷ This fatal correlation was strong, and using it as their basis the Arians located in the will of the Father the mechanism for keeping him at an ontological remove from the Son. We must underline that Athanasius did not appear to have an issue with the internal cogency *per se* of the Arian argument—many Nicenes felt unease at any mention of the will in the

⁸¹⁷ *C. Ar.* 3.59 (*NPNF*² 4:426).

begetting precisely because they too were bound by the notions of contingency it implied—only with its applicability to the Trinity. For this reason, Athanasius would have preferred that right believers avoided the phrase altogether. However, it was apparent that non-Arians were using it too, so his goal in these final pages of his *Oration*s became to analyze and delineate the proper boundaries of the question of will in the begetting and to ensure that at least the “right intention” was being applied to “that simple use of words” he found so distasteful.⁸¹⁸

For Athanasius, the Arian understanding of the precedent will of the Father in the begetting of the Son had its inspiration in the thought of one Ptolemy the Valentinian. According to Athanasius, Ptolemy had claimed that the Unoriginate was possessed of two attributes, thought and will (*ἔννοιαν καὶ θέλησιν*). The things that the unoriginate principle cogitated in thought required a specific act of will to be brought into existence. Without this act of will, they would remain just divine thoughts and nothing more.⁸¹⁹ Athanasius charged that the Arians had simply repackaged this system of Ptolemy’s, laying particular emphasis on the Father’s “precedent will and pleasure” (*προσηγουμένην βούλησιν καὶ θέλησιν*),⁸²⁰ by the power of which—and here they invoked a host of proof-texts⁸²¹—all things had come from inexistence into being. Thus, heretics such as Asterius, whom we know to have been a classical Arian and the object of many of Athanasius’ critiques, simply included the Son among these generate objects of the Father’s pleasure and will,

⁸¹⁸ *C. Ar.* 3.59 (*NPNF*² 4:426).

⁸¹⁹ *C. Ar.* 3.60 (*NPNF*² 4:426).

⁸²⁰ *C. Ar.* 3.60 (PG 26:449A).

⁸²¹ Ps 113:11 (LXX): “But our God is in heaven and on earth; all things soever He hath willed, He hath done [*ὅσα ἠθέλησεν, ἐποίησεν*]”; Ps 110:2 (LXX): “Great are the works of the Lord, sought out in all the things that He hath willed”; Ps 134:6 (LXX): “All that the Lord hath willed He hath done, in heaven and on the earth, in the seas and in all the abysses.”

thus putting him on a par with other creatures, with all having their origin in prior inexistence.⁸²²

We have already seen in an earlier chapter the strongly volitional character of Valentinian theology. Yet in Ptolemy's particular rendition of it, at least as Athanasius described it, we observe a departure from the classic understanding of will as an expression of knowledge that we found in the Valentinianism we reconstructed from Irenaeus. Instead, will was here understood to be independent from thought/knowledge, not an expression and natural outflow thereof, and was required as a distinct action to actuate and bring to fruition the objects of thought. Athanasius, clearly moved by the classical paradigm, found this dichotomy absurd: "I consider understanding and will to be the same. For what a man counsels, about that also he has understanding; and what he has in understanding, that also he counsels."⁸²³ To appreciate where Athanasius was about to lead the conversation, we must note the enduring Nicene protestation against Arius' depiction of the Son as but an image of the Father's proper Word. From as early as Alexander,⁸²⁴ the Nicenes countered that the Son was himself God's proper rational principle, not merely an externalized image thereof as Arius had presented him. Athanasius was now moving beyond this premise and arguing that if the Son as Word was the rational principle of the Father, then it followed that, on the basis of the identification of thought and will that he was advocating for on the basis of an analogy between humans and God, the Son was himself also the volitive principle in the

⁸²² C. Ar. 3.60 (NPNF² 4:426-427).

⁸²³ C. Ar. 3.65 (NPNF² 4:429). PG 26: 460B: "Ταῦτόν γάρ ἡγοῦμαι φρόνησιν καὶ βούλησιν εἶναι. Ὁ γὰρ βουλευέται τις, τοῦτο πάντως καὶ φρονεῖ· καὶ ὁ φρονεῖ, τοῦτο καὶ βουλευέται."

⁸²⁴ Apud Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 1.3 (NPNF² 3:37): "For it would be the height of ignorance, and contrary indeed to all reason, to affirm that the cause of any created thing can be posterior to that caused by it. The interval during which they say the Son was still unbegotten of the Father was, according to their opinion, prior to the wisdom of God, by whom all things were created."

Godhead: the Son was God's will, a conclusion Athanasius saw vindicated by Prov 8:14.⁸²⁵ Only such an understanding made sense of the data. Scripture made clear that God brought all things into being through his Word, which, Athanasius was clarifying, was also his Will:

“And as the Apostle writes to Thessalonians, ‘the will [*θέλημα*] of God is in Christ Jesus.’⁸²⁶ The Son of God then, he is the ‘Word’ and the ‘Wisdom;’ he the ‘understanding’ and the living ‘counsel’ [*βουλή*]; and in him is the ‘good pleasure [*θέλημα*] of the Father;’ he is ‘truth’ and ‘light’ and ‘power’ of the Father.”⁸²⁷

And as himself the Word and Will of God, the Son could never have been willed into existence, for he could not have been his own object. By separating the Son from the Father the Arians sought only to “call Him a creature instead of the proper Word of the Father.”⁸²⁸ Athanasius was not opposed to the Arian axiom that a thing willed was at an ontological distance from the willing agent. His difference with them was only that the Son was not among these objects of will, and therefore was not inferior to the Father. Rather, as God's true Word and Will, he was of the Father's very nature itself: “As far then as the Son transcends the creature, by so much does what is by nature transcend the will.”⁸²⁹ The tactic of applying “human contrarities” to God in order, supposedly, to safeguard against subjecting God to necessity or purposelessness was merely a means of denying that there is a true Son of God. For, in his eyes, making the Son the object of will

⁸²⁵ C. Ar. 3.65 (NPNF² 4:429); Prov 8:14 (LXX): “*Ἐμὴ βουλή καὶ ἀσφάλεια, ἐμὴ φρόνησις, ἐμὴ δὲ ἰσχύς.*”

⁸²⁶ 1 Thess 5:18.

⁸²⁷ C. Ar. 3.65 (NPNF² 4:429 [PG 26:461A]).

⁸²⁸ C. Ar. 3.65 (NPNF² 4:429).

⁸²⁹ C. Ar. 3.61 (NPNF² 4:427).

in order to guard against necessity made as much sense as making God's goodness and mercifulness objects of will for the same reason.⁸³⁰

It must be made clear, however, that Athanasius was not shutting out the question of will completely. In emphasizing the Son's *natural* connection to the Father, Athanasius' specific target had been the notion of the Son's generation as the object of the Father's *precedent* will. For a volitive act (*βούλησις*) prior to the begetting of the Son suggested his ontological contingency, namely that the Father *chose* to beget the Son, and that he theoretically could have chosen otherwise. This was, as we intimated above, as illegitimate as suggesting that the Father chooses to be good,⁸³¹ and it was this that Athanasius was shutting out. However, if one fully accepted a relation between Father and Son that was according to nature, then, Athanasius argued, one could also begin to see, as an inherent and necessary corollary of this natural concomitance of Father and Son, a mutual "good pleasure" or "wanting" (*θέλησις*), and love (*ἀγάπη*), between them as well. For it was "one thing to say, 'Of will [*βουλήσει*] he came to be,' and another, that the Father has love [*ἀγαπᾷ*] and good pleasure [*θέλει*] towards his Son who is his own by nature."⁸³² Just because the Son was not brought into existence by a prior act of the Father's will did not make the Son unwanted of the Father. On the contrary, being naturally of the Father and proper to his essence, it was as impossible for the Son's existence to be at cross-purposes with the good pleasure of the Father as it was for Father's own subsistence to conflict with his good pleasure.⁸³³ Not only so, this good

⁸³⁰ C. Ar. 3.62 (NPNF² 4:428): "If it be unseemly to speak of necessity in the case of God, and therefore it is by nature that He is good, much more is He, and more truly, Father of the Son by nature and not by will."

⁸³¹ C. Ar. 3.66 (NPNF² 4:430).

⁸³² C. Ar. 3.66 (NPNF² 4:430).

⁸³³ C. Ar. 3.66 (PG 26:461C): "Ὡσπερ γὰρ τῆς ἰδίας ὑποστάσεως ἐστι θελητής, οὕτω καὶ ὁ Υἱός, ἴδιος ὢν αὐτοῦ τῆς οὐσίας, οὐκ ἀθέλητος ἐστὶν αὐτῷ."

pleasure was mutual: the Son was indeed “wanted [ἠελοόμενος] of the Father,”⁸³⁴ but also, “by the very good pleasure by which the Son is wanted, the Son too loves, wants, and honors the Father.”⁸³⁵ This mutuality—“The Father wants [ἠελεἰ] the Son,” and, “The Son wants [ἠελεἰ] the Father”⁸³⁶—implied not precedent will, but “genuineness of nature, and propriety and likeness of essence.”⁸³⁷ Thus, Athanasius concluded, “The Father loves and wants the Son, and the Son loves and wants the Father.”⁸³⁸

It seems clear to me that this line of thought, which came in the very last paragraphs of his arduous *Orationes contra Arianos*, was intended as an answer to those anti-Nicenes for whom a treatment of will in the Trinity was imperative. This sense of mutual will, which Athanasius described with the verb ἠελω and its derivatives—and which *NPNF* consistently renders “good pleasure,” which in places I have replaced with “want”—stands in contrast to the βούλεσθαι and its derivatives, with their intellectual overtones that suggest a kind of willing interwoven with knowledge and deliberation,⁸³⁹ and which Athanasius tended to correlate with the precedent will he so argued against. We also note that this *good pleasure* was mentioned in concert with the verb “to love,” almost like a doublet. We have already noted how, in certain schools of thought, love was seen as a species of will,⁸⁴⁰ so I am inclined to take Athanasius’ words here as a description of the innate harmony that must characterize the natural relation he was arguing for. Because this commonality of *thelesis* had its basis in the Son’s being of the

⁸³⁴ *C. Ar.* 3.66 (PG 26:461C).

⁸³⁵ *C. Ar.* 3.66 (PG 26:461C-464A).

⁸³⁶ *C. Ar.* 3.66 (PG 26:464B).

⁸³⁷ *C. Ar.* 3.66 (*NPNF*² 4:430). The Gk. (PG 26: 464B) here—“φύσεως γνησιότητα καὶ οὐσίας ιδιότητα καὶ ὁμοίωσιν”—is notable for its seemingly homoiousianist choice of words.

⁸³⁸ *C. Ar.* 3.66 (PG 26: 464C).

⁸³⁹ As Athanasius himself said in *C. Ar.* 3.65 (PG 26: 460B): “Ταύτων γὰρ ἡγοῦμαι φρόνησιν καὶ βούλησιν εἶναι.” Both Clement (apud Maximus’ *Pyrr.* [PG 91: 317C]) and Origen (*Comm. Jo.* 20:22 [PG 14: 621C]) define βούλησις as εὐλογος ὀρεξις.

⁸⁴⁰ Diogenes Laertius 7.106.

Father according to nature and essence, Athanasius seemed in a way to portend Ambrose, who, as we saw, was to argue that commonality of essence meant the commonality of will, and who, in turn, I have claimed gives us a way of understanding the Council of Antioch. However, the similarity between them is superficial, because Ambrose was dealing with the divine will in the outward operation of the Godhead in creation. Moreover, this inner harmony that Athanasius talked of was peculiar because it was bi-directional in its action, from Father to Son and from Son *back to* the Father, and so is noteworthy for its ramifications for a social view of the Trinity. Arius' attempt at bi-directionality had been doomed by the sense of contingency it rested on, but Athanasius eliminated contingency by making the harmony the inherent corollary of the natural concomitance between Father and Son. In this way, Athanasius was attempting to redeem what Sardica had rejected.⁸⁴¹ We note, too, that this *theletic* harmony was distinct from God's outward, purposive, and volitive movement in creation, which, Athanasius had already argued, was tied especially to the action of the Son, being himself the Will of God that was eternally with God.

Nevertheless, for all its brilliance, Athanasius' system seemed burdened by an unclear sense of the Son's begetting. To be sure, he was fond of arguing for the sameness of essence between Father and Son by drawing analogies from human procreation in which children were no less human than their parents.⁸⁴² But the presentation of the Son as the divine Will itself, and his likening the Son's concomitance with the Father to that of the goodness and mercifulness that inhered naturally in the Father must have made the

⁸⁴¹ However, I must reiterate my suspicion that Antioch was not concerned with bi-directional willing, which was always subject to the suspicion of promoting potential discord between the divine persons, but the oneness of operation of the Father and Son.

⁸⁴² See e.g. *Dion.* 18, *C. Ar.* 3.67 inter alia. We note, of course, the difficulty of using a human-child analogy to describe the *homoousion*.

Son seem to some like a property of the Father and obscured the vision of him as his *Monogenes*. Thus, if, as their opponents charged, the anti-Nicene insistence on including a place for will in their Trinitarian theology made them suspect of preaching an extreme subordinationism, in which the Son was on a lower ontological stratum than was the Father, Athanasius' opponents might have taken his proposal as a different kind of diminution of the Son, one where the Son, likened to a property or aspect of the Father, was not possessed of personhood to the degree that the Father was, thus encouraging the view that Nicaea's supporters were Sabellians.⁸⁴³ And if Irenaeus' response to the Valentinians of his day appears to have been to avoid open mention of the question of will in the Godhead, Athanasius' response to what he too identified as volitionistic Valentinianism was explicitly to shut it out from the theological conversation as much as possible.

THE GREGORIES: RESOLUTION OF PRECEDENT WILL, AND THE OUTWARD VOLITIVE MOVEMENT OF THE TRINITY

A new impetus for denouement was provided only after the peace of 362, when, in the face of Julian's persecution of the Church, a synod was called in Alexandria, and Nicene prelates under the leadership of Athanasius were reconciled with moderate churchmen of the anti-Nicene party. This was a culmination of a process wherein each side had begun to realize that the other was not Sabellian or tri-theist respectively. It was

⁸⁴³ We must be clear that Athanasius was not calling the Son a quality of the Father, only that the illustration he used here could be taken to undermine the personhood of the Son. As he clarified in *Ep. Afr.* 8, the idea of qualities in God implied compoundness of the simple divine essence. The mysterious author of *C. Ar.* 4.2, which has been received as part of a supposed fourth book of Athanasius' *Orationes contra Arianos*—although the consensus remains that it was neither part of the original work nor even written by Athanasius (See Quasten 3:27-28)—takes the same line.

in this context that a new generation of thinkers brought fresh eyes to the issues. Among these were Gregory of Nazianzus—the Theologian—, and Gregory of Nyssa, scions of the moderately anti-Nicene party once led by Basil of Ancyra. On the one hand, their approach focused on upholding the full personhood of the divine hypostases—a traditionally anti-Nicene approach⁸⁴⁴ that, after the Council of 362, as we see from its findings as published in the Tome to the Antiochenes, had begun to gain acceptance from both sides.⁸⁴⁵ On the other hand, in its effort to give an answer to the unresolved question of precedent will, it also took its inspiration from a line of thinking we first saw at Sirmium. This argued that, although the Son’s generation was concomitant with the will of God, it was so in the way as happens with “one of the works.”⁸⁴⁶ In other words, they sought to preserve a sense of the Father’s precedent will in the begetting of the Son—it had long been a part of the tradition as a guard of the sovereignty of God, and could not simply be jettisoned—but in a way that, because it was said not to abide by the norms governing causality in the created order, could be argued did not imply the Son’s ontological inferiority to God.

Gregory of Nazianzus was the first to look at the burning question and to attempt to resolve it in a way that was respectful of the Council of Nicaea. He made special note of the impasse to which the debate on the precedent will of God had till his time continuously been led:

⁸⁴⁴ Telling were the Tome’s efforts to play down the authority of the Council of Sardica (*apud* Athanasius, *Tom.* 5).

⁸⁴⁵ Characteristic was the statement in the Tome which said, “...the Father perfectly exists and subsists, and that the Son perfectly subsists, and that the Holy Spirit perfectly subsists. Wherefore also I accept the above explanation concerning the Three Subsistences [*ὑποστάσεων*], and the one Subsistence [*ὑποστάσεως*], or rather Essence [*οὐσίας*], and those who hold thus. For it is pious to hold and confess the Holy Trinity in one Godhead” (*Apud* Athanasius, *Tom.* 11 [*NPNF*² 4:486—PG 26: 809A]).

⁸⁴⁶ *Apud* Athanasius, *Syn.* 27 (*NPNF*² 4:465 [PG 26: 740B]).

“He, they say, either voluntarily begat the Son, or else involuntarily. Next, as they think, they bind us on both sides with cords; these however are not strong, but very weak. For, they say, if it was involuntarily, he was under the sway of some one. And who exercised this sway? And how is He, over whom it is exercised, God? But if voluntarily, the Son is a Son of Will; how then is He of the Father?—and they thus invent a new sort of Mother for him,—the Will,—in place of the Father. There is one good point which they may allege about this argument of theirs; namely, that they desert Passion, and take refuge in Will. For Will is not Passion.”⁸⁴⁷

The dilemma for Gregory lay between two extremes. On the one side, the generation of the Son was seen not as a matter of the Father’s will but the product of compulsion on him, which, of course, suggested the existence of some third element, above both Father and Son, that dictated the necessity of the Son’s begetting. Not without some justification, this had been the perception of the Neo-Platonist position in Christian circles.⁸⁴⁸ We have already seen how, in the face of strongly volitionist Gnosticism, Plotinus moved, away from volitive explanations of the movement from primordial oneness to plurality, to a strong sense of rationalistic determinism. Gregory’s opposition to the necessity thesis was twofold. First, it belittled the sovereignty of God: “Let us not ever look on this Generation as involuntary, like some natural overflow, hard to be

⁸⁴⁷ *Or.* 29.6 (NPNF² 7:302 [PG 36:80C-81A]): “*Βουληθεῖς, φασί, γεγέννηκε τὸν Υἱόν, ἢ μὴ βουλόμενος. Εἴτα δεσμοῦσιν, ὡς οἴονται, ἀμφοτέρωθεν ἄμμασιν, οὐκ ἰσχυροῖς, ἀλλὰ καὶ λίαν σαδροῖς. Εἰ μὲν γὰρ οὐ θέλων, φασί, τετυράννηται. Καὶ τίς ὁ τυραννήσας; Καὶ πῶς ὁ τυραννηθεῖς, Θεός; Εἰ δὲ θέλων, θελήσεως Υἱός, ὁ Υἱός· πῶς οὖν ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς; Καὶ καινὴν τινα μητέρα τὴν θέλησιν ἀντὶ τοῦ Πατρὸς ἀναπλάττουσιν. Ἐν μὲν οὖν τοῦτο χάρειν αὐτῶν, ἂν τοῦτο λέγωσιν, ὅτι τοῦ πάθους ἀποστάντες, ἐπὶ τὴν βούλησιν καταφεύγουσιν· οὐ γὰρ πάθος ἢ βούλησις.”*

⁸⁴⁸ See, e.g., *Enn.* 5.7: “The *Nous* stands as the image of the Hen, firstly because there is a certain necessity that the first should have its offspring...”

retained, and by no means befitting our conception of Deity.”⁸⁴⁹ Secondly, and most poignantly, it clashed with the principle, dearly held by Gregory and derived ultimately from Origen, that things done out of necessity were ephemeral, “for what is involuntary, apart from its being the result of oppression, is neither meritorious nor durable.”⁸⁵⁰ His contrast, here, with the Nicene party’s suspicion of will as given to mutability was stark.

The other side of the quandary saw the Son as the product of the divine Will, which, as a proximate cause in the service of the Father, brought about the generation of the Son, to the point of assuming even a kind of maternal status. We are reminded here of several things. First, one thinks of Athanasius’ description of the view of Ptolemy the Valentinian, who argued for will as an autonomous principle in the One. Secondly, we cannot but also recall here the way Eusebius of Caesarea parried the claim that the Son came to be from things inexistent by putting forth the divine Will as the substrate from which all things were formed.⁸⁵¹ It seems some went a further step and connected this to Aristotle’s view that a mother provides the material substrate in procreation,⁸⁵² to arrive at the final notion, here described by Gregory, of the divine Will as the Son’s mother. In any case, the inescapable sense of contingency which, in the understanding of the proponents of the theory of the Father’s volitive begetting of the Son, surrounded the Father’s generative will and naturally put this ultimately contingent Son at an ontological distance from the Father, of whom, thus, he could not be considered truly a part. Of course, Gregory rejected this side of the dilemma as well, but he commended its

⁸⁴⁹ *Or.* 29.2 (*NPNF*² 7:301).

⁸⁵⁰ *Or.* 2.16 (*NPNF*² 7:208). Cf. *Or.* 31.25 (*NPNF*² 7:325-326): “For nothing that is involuntary is durable; like streams or trees which are kept back by force. But that which is voluntary is more durable and safe. The former is due to one who uses force, the latter is ours; the one is due to the gentleness of God, the other to a tyrannical authority. Wherefore God did not think it behooved Him to benefit the unwilling, but to do good to the willing.”

⁸⁵¹ *Dem. ev.* 4.1.

⁸⁵² *Gen. an.* 1.20 (729^a9-11), 2.1 (732^b1-11).

proponents at least for correctly not confusing will with passion.⁸⁵³ It was important for Gregory that this ancient and well-established distinction⁸⁵⁴ not be blurred, for he sought to overcome this dilemma and restore a sense of will in the begetting of the Son without this in any way embarrassing the principle of the sameness of being between Father and Son, as this had first been laid down by Nicaea, or there being any suspicion of affinity to the irrationalist and passionist systems of the Gnostics of old.

For Gregory, the path toward a solution to this problem of will lay principally in maintaining the theological order in the Trinity that the anti-Nicene party had held so dear. To this end Gregory advanced what originally had been Plotinus'⁸⁵⁵ language of *cause* to define the nature of the Father's relation with the Son. For Gregory, there was no shame in talking of the Father as the cause of the Son, or, notably, in embracing the sense of hierarchy that it connoted. He freely admitted that, "in respect of being the cause [$\tau\tilde{\omega}$ αἰτίῳ], the Father is greater [$\mu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega\nu$] than the Son."⁸⁵⁶ Gregory clearly was trying to find a place for the words of Christ, "My Father is greater than I" (Jn 14:28), whose implications others had tried to blunt by arguing that the Son here was speaking according to his human nature. Their explanations were unsatisfying, even banal. "To say that he is greater than the Son considered as man, is true indeed, but is no great thing. For what marvel is it if God is greater than man?"⁸⁵⁷ And yet there were also those passages

⁸⁵³ *Or.* 29.6 (NPNF² 7:302 [PG 36:81A]): "There is one good point which they may allege about this argument of theirs; namely, that they desert Passion [$\pi\acute{\alpha}\theta\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$], and take refuge in Will [$\beta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\eta\sigma\iota\nu$]. For Will is not Passion."

⁸⁵⁴ See e.g. Aristotle (*Eth. nic.* 3.2).

⁸⁵⁵ *Enn.* 5.1.6.19-22: "We dare not talk of generation in time, dealing as we are with eternal Beings: where we speak of origin in such reference, it is in the sense, merely, of cause [$\alpha\acute{\iota}\tau\iota\alpha\varsigma$] and order [$\tau\acute{\alpha}\xi\epsilon\omega\varsigma$]." I have used MacKenna's translation here, except that I have rendered $\tau\acute{\alpha}\xi\epsilon\omega\varsigma$ as "order," instead of his "subordination" which I felt was unwarranted.

⁸⁵⁶ *Or.* 29.15 (NPNF² 7:306 [PG 36:93B]): " $\tau\tilde{\omega}$ αἰτίῳ μείζων ὁ Πατήρ τοῦ Υἱοῦ."

⁸⁵⁷ *Or.* 30.7 (NPNF² 7:312 [PG 36:113A]): " $\tau\omicron$ γὰρ δὴ λέγειν, ὅτι τοῦ κατὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπον νοουμένου μείζων, ἀληθές μὲν, οὐ μέγα δέ. τί γὰρ τὸ θαυμαστόν, εἰ μείζων ἀνθρώπου Θεός;"

in Scripture that talked of the Son's equality with the Father. For Gregory this apparent contradiction only made sense if one understood that "the *greater* [μείζων] refers to cause [αἰτία],⁸⁵⁸ while the *equal* [ἴσον]⁸⁵⁹ belongs to the nature [φύσεως]."⁸⁶⁰ Here was the key. The Arians had long based their argument for the Father's ontological superiority on his status as unoriginate begetter of the Son. His unbegottenness, they claimed, was inextricably tied to his essence.⁸⁶¹ Gregory disagreed. In the same way that Adam, who was not begotten of human parents but was directly created by God, was not ontologically different from humans, so too "neither is he who is unbegotten alone God, though he alone is Father."⁸⁶² The fact that the Father was unbegotten, but the Son was not, did not upset the homoousion, because unbegottenness stood "outside the Essence" (περὶ οὐσίαν); *unbegotten* was "not a synonym for *God*."⁸⁶³ Thus, the only-begotten Son was not, on account of his generacy, any less God than the unbegotten Father. To reconcile these seeming opposites, Gregory invoked the old principle often brought up, especially in anti-Nicene circles, that the begetting of the Son was unlike that of "one of the works,"⁸⁶⁴ but was a process that lay wholly beyond human comprehension.⁸⁶⁵ How

⁸⁵⁸ The *NPNF* chooses to translate *αἰτία* as "origination," instead the the "cause" that I have preferred.

⁸⁵⁹ Though he did not cite it, Gregory must have been referring to Phil 2:6: "τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ."

⁸⁶⁰ *Or.* 30.7 (*NPNF*² 7:312 [PG 36:112C]): "Τὸ μείζον μὲν ἐστὶ τῆς αἰτίας, τὸ δὲ ἴσον τῆς φύσεως."

⁸⁶¹ See e.g. Eunomius, *Apol.* 1.8: "This [i.e. the Unbegotten] must be unbegotten essence [οὐσία ἀγέννητος]." Arians such as Eunomius used *essence*, in an Aristotelian fashion, to denote the *whatness* of a thing. Names were simply verbal formulae of essences. The name *Father*, therefore, contained those things peculiar to the Father, including his status as begetter and his unoriginateness—manifestations of his unique essence, in which the Son had no participation. The arbitrariness of such a definition of *ousia* was illustrated by their strenuous arguments against taking the names *Father* and *Son* as suggesting, as per human procreation, ontological parity (see Eunomius, *Apol.* 1.16-18).

⁸⁶² *Or.* 29.11 (*NPNF*² 7:305 [PG 36:88C]): "οὐδὲ τὸ ἀγέννητον μόνον Θεός, εἰ καὶ μόνον Πατρός, ἀλλὰ δέξαι καὶ τὸ γεννητὸν εἶναι Θεόν."

⁸⁶³ *Or.* 29.12 (*NPNF*² 7:305 [PG 36:89AB]): "Οὐ ταῦτον ἀγέννητον καὶ Θεός."

⁸⁶⁴ See, e.g., the Council of Sirmium: *apud* Athanasius, *Syn.* 27 (*NPNF*² 4:465 [PG 26: 740B]).

⁸⁶⁵ *Or.* 29.4 (*NPNF*² 7:302 [PG 36:80A]): "He, whose existence is not the same as ours, differs from us also in his generation" ("ὅ τὸ εἶναι μὴ ταῦτον, τούτῳ καὶ τὸ γενεῶν διάφορον").

could a human dare to postulate anything about it when he could barely understand his own generation?⁸⁶⁶ It was a mystery as ineffable as the divine essence itself.⁸⁶⁷

“The Begetting of God must be honored by silence. It is a great thing for you to learn that he was begotten. But the manner of his generation we will not admit that even Angels can conceive, much less you. Shall I tell you how it was? It was in a manner known to the Father who begat, and to the Son who was begotten. Anything more than this is hidden by a cloud, and escapes your dim sight.”⁸⁶⁸

The best one could do was to hedge one’s opaque comprehension of it roundabout with a few privative statements that posited what it could not be. Thus, the generation of the Son was said by Gregory to be, unlike human procreation, incorporeal and therefore passionless,⁸⁶⁹ and not subject to time, so that there “there was never a time when he was not.”⁸⁷⁰

It was within this general framework that Gregory turned also to our question of the Father’s precedent will in begetting the Son. As cause of the Son, the sovereign Father himself had willed the Son’s begetting. Against those, who had elevated will into a principle unto itself, by which the Son really was the Son of Will, a maternal principle, and not of the Father, he responded simply that a thing willed was the object of a willer, not of a will:

⁸⁶⁶ *Or.* 29.8.

⁸⁶⁷ *Or.* 29.11 (NPNF² 7:305 [PG 36:88CD]): “What then *is* the Essence of God? It is for your infatuation to define this, since you are so anxious about His Generation too; but to us it will be a very great thing, if ever, even in the future, when this darkness and dullness is done away for us, as He has promised Who cannot lie” (“*Τίς οὖν οὐσία Θεοῦ; Τῆς σῆς ἀπονοίας τοῦτο λέγειν, ὃς πολυπραγμονεῖς καὶ τὴν γέννησιν· ἡμῖν δὲ μέγα, κἂν εἴποτε καὶ εἰς ὕστερον τοῦτο μάθοιμεν, λυθέντος ἡμῖν τοῦ ζόφου καὶ τῆς παχύτητος, ὡς ἡ τοῦ ἀψευδοῦς ὑπόσχεσις*”).

⁸⁶⁸ *Or.* 29.8 (NPNF² 7:303 [PG 36:84C]): “*Θεοῦ γέννησις σιωπῇ τιμάσθω. Μέγα σοι τὸ μαθεῖν, ὅτι γεγέννηται. Τὸ δὲ πῶς, οὐδὲ ἀγγέλοις, μὴ ὅτι γε σοὶ ἐννοεῖν συγχωρήσωμεν. Βούλει παραστήσω τὸ πῶς; Ὡς οἶδεν ὁ γεννήσας Πατήρ, καὶ ὁ γεννηθεὶς Υἱός· τὸ δὲ ὑπὲρ ταῦτα, νέφει κρύπτεται, τὴν σὴν διαφεῦγον ἀμβλυωπίαν.*”

⁸⁶⁹ *Or.* 29.4.

⁸⁷⁰ *Or.* 29.3 (NPNF² 7:301).

“...a partition is set up between the Creator and the creatures in the shape of Will. And yet I think that the person who wills is distinct from the act of willing; he who begets from the act of begetting; the speaker from the speech, or else we are all very stupid. On the one side we have the mover, and on the other that which is, so to speak, the motion. Thus the thing willed is not the child of will, for it does not always result therefrom; nor is that which is begotten the child of generation, nor that which is heard the child of speech, but of the person who willed, or begat, or spoke.”⁸⁷¹

Gregory’s purpose here was twofold. First, he placed the person of the Father, not some impersonal force such as Will, as the central agent in theology.⁸⁷² Secondly, and more importantly for our purposes, Gregory also sought to remove all mediating barriers between Father and Son that had been erected by viewing divine begetting in too human, discrete, and sequential terms. “The things of God are beyond all this,” he maintained. For in the Father “the Will to beget” was itself equal (*ἴσως*) with generation; there was no “intermediate action.” There was no interval between the Father’s willing and his begetting, and, in this general context of the Son’s incomprehensible generation by the

⁸⁷¹ *Or.* 29.6 (NPNF² 7:303 [PG 36:81B]): “Θελήσει γὰρ μέση τοῦ κτίστου διατειχίζεται. Ἄλλ’ ἕτερον, οἶμαι, θέλων ἔστι καὶ θέλησις, γεννῶν καὶ γέννησις, λέγων καὶ λόγος, εἰ μὴ μεθύομεν· τὰ μὲν ὁ κινούμενος, τὰ δὲ οἶον ἢ κίνησις. Οὐκ οὐκ θελήσεως, τὸ θεληθέν· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἔπεται πάντως· οὐδὲ τὸ γεννηθέν, γεννήσεως· οὐδὲ τὸ ἀκουσθέν, ἐκφωνήσεως· ἀλλὰ τοῦ θέλοντος, καὶ τοῦ γεννῶντος, καὶ τοῦ λέγοντος.”

⁸⁷² As an aside, we note that, in some modern Greek circles, this move has in modern times inspired an entire school of theology, whose leading figures include Metropolitan John Zizioulas and Christos Yannaras, that is founded on the valorization of Person and interpersonal relation in Trinitarian theology and, by extension, human affairs. Illustrative is Zizioulas’ statement (*Being as Communion* [London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985], 40-41) that “among the Greek Fathers the unity of God, the one God, and the ontological ‘principle’ or ‘cause’ of the being and life of God does not consist in the one substance of God but in the *hypostasis*, that is, *the person of the Father*. The one God is not the one substance but the Father, who is the ‘cause’ both of the generation of the Son and of the procession of the Spirit. Consequently, the ontological ‘principle of God is traced back, once again, to the person.” The work of this school of thought has been received variously.

Father, the begetting itself was such that there was no mediation, no ontological gap, no time lapse, and no suggestion of the Son's ontological inferiority to the Father.

However, at this point Gregory seemed suddenly to stop. My suspicion is that he was careful not to enter more sensitive territory than would be prudent for one in his precarious political situation. At the time of his writing, he was the minority Nicene bishop of Constantinople in the tense years leading up to the Council that was to be held there in 381. This unease was hinted at by the tempered remark, which seemed to cut short his train of thought: "if we may accept this at all, and not rather consider generation superior to will."⁸⁷³ Instead of opening up a fuller treatment of the question on will he had touched on, he appeared rather to suggest to his readers that if one were having trouble accepting his thinking, then one could dismiss all that he had said and simply consider the "generation superior to will." Of course, this alternative he was recommending was nothing other than the old position of Athanasius, the trusted pillar of the Nicene orthodoxy, which, as we have already seen, placed the Son's begetting above and beyond all questions of will. Gregory's caution here was understandable. His political position around 379 was uncertain, and, with his talk of the Father's willing in the begetting of the Son, he was delving into areas that many among the Nicenes had long considered tantamount to Arianism. His offer of a respectable and safe fallback position that assured his readers of his Nicene sympathies was understandable.

Fortunately for us, however, this crucial train of thought touched on by Gregory was soon picked up again by his namesake, compatriot, and friend, Gregory of Nyssa, who, writing only just after Gregory of Nazianzus (382) and buoyed by the triumph of the Council of Constantinople (381), was to provide it with a fitting coda. Gregory of

⁸⁷³ *Or.* 29.6 (PG 36:81BC): "εἴ γε καὶ τοῦτο δεξιόμεθα ὄλως, ἀλλὰ μὴ καὶ φελησεως κρείττων ἢ γέννησις."

Nyssa's methodology rested on the same strategy as that of Gregory of Nazianzus, namely that of reconciling seemingly irreducible opposites in the transcendence and infinitude of the inner life of the Trinity. Indeed, on the one hand, Scripture called the Son begotten. Yet, that same Scripture would also say that "he is verily God, and assuredly eternal, and is never at any time found to be non-existent."⁸⁷⁴ On the face of it, Gregory conceded, the one claim did not "at first seem to agree with the other."⁸⁷⁵ In the eighth book of his *C. Eun.*, Gregory sought to shed light on this paradox by examining the derivative problem on which we are focused: how the Father willingly begot the Son without this in any way suggesting the ontological inferiority of the latter. His goal here was to be able to "apprehend the doctrine on this point by the aid of things cognizable to our senses."⁸⁷⁶ By analyzing one paradox, he would be able to elucidate the other. He focused on dismantling the key Arian assertion that if the Father exercised will (*βεβουλησθαι*) in the begetting then it followed that "the Father first willed and so proceeded to become a Father." From this they then inferred the Son's ontological posteriority to the Father. For Gregory, oppositely, the "immediate conjunction" (*ἄμεσος...συνάφεια*) between Father and Son, which all accepted, did not have necessarily to exclude the notion of the Father's willing in the begetting, as though he begot the Son "without choice, by some necessity of his nature [*φύσεως ἀνάγκην*]."⁸⁷⁷ Neither did this act of willing separate the Son from the Father, as if to come "in between them as a kind of interval." People had long been led to the wrong conclusions on this matter precisely

⁸⁷⁴ *C. Eun.* 8.1 (NPNF² 5:201 [PG 45:772C]): "Ἀλλὰ μὴν ἀληθῶς ἐστὶ Θεός, ἀεὶ πάντα ἐστί, καὶ οὐδέποτε ἐν τῷ μὴ εἶναι καταλαμβάνεται."

⁸⁷⁵ *C. Eun.* 8.2 (NPNF² 5:202 [PG 45:773C]): "κἂν δοκῇ κατὰ τὴν πρόχειρον ἔννοιαν μὴ συμβαίνειν ὁ λόγος τῷ λόγῳ."

⁸⁷⁶ *C. Eun.* 8.2 (NPNF² 5:202 [PG 45:773C]): "δυνατὸν ἂν γένοιτο νοῆσαι τὸ περὶ τούτου δόγμα διὰ τινῶν τῶν κατὰ τὴν αἴσθησιν ἡμῶν γνωριζομένων."

⁸⁷⁷ *C. Eun.* 8.2 (NPNF² 5:202 [PG 45:773C-D]).

because they overlooked what was a fundamental difference between human and divine natures. In the “heavy and inert” nature of humans, the wish for a thing and the possession of it were always understood as separate and non-simultaneous events: “Now we wish for something we have not, and at another time we obtain what we do not wish to obtain.” However, in the “simple and all-powerful” divine nature, such fragmentation did not exist: “all things are conceived together and at once, the willing of good as well as the possession of what he wills.”⁸⁷⁸ The divine will itself was “contemplated as operating, indwelling, and co-existing in the eternal nature.” It neither arose in it from some separate principle, nor was it capable from being conceived apart from the object of will. For, he concluded, it was

“not possible that with God either the good will should not be, or the object of will should not accompany the act of will, since no cause can either bring it about that that which befits the Father should not always be, or be any hindrance to the possession of the object of will.”⁸⁷⁹

Thus, Gregory elaborated, it followed that, because the Son was by nature the good—“or rather beyond all good”—and the good never failed to be the object of the Father’s will, then neither was will forced out by the immediate conjunction of Father and Son, nor was there any separation between the two on account of the element of will existing in their relation.⁸⁸⁰ Gregory’s choice of example here was interesting. We recall how for

⁸⁷⁸ *C. Eun.* 8.2 (NPNF² 5:202 [PG 45:776A]): “ἀλλὰ νῦν μὲν βουλόμεθά τι ἔχειν ἂν οὐκ ἔχομεν, μετὰ ταῦτα δὲ τυγχάνομεν ἂν τυχεῖν οὐκ ἠβουλήθημεν. Ἐπὶ δὲ τῆς ἀπλῆς καὶ παντοδυνάμου φύσεως, ὁμοῦ τὰ πάντα καὶ κατὰ ταῦτόν νοεῖται, καὶ τὸ θέλειν τὸ ἀγαθόν, καὶ τὸ ἔχειν ὅπερ ἠθέλησε.”

⁸⁷⁹ *C. Eun.* 8.2 (NPNF² 5:202 [PG 45:776A]): “Οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐνδέχεται παρὰ τῷ Θεῷ, ἢ τὸ ἀγαθὸν θέλημα μὴ εἶναι, ἢ μὴ συνεῖναι τῷ θελήματι· οὐδεμιᾶς αἰτίας οὐδὲ τὸ πρέπον τῷ Πατρὶ μὴ πάντα εἶναι μειούσης, οὔτε πρὸς τὸ ἔχειν τὸ βουλητὸν ἐμποδιζούσης.”

⁸⁸⁰ *C. Eun.* 8.2 (NPNF² 5:202 [PG 45:776AB]): “Ἐπεὶ οὖν φύσει τὸ ἀγαθόν, μᾶλλον δὲ παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ ἐπέκεινα ὁ μονογενὴς Θεός, οὐκ ἀβούλητον δὲ τῷ Πατρὶ τὸ ἀγαθόν· φανερώς ἀποδείκνυται διὰ τούτων, ὅτι καὶ ἄμεσός ἐστι τοῦ Υἱοῦ ἢ πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα συνάφεια, καὶ οὐκ ἐξωθεῖται οὐδὲ ἐξείργεται ὑπὸ τῆς ἀδιαστάτου συναφείας τὸ

Athanasius, the Father's goodness was natural to him and therefore was not in the purview of his will. The Father's nature could not be the object of his will. Rather, the Father's will had as its object things outside of the Father, not things natural to him. To say, therefore, that the Father willed to be good was to present his goodness as conditional and external to God's being. Conversely, in this illustration of Gregory's, the Father's goodness, although also natural to him, was nevertheless understood to be the object of his will as well. In other words, God ever willed the eternal begetting of his own natural and incontinent goodness. There was a tension here, to be sure. First, I should underline that Gregory's presentation of the Son as the good was incidental, not a concerted turn toward thinking of the Son as a divine property; there was simply too much evidence elsewhere of Gregory's perception of the Son as a concrete person, an hypostasis, and not a property. If anything, what divulged more about the substance of his understanding was his "or rather beyond all good." For here Gregory was declaring that he had reached the very limit of human comprehension when it came to fathoming the interior life of the Trinity. The sense of otherness and incomprehensibility that surrounded the begetting was such that all one could do was to hedge the mystery about with truth statements that in instances such as this one may have even seemed contradictory, but rule that, in the unknowable divine realm, they were not opposed to one another. Thus, in these most transcendent instances, the Son was both willed yet not contingent, begotten yet without beginning, caused yet not inferior.

Gregory's solution, founded on the understanding that human norms could only ever represent but a fragmented reflection of matters pertaining to the divine nature, put

βούλημα τὸ τῆ ἀγαθῆ φύσει διὰ παντὸς ἐνυπάρχον. Εἰ δέ τις ἀνεπηρέαστως ἀκούει τοῦ λόγου καὶ τοιοῦτόν τι τοῖς εἰρημένοις προσθεῖναι βούλομαι.”

forward the transcendent, supra-intellectual nature of Trinitarian theology. Eusebius of old had attempted to present the divine will as a kind of substrate from which all things had been fashioned. What this did, however, was reinforce the Arian position of a Son at a distance from the Father. Gregory, however, located the divine will in the divine nature itself, and argued that although the Father willed the begetting of the Son, he did so without interval, without mediation, without remove, before all ages, and without this in any way implying the Son's ontological inferiority. Moreover, given that the term *nature* was for Gregory but a synonym for *ousia*,⁸⁸¹ it followed necessarily that the identity of *ousia* between Father and Son—enshrined by Nicaea, and, after the peace of 362, accepted by the moderate anti-Nicenes including the forebears of Gregory—also implied their identity of will. Now Gregory was in a position to give structure and substance to the theological precept first articulated at the Council of Antioch some forty years previously. There, the Council had attempted to define the relationship between Father, Son (and Holy Spirit) as an oneness according to symphony. I argued that, based on the evidence we have at hand, it was simply inconceivable to envisage this as anything other than a statement that the absolute commonality of will of the divine persons, in the observed volitive movement of the Trinity *ad extra*, was a phenomenological index of their unfathomable underlying unity which the council lacked the theological wherewithal to describe otherwise. Armed now with a notion of the homoousion freed of

⁸⁸¹ As Johannes Zachhuber notes in "Ousia," pages 565-566 in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, (ed. by Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco & Giulio Maspero; trans. by Seth Cherney [Brill: Leiden, 2010]): "The fact that he [Gregory] unquestioningly assumes the semantic equivalence of *ousia* and *physis* is evinced by *Graec* and *Abl*, which develop the same argument, but do so using *ousia* and *physis* terminology, respectively." Further evidence of this emergent correlation was the doctrinal epistle that the Council of Constantinople itself sent to the Church in the West, which equated the *ousia*, *physis*, Godhead (see Tanner, *Decrees*, 18:33-34), and power (*ibid.* 18:22) of the three hypostases.

the associations that so sullied it in the eyes of the Antiochenes, Gregory began to put together a theological system that brought together all these loose threads.

Gregory took as his starting point the unfathomable and indescribable divine nature about which we have already made intimations. To Gregory's understanding, the "unnameable and unspeakable"⁸⁸² divine nature was definable only either negatively or by "one of its surroundings."⁸⁸³ By "surroundings" Gregory made clear that he meant the divine operations (*ἐνέργειαι*)⁸⁸⁴ that flowed therefrom and which were identified according to humans' "variable conceptions" of them.⁸⁸⁵ Even the notion of the *Godhead* (*Θεότης*) itself, mistakenly taken by many as "a common name of the nature,"⁸⁸⁶ was really a term identifying God's supervisory operation.⁸⁸⁷ Each divine operation, extending "from God to the creation," whether referring to the "acts of His providence for us, or to the government and constitution of the universe," came about through the singular "action of the Three."⁸⁸⁸ It was this that constituted the basis of Christian monotheism: not God's personal oneness—the divine persons were three—but the absolute oneness of the Trinity's action in its operation in the world. Every operation had "its origin from the Father, and proceeds through the Son, and is perfected in the Holy Spirit."⁸⁸⁹ Among these divine operations was included, of course, the unitary divine will that acted in the

⁸⁸² *Abl.* (NPNF² 5:332 [PG 45:121A]): "ἀκατονόμαστον τε καὶ ἄφραστον."

⁸⁸³ *Abl.* (NPNF² 5:332 [PG 45:121A]): "...πᾶν ὄνομα, εἴτε παρὰ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης οὐσίας ἐξεύρηται, εἴτε παρὰ τῶν Γραφῶν παραδέδοται, τῶν τι περὶ τὴν θεῖαν φύσιν νοουμένων ἐρμηνευτικὸν εἶναι λέγομεν, οὐκ αὐτῆς δὲ τῆς φύσεως περιέχειν τὴν σημασίαν."

⁸⁸⁴ *Abl.* (NPNF² 5:333 [PG 45:121D]): "Ἐπεὶ τοίνυν τὰς ποικίλας τῆς ὑπερκειμένης δυνάμεως ἐνεργείας κατανοοῦντες ἀφ' ἐκάστης τῶν ἡμῖν γνωρίμων ἐνεργειῶν τὰς προσηγορίας ἀρμόζομεν, μίαν δὲ καὶ ταύτην εἶναι (λέγομεν τοῦ Θεοῦ) τὴν ἐνέργειαν."

⁸⁸⁵ *Abl.* (NPNF² 5:334 [PG 45:125C]): "κατὰ τὰς πολυτρόπους ἐννοίας."

⁸⁸⁶ *Abl.* (NPNF² 5:333 [PG 45:124C]): "κοινὴ τῆς φύσεως ἢ κλήσις τῆς Θεότητος."

⁸⁸⁷ *Abl.* (NPNF² 5:333 [PG 45:121D-124A]). In this case, the operation denoted by *Θεότης* was God's status as our beholder (*θεατής*) or overseer.

⁸⁸⁸ *Abl.* (NPNF² 5:334 [PG 45:125CD]): "Θεόθεν ἐπὶ τὴν κτίσιν...εἴτε εἰς τὴν ἡμετέραν πρόνοιαν φθανόντων, εἴτε πρὸς τὴν τοῦ παντὸς οἰκονομίαν καὶ σύστασιν διὰ τῶν τριῶν μὲν γίνεται."

⁸⁸⁹ *Abl.* (NPNF² 5:334 [PG 45:126C]): "ἐκ Πατρὸς ἀφορμᾶται καὶ διὰ τοῦ Υἱοῦ πρόεισι, καὶ ἐν τῷ Πνεύματι τῷ ἀγίῳ τελειοῦται."

world, the motion of which also flowed “from the Father, through the Son, to the Spirit.”⁸⁹⁰ There was “one motion [*κίνησις*] and disposition [*διακόσμησις*] of the good will [*ἀγαθοῦ θελήματος*] which is communicated from the Father through the Son to the Spirit.”⁸⁹¹ The absolute unity of the action of the three hypostases declared their oneness of nature.⁸⁹² Being at one and the same inscrutable level of being—or of one and the same ousia, as Nicaea had long-established—there could be only one way for the divine persons to will and act. Their will and operation had its origin and initiation in the Father, was brought forth in the Son, and was completed in the Holy Spirit, all these occurring “without mark of time or distinction,”⁸⁹³ for the movement was one. It was not a question of the divine persons being in a relation of obedience to one another, for all acted according to their one and same nature, a nature which had its origin in the Father, who, by means inscrutable and beyond understanding, bestowed this same nature on the other two persons before all time and age.⁸⁹⁴

To expand from Gregory’s theological framework, we see him engaging the question of will on two levels. Inside the Trinity Gregory allowed an exploded view of its inner workings in order for one to arrange the data of revelation only if there was a prior understanding that this exploded view was at bottom catachrestic and insufficient to

⁸⁹⁰ *Abl.* (NPNF² 5:335 [PG 45:129B]): “οὐδεμιᾶς παρατάσεως ἐν τῇ τοῦ θείου βουλήματος κινήσει ἀπὸ τοῦ Πατρὸς, διὰ τοῦ Υἱοῦ, ἐπὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα γινομένης ἢ νοουμένης.”

⁸⁹¹ *Abl.* (NPNF² 5:334 [PG 45: 128A]): “...μία τις γίνεται τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ θελήματος κίνησις τε καὶ διακόσμησις, ἐκ Πατρὸς διὰ τοῦ Υἱοῦ πρὸς τὸ Πνεῦμα διεξαγομένη.”

⁸⁹² Cf. *C. Eun.* 2.15 (NPNF² 5:132 [PG: 45:564C]): “For the community of nature gives us warrant that the will of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is one, and thus, if the Holy Spirit wills that which seems good to the Son, the community of will clearly points to unity of essence” (“Ἐν γὰρ βούλημα εἶναι Πατρὸς τε καὶ Υἱοῦ καὶ Πνεύματος ἁγίου, ἢ τῆς φύσεως κοινωνία διαμαρτύρεται. Ὡστε εἰ ἐκεῖνο βούλεται τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ὃ δοκεῖ τῷ Υἱῷ, ἢ κοινωνία τοῦ θελήματος σαφῶς παρίστησι τὴν τῆς οὐσίας ἐνότητά.”).

⁸⁹³ *Abl.* (NPNF² 5:335 [PG 45: 129AB]): “ἄχρόνως καὶ ἀδιαστάτως.”

⁸⁹⁴ The constraints on this study do not allow us to tackle the question of the spiration of the Spirit in Gregory. We will simply take as a given Gregory’s obvious acceptance of the Holy Spirit’s consubstantiality with the Father and Son.

express the meeting, inside the transcendence of the divine nature, of what to human finitude seemed to be irreconcilable opposites. Outside the Trinity, he saw all outwardly directed divine action as one, and operating in the formula, again derived from revelation, “from the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit.” In this way, he offered an answer to the question that had plagued Arius of how to reconcile the plurality of divine persons in the Godhead, as revelation had made them known, with the philosophical need to preserve monotheism. More specific to our questions surrounding will, Gregory brought closure to what had been the vexing question of the Father’s precedent will in the begetting of the Son. The Father willed the begetting of the Son, without this in any way implying the Son’s ontological inferiority, and he also willed outwardly from himself through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. This divine volitional movement was unidirectional with the question of volitional response to the divine will being limited to creatures. Secondly, he also brought to final fruition the idea, first formulated at Antioch, of the oneness according to *symphonia* of the three hypostases of the Trinity. Oneness here denoted not contingent, and potentially fragile, interpersonal volitive oneness, but absolute oneness of outward volitive movement, which pointed to an ontological oneness that the Council of Antioch lacked the philosophical wherewithal to describe. Gregory, now able to cite the homoousion without this negating the concrete existence of three hypostases in the Trinity, was able to offer a fuller solution. The final question of the potential for volitional disharmony between the divine persons, which had so alarmed the Council of Serdica, was resolved early in the debate. Arius’ early position of a cognitive deficit between the divine persons had met with stiff opposition, even from his allies. In Greek thought, volitive action was a question of understanding. Without a disparity of

such between the divine persons, the question of potential discord in the Trinity quickly became baseless. All evidence suggests that even Arius himself abandoned this line of inquiry very early in the piece. From that point on, all sides held, even though it seems they did not realize it of each other, that the movement of will in the Trinity was unidirectional and outward from the Father. Any sense of response to the divine will, and the potential for discord therewith, was limited to sphere of those rational creatures, humans, who were possessed of limited powers of understanding, who made up for their cognitive lack through their faith in the goodness of God's will and knowledge.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have examined how the problem of will in the understanding of the Holy Trinity became one of the crucial questions at the center of the controversy surrounding the teachings of Arius. In the same way that Gnosticism of old had provoked the reaction of its contemporaries with its strongly volitional theology, which was founded on a system of cognitive disparity between the divine hypostases, so too Arius put forward a similarly volitionist theory of the Trinity, also founded on the belief that the downward gradient in ontological status as one considered the persons of the Trinity necessarily corresponded to a decline in knowledge. This cascade of increasing ignorance fueled the early Arius' notion of the potential for volitional disharmony between the persons in the Trinity. Although, on the one hand, the potential for discord, which, of course, because of the laudable virtue of the Son, was never realized, laid the basis for a vision of the Son as moral exemplar subordinate to and overcoming the same contingencies to which humans were also subject, the sheer horror provoked by the claim

of an even potentially sinful Son of God forced a hasty and radical readjustment on the part of Arius. We have strived to show how this decisive repositioning on the part of the heresiarch was probably the result of pressure from both foe and but also friends who did not share his understanding of gradated cognition in the Trinity. Nevertheless, the sense of contingency that had come to be associated with the faculty of will was to linger on, even after Arius' recantations. Thus in the circles loyal to the Council of Nicaea which disciplined Arius there reigned a leeriness to any mention of will in the Trinity, even in those instances where will had traditionally been considered an acceptable, nay even a necessary, theological element.

In this light, the efforts of the Council of Antioch to come up with an alternative to the homoousion, which had been put forward by Nicaea to describe the oneness of Father and Son—an alternative that instead rested on the absolute oneness of volitive action as phenomenological index of an underlying, indescribable ontological oneness of the three divine persons—were greeted by loyalist Nicene circles as a re-edition of the early Arius' thesis of the Son's volitional and moral contingency. I have argued, based on the writings of Arius himself, but also of Eusebius of Caesarea, who in many ways represented the soul of Antiochene Council, that such a reading of Council's intentions was simply impossible. I believe my reading is supported by the Macrostich Creed, which sought to explain Antioch by describing this oneness according to *symphonia* as a "symphony of dominion." It was not until after the peace of 362, in which Nicenes and moderate anti-Nicenes were able to be reconciled, that a new impetus was given to vindicate and give theological substance to the position that Antioch had promulgated but briefly and without the theological means that were to be afforded to the new generations

of expositors by an homoousion now exorcised of the woes that many anti-Nicenes had seen in it.

In like wise, the question of the Father's precedent will in the begetting of the Son, so long a staple in Christian theology, had become verboten because, again, of the sense of conditionality with which Arius had fortified it. If the Father had willed to beget the Son, he could just as well have willed it not. Even the great Athanasius displayed a suspicion of the opinion of the Father's will in the begetting of the Son, and it fell again to that new generation of theologians, which also was to form the backbone of the second great Council in 381 that signaled the closure to the Arian controversy, to navigate through the Scylla of necessity and Charybdis of contingency in positing the role of the Father's precedent will in the Son's begetting. Their solution was really the only way out left to such a pointed dilemma: appeal to the divine transcendence. One of the early advocates of such a transcendentalist understanding of the Father's willing begetting had of course been the anti-Nicene Council of Sirmium, which denounced those who took the Father's willing generation of the Son in human terms.⁸⁹⁵ We cannot overlook the fact, also, that the strategy of appealing to the non-analogy of human and divine norms was also to be found as early as the penitent Arius, who sought to explain that his controversial statements could not be taken in a creaturely way.⁸⁹⁶ Thus, we saw the Gregories make a clear distinction between what can be known about God and what not. Human communion with God was limited to the divine operations, which were the absolutely unitary outward movement of the Godhead. This was the basis of Christian monotheism, not the personal monotheism argued for by the early Arius. On the other

⁸⁹⁵ Apud Athanasius, *Syn.* 27 (*NPNF*² 4:465).

⁸⁹⁶ "...Perfect creature of God, but not as one of the creatures; offspring, but not as one of things begotten." Apud Athanasius' *Syn.* 16 (*NPNF*² 4:458).

hand, the inner life of the Trinity remained ever beyond the cognitive abilities of creatures. The most one could do was to hedge the transcendent inner life of the Trinity about with statements of what could not be the case, even if those statements appeared, on the superficial level of human cognition, to be in conflict with one another. This solution sought at once to find a balance between communion with the divine and preserving the sense of divine otherness that simply must accompany a doctrine of triune oneness. In this general framework, a place was also found for the questions surrounding the divine will that Arius had first raised.

CONCLUSION

We opened this treatise with the furor that was provoked over what we might call a social understanding of the Trinity. Scriptural evidences such as the Johannine, “that they be one even as we are one,” became the basis of a fear in the minds of some of an analogy between harmonious human interactions and the relations between the divine hypostases in the Holy Trinity. Here, human oneness was understood as coming about only through the contingent meeting of minds and alignment of wills, and the same was argued as applying in the divine sphere. Although this view was promptly rejected by most quarters of the fourth century Church, our further investigation has suggested that it was not a widespread one to start with. Rather it can be traced with certainty only to the early Arius, parts of Asterius, and, if we are to believe their accusers at Sardica, possibly certain others such as Valens and Ursacius.

The view that Arius articulated took its inspiration from another tenet that had had a long history in Christian theology, namely the idea of the Father’s precedent will in the generation of the Son. The importance of this doctrine lay in its acting as a check on notions of cosmic or rational necessity impinging on the absolute sovereignty of God. In the case of Arius, however, it was taken as a statement on the conditionality of the Son’s existence, and thus on his kinship with the creatures. Presented as a product of the Father’s will, he was understood as relating back to the Father only through volitional means, namely through voluntary submission and obedience. The voluntary and contingent nature of this relation was reinforced by the Son’s status as creature, and the concomitant belief that he was also on an inferior level to the Father regarding knowledge

and understanding. The Son's deficit in understanding was made up for through his faithful obedience. In this way, he became the representative of creation who won salvation for his fellow creatures by passing the very test that they could not.

Despite the superficial kerygmatic attractions of a Christ primarily as soteriological hero, who overturned the ancestral rebellion through an obedience that theoretically could well have lapsed, the reality was that this understanding of the Son did not have much antecedent in the theological tradition, at least in how it had come to be circumscribed in the writers that we have examined. On the contrary, the notion of the Father's antecedent will in generating the Son was, as we said, a guard against embarrassing the omnipotence of the Father. More importantly, however, was the fact that it served, not as an index of the Son's creaturely status—on the contrary—but as a key component in a psychological paradigm that aimed to demonstrate the closeness of the Son to the Father and his status as Logos generated by will from the Father as a word from mind. Some of the authors went as far as to describe the Son as coming forth from the substance of the Father. In this regard, the fact that the Father willed the Son into being was not seen as undermining the divinity of the Son, but as demonstrating that he came forth from within the Father. This was a special act of will, analogous to the uniqueness of the begetting and its unlikeness to anything similar in creation.

This stress on the Son as Logos of the Father precluded any notion of ignorance in the Son that could have acted as the basis of a theory of merely moral union. Sin was, to the Greek mind, the result of ignorance. Where there was no ignorance there could be no sin. The omniscience of the Son meant absolute identity of will with the Father. We note

that in Arius, much was made of the relative ignorance of the Son; only thus could his system of obedience work. This was absent in the earlier authors we examined.

The earliest writers such as Justin and Tertullian laid emphasis on Christ not as potentially disobedient but as the perfect expression of the Father, and thus enlightener and bearer of the saving knowledge that the fallen and, thanks to the demons, beguiled and misinformed world was called to heed. Thus having overcome ignorance, they freely obeyed God and aligned their own wills with his, presumably complementing their ontological disparity in understanding through their faith. The theodicean concerns of both writers were clear. This was an age where the dual sense of justice and human accountability were held in high regard, and the freedom of will was the means of establishing it. Thus their theological schemes of both Justin and Tertullian could be described as grand movements of will, from the Father and in the Son, outwardly from the Godhead—in Tertullian expressed in terms of a monarchy based on identity of substance and will—and back toward the divine source with those enlightened ones who were voluntarily obedient in tow. Of note is that in both these theologians the model of obedience was the Virgin Mary whose submission to God was anti-paradigmatic of the rebellion in Eden.

Being the later writer, Tertullian also had the occasion to focus on the Valentinian Gnostics and to denounce their understanding of *probole* as placing the derivative hypostases in the Pleroma at too great a cognitive distance from their heavenly source. Indeed, the Gnostic understanding stood diametrically opposed to the Christian one. Here, apart from its infamous explosion of agents in the divine sphere, life therein was characterized by cognitive stratification among the divine hypostases which led to

volitional disharmony and discord, the by-product of which was the creation of the material universe. Importantly, this strong emphasis on volitional disharmony and the chaos in the divine estate born therefrom produced among the Gnostic contemporaries an opposing de-emphasis of the matter of will in the divine life. Plotinus abandoned an earlier reliance on the notion of *tolma* as the explanatory device of the cascade from primordial oneness and put forward instead a sense of rational necessity in which any willing was seen as a matter of irrationality. On the other hand, Irenaeus, the great polemicist against the Gnostics, advanced a vision of the Trinity that left no room at all for a sense of will in the divine life. The three hypostases of the Godhead were presented as organic parts—the Son and Holy Spirit as the *hands* of the Father—of an always existent Trinity of persons. In this respect, Irenaeus stood in contrast with Tertullian, who, instead of avoiding the question of will, analyzed it in depth. Thus, the Gnostics, Irenaeus, and Tertullian mirrored the fourth century disputes: the Gnostics, with their theory of the limited knowledge in the Pleroma, loosely prefigured Arius, with his own theory of ignorance and potential lapse in the Son; Irenaeus, with his unwillingness to delve too deeply into the generation and the accompanying de-emphasis of the will would resemble some of the Nicene party who looked with leeriness at all mention of the will; Tertullian, moved by his desire to preserve the sense of plurality in the Godhead, would herald the impulse to preserve a sense of will in the Trinitarian relations within orthodox limits.

In Origen we saw a strong statement on the will but not in a way that affected the internal life of the Trinity. There, he would follow the psychological paradigm mapped out by Irenaeus and Tertullian to explain the origin of the Son. In like wise, the Son

would become the externalized expression of the Father's wisdom and will. The Father's precedent will in begetting the Son, as an act of mind, again was not a sign of the Son's inferiority, but his affinity, to the Father. The Son was of the same substance as the Father, a fact declared by their sameness of action, and although there was in Origen a strong sense of hierarchy in the Trinity, the fact that the Son willed and acted identically with the Father put him ontologically on the side of divinity, which was non-material, not the creatures, which to varying degrees material. For Origen mapped this understanding of the Godhead onto a bifurcated theory of reality. Here, the material nature of the created dominion, which was characterized by a tendency to compulsion and ignorance, was set against the freedom of the purely spiritual and non-material divine realm. Nevertheless, humans, endowed with free will, were called to overcome the stringencies of their surroundings. In fact, the entire motion of the cosmos was a retributive—a modern might even dare to describe it as *karmic*—interplay of free will, choice, and consequence. It was in this network of pre-incarnate souls, whose actions determined consequences and in the almost ubiquitous cases of disobedience led to various degrees of downward motion and materialization, that Origen placed the human mind of Christ. Through its meritorious, super-rational obedience, it was united with the Logos and then with it, put into the flesh to enlighten the world and win its free assent to obey. Again, in line with Greek norms, will was a function of knowledge.

This background informed the disputes surrounding Arius. His earliest efforts, marked by a theological crudity that even his political allies balked at, took the fact of the Father's precedent will in begetting the Son as a sign of the ontological inferiority of the latter, and placed the Son on a gradated scale of cognizance so that even he was subject to

ignorance and therefore disobedience. Yet, even Arius was to distance himself from this position. The statements on will and *symphony* in the Trinity that emanated from within the moderate anti-Nicene camp, specifically the formulae of the Council of Antioch (341), must be read in this light and not as a restatement of Arius' early position. Rather, I argued that symphony could not have been a theory of contingent harmony, but an empirical observation of absolute and inimitable oneness of action and will in the three divine hypostases. In light of past correlations between essence and action, I presented this as an attempt by the Council at describing an *homoousion* without it actually using the problematic term. If this is in fact so, then when we look behind the disagreements over language, the fourth century conflicts do not appear quite so stark. By the time of the Second Council, however, the de-stigmatization of the notion of co-essentiality was complete, and the notion of oneness of action, will, and essence/substance became part of the standard theological vocabulary. In this context, too, the notion of the Father's antecedent will in begetting the Son too was stripped of any ontologically subordinationist significance that some had attributed to it. In the same way as with the process of the begetting itself, the Father's willing to beget the Son did not imply his ontological inferiority. They had reached the limits of theological speculation, beyond which could only be silence.

Whither, then, the Johannine passage, "That they be one even as we are one"? By the Church at large, it certainly was not taken to prescribe a strict analogy between the oneness of the persons in the Trinity and the concord between humans. This was ontologically impossible, because humans are not *homoousioi*—neither among

themselves nor, most certainly, with the Godhead.⁸⁹⁷ Neither can we look at it, anachronistically as far as conciliar history goes, as a statement on the exemplariness for humans of the perfect alignment of divine and human wills in the incarnate Son simply because humans are not hypostatically united with one another. Rather, we must step away from the mindset of a strict analogy and look at the passage with poetic eyes. We must guard ourselves from the temptation of analogizing too strictly from the doctrine of personhood in the divine Trinity.

⁸⁹⁷ The trepidation that the Johannine “I in the Father, and the Father in me” (14:11) inspired in Hilary (*Trin.* 3.1 [*NPNF*² 9:62]) against too firm an analogy between human affairs and the inner life of the Trinity deserve mention here: “This is a problem which the wit of man will never solve, nor will human research ever find an analogy for this condition of Divine existence. But what man cannot understand, God can be” (“Haec quidem sensus hominum non consequetur, nec exemplum aliquod rebus divinis comparatio humana praestabit: sed quod inintelligibile est homini, Deo esse possibile est” [PL 10:76AB]).

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