

# Trinitas

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A Theological Encyclopedia of the Holy Trinity

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## T

**TERTULLIAN** (d. after 200)

The great African fashioned the Latin language of the Trinity, and many of his words and phrases remained permanently in use: the words *Trinitas* and *persona*, the formulas "one substance in three persons," "God from God, Light from Light."<sup>1</sup> He uses the word *substantia* 400 times, as he uses *consubstantialis* and *consubstantivus*, but hasty conclusions cannot be drawn from usage, for he does not apply the words to Trinitarian theology. He had a Stoic background, not the decided forensic ideas Harnack thought.

In the *Apologeticum*, written before T. joined the Montanists, he gives an idea of his position on the relationship of Father and Son: "We say that God has brought forth this spirit and in bringing him forth he begot him, and that, for this reason, he is called the Son of God and God, because of the unity of the substance; for God also is spirit . . . . Thus what came forth from God is God, the Son of God and the two are but one."<sup>2</sup>

It was, however, in the *Adversus Praxean* that T. came to grips with the problems of Trinitarian theology. In his thinking the "economy" has a very important place: "We believe in one only God, yet subject to this dispensation, which is our word for economy, that the one only God has also a Son, his Word, who has issued (*processerit*) out of himself, through whom all things were made and without whom nothing was made (cf. Jn 1:3). He

was sent from the Father into the virgin and born of her, man and God, son of man and Son of God, and named Jesus Christ . . . as if thus also the one could not be all, since all are from the one, namely, through the unity of substance; while at the same time the mystery of the divine economy should be safeguarded, which of the unity makes a trinity, placing the three in order not of quality but of sequence, different not in substance but in aspect, not in power but in manifestation; all of one substance, however, of one quality and of one power, because the phases, the aspects, the manifestations, are all of the one God, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."<sup>3</sup>

Was T. a binitarian in theology before he joined the Montanists? In *De Praescriptione*, 36, and in *De Virginibus Velandis*, 1, formulae are used which on first reading seem to allow this interpretation. His best commentator exonerates him.<sup>4</sup> He clarifies things also in regard to the meaning of *persona*, not with T. a fully elaborated concept, as in later thinking. T. has been accused of tritheism (*qv*) by Harnack,<sup>5</sup> whereas J. Tixeront, a historian of dogma, thought that he was already expounding the consubstantial (*qv*)<sup>6</sup>.

There is little doubt about the meaning of these assertions: "Two we specify the Father and the Son, and then three with the Holy Spirit, from the principle of the economy which gives the number"<sup>7</sup> "And the Father is God, the Son is God

and the Holy Spirit is God, and each is God."<sup>8</sup> "The second person is his Word (*sermo*) and the third the Spirit in the Word."<sup>9</sup> T. used *per Filium* in regard to the procession of the Spirit (see FILIOQUE).

T. uses imagery to express his ideas: "For God brought forth the Word, as the Paraclete also teaches, as the root brings forth the shoot, as the spring brings forth the stream, as the sun brings the beam. And these manifestations are emissions of those substances from which they proceed. And I would not hesitate to say that the shoot is the son of the root, the stream the son of the spring, the beam the son of the sun; because every source is a parent and everything that is brought forth from a source is its offspring. Much more is true of the Word of God, who received the name of the Son in the proper sense."<sup>10</sup>

It would be unfair to ask from a second century writer the development of ideas which the clash of minds a century and a quarter later would effect. Thus he writes: "Because God is Father and God is judge, nevertheless not that he was always father and judge because he was always God. For he could not be father before there was a son, nor judge before there was a crime. There was a time when there was neither sin to make God a judge nor a son to make God a father."<sup>11</sup>

Not everyone has reacted against this phrasing as strongly as Petavius.<sup>12</sup> Though the phrasing is defective T's idea seems to have been that there was a time when the Word had not been manifested outside God. How does one explain T's use of the word "*portio*" to describe the character of the Son? "This does not properly mean 'part' (*pars*). The Son is not a 'part' of the divine substance, but has a 'share' in it. The Father possesses the *substantiae plenitudo*, the Son is a *portio* and as such has a share in this fullness. The divine substance is essentially one; the Son is, as it were, an effluence of this one substance: *Pater enim tota substantia est, filius vero derivatio totius et portio*."<sup>13</sup> "With regard to him (the *Logos*), we are taught that he is derived (*prolatum*) from God and begotten by derivation (*prolatione*) so that he is the Son of God and called God because of the unity of the substance."<sup>14</sup>

Was T. then a subordinationist? The view has been held from time to time and latterly by a competent scholar.<sup>15</sup> Some of his sentences are less than clear, as when he says of the Father and Son "the one commanding what is to be done the other doing what has been commanded."<sup>16</sup> In such

statements he seems to contradict his own basic thesis. He also used the word *monarchia* without incurring heretical monarchianism. For him the will of God towards salvation is the guarantee of the *monarchia*, the norm of the Son's work, the ground of the existence of the Son and the Spirit.

<sup>1</sup>Works CCL, I-II; CSEL 20, 47, 70, 76 etc.; cf. A. d'Ales, *La théologie de Tertullian*, Paris, 1905, 67-103; M. Kriebel, *Studien zur älteren Entwicklung der abendländischen Trinitätslehre bei Tertullian und Novatian*, Ohlau i. Schl., 1932, 95ff.; J.M. Restrepo-Jaramillo, "Tertullian y la doble fórmula en el símbolo apostólico," *Greg* 15 (1934), 3-58; J.F. Bethune-Baker, *The Meaning of Homoousios in the 'Constantinopolitan' Creed, Texts and Studies*, VII, 1, Cambridge, 1901; G. Aeby, *Les missions divines de saint Justin à Origène*, Fribourg (Switzerland), 1958, 68ff; Th. L. Verhoeven, *Studien over Tertullianus' Adversus Praxean*, Amsterdam, 1948; R. Braun, 'Deus Christianorum', *Recherches sur le vocabulaire doctrinal de Tertullien*, Paris, 1962; G.C. Stead, "Divine Substance in Tertullian," *JTS*, 14 (1963), 46-66; B. Piault, "Tertullian a-t-il été subordinationiste?," *RSPT*, 47 (1963), 181-204; S. Otto, 'Natura' und 'dispositio'. *Untersuchung zum Naturbegriff und zur Denkform Tertullians*, Munich, 1960; K. Wolff, *Das Heilswirken Gottes durch den Sohn nach Tertullian*, Rome, 1960, 35-117; esp. J. Moingt, *Théologie trinitaire de Tertullien*, 3 vols, Paris, 1966; *idem*, "Théologie trinitaire de Tertullien," *RSR* 54 (1960), 337-369; B. de Margerie, S.J., *La Trinité chrétienne*, 121-27; B. Lonergan, S.J., *Nicaea*, 43-47; W.J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God*, Washington, 1982, 34-37; G. Bardy, *DTC*, 15, 1, 147-151; *ibid.*, 2, 1633ff.; Quasten, II, 266-340; Altaner, 148-63; M. Pellegrino, *E.C.*, 11, 2025-33; Kelly, *Doctrines*, 111-115; Fliche-Martin, III, 680-683 (J. Lebreton); A. Qulquarelli in *Semanas de Estudios Trinitarios*, VII, Salamanca, Secretaria Trinitaria, 141-187; <sup>2</sup>*Apol.*, 21; <sup>3</sup>*Adv. Prax.*, 2; <sup>4</sup>J. Moingt, *op.cit.*, I, 81ff; <sup>5</sup>*Dogmengeschichte*, I, 577, n. 2; II, 298, n. 1; <sup>6</sup>*Histoire des Dogmes* I (1915), 401-402; <sup>7</sup>*Adv. Prax.*, 13; <sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*; <sup>9</sup>*Adv. Prax.*, 12; <sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 8; <sup>11</sup>*Adv. Hermonogem*, 3; <sup>12</sup>*Theol. dog. de Trinitate*, I, 5, 2; <sup>13</sup>*Adv. Prax.*, 9; <sup>14</sup>*Apol.*, 21; <sup>15</sup>G. Aeby, *op.cit.*; <sup>16</sup>*Adv. Prax.*, 12.

#### THEOPHANES OF NICAEA (d. 1381)

T.'s work *Sermo in Sanctissimam Deiparam*, first published in 1935 by M. Jugie, A.A. (*qv*), contains one of the most daring syntheses ever composed on Mary, the Blessed Trinity and the created universe.<sup>1</sup> Fr. Jugie thought T. the greatest writer on Mary's universal mediation. It is the section wherein Mary's relations with each of the divine Persons is considered that interests us in the present work. Mary is united with the Father through the Son common to each.<sup>2</sup> Through this union there is one and the same divine grace and energy of the Son and Mother which through her reaches