



**TERTULLIAN
of Carthage(190-225),
Theology of**

Tertullian's Theological View: Semi-Arian

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Tertullian of Carthage – 190-225 AD

The historical evidence proves that the founders of Arianism and Trinitarianism were influenced by pagan Greek philosophy. While Justin, Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen were clearly influenced by Greek philosophy, the historical evidence proves that Tertullian was also influenced by elements of Greek Philosophy.

Tertullian wrote (in *De Testim Animae* 1.) “Some of our number, who are versed in ancient literature, have composed books by means of which it may be clearly seen that we have embraced nothing new or monstrous, nothing in which we have not the support of common and public literature.” Cited in *“The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity”*, Page 126 - By Church Historian Edwin Hatch

Edwin Hatch then wrote that Tertullian believed that he was teaching the same thing as the Greek Philosophers.

“Elsewhere, the same writer (Tertullian) founds and argument for the toleration of Christianity on the fact that its opponents maintained it to be a kind of philosophy, teaching the very same doctrines as the philosophers ...” Cited from *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity*, Page 126, Edwin Hatch - Apol. 46

On Page 134 of the same book, Church Historian Edwin Hatch wrote,

“Tertullian, though he asks, ‘What resemblance is there between a philosopher and a Christian, between a disciple of Greece and a disciple of heaven?’” Nevertheless “expresses Christian truths in philosophical terms ...” Footnote 1, Apol. 46

Tertullian wrote in his *Treatise on the Soul*, Chapter 2,

“Heraclitus (a Greek Philosopher) was quite right, when, observing the thick darkness which obscured the researches of the inquirers about the soul, and wearied with their interminable questions, he declared that he had certainly not explored the limits of the soul, although he had traversed every road in her domains.”

The historical evidence proves that Tertullian was the first Christian writer to use the word “trinity” with the words, “three persons.” The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge plainly documents the historical influence that Greek Philosophy had on the development of the Trinity:

“The doctrine of the Logos and the Trinity received their shape from Greek Fathers, who ... were much influenced, directly or indirectly, by the Platonic philosophy ... that errors and corruptions crept into the Church from this source cannot be denied.”

The book entitled, The Church of the First Three Centuries says,

“The doctrine of the Trinity was of gradual and comparatively late formation ... it had its origin in a source entirely foreign from that of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures; ... it grew up, and was engrafted on Christianity, through the hands of the Platonizing Fathers.”

Church Historian Jaroslav Pelikan wrote that “Neo-platonic elements were unmistakably present” in the Trinitarian definition of One God in ‘three persons.’”

“The doctrine of the Trinity ... must be interpreted in a manner that would be consistent with this a priori definition of the deity of God (One essence, three persons). Neoplatonic elements were unmistakably present in this definition ...” Pelikan, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition, Vol. 1.

The writings of Tertullian himself prove that he believed that the Son was created by the Father before the world was created and that the Son was always subordinate to the Father even before his birth in Bethlehem. Therefore the chief founding father of Trinitarian theology was really an Arian who wrote in Against Hermogenes chapter 3,

“God is in like manner a 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 ...” Against Hermogones Chapter 3

Tertullian clearly taught that God was not always a Father to the Son but became a Father when the Son was begotten.

In Against Praxeus chapter 7, Tertullian wrote that the Word of God the Father assumed a form and voice when God said, “Let there be light in Genesis 1:3.

“Then, therefore, does THE WORD also Himself ASSUME HIS OWN FORM AND GLORIOUS GARB, HIS OWN SOUND AND VOCAL UTTERANCE, WHEN GOD

SAID, LET THERE BE LIGHT (Genesis 1:3) This is the perfect NATIVITY OF THE WORD, when He proceeds forth from God— FORMED BY HIM FIRST to devise and think out all things under the name of Wisdom ... or by proceeding from Himself HE BECAME HIS FIRST BEGOTTEN SON, because begotten before all things; Colossians 1:15 and His only-begotten also, because alone begotten of God, in a way peculiar to Himself, FROM THE WOMB OF HIS OWN HEART [THE FATHER’S].”

Tertullian clearly stated that the Son was BEGOTTEN “from the womb of the Father’s heart” when God said, “Let there be light in” in Genesis 1:3. “THIS IS THE PERFECT NATIVITY OF THE WORD.”

The definition of “Nativity” is “the occasion of a person’s birth” as “the place of my nativity.”

In Patrology Vol. 2, Trinitarian Church Historian Johannes Quasten wrote that Tertullian believed that “THE SON IS NOT ETERNAL” and that Tertullian believed in the “SUBORDINATIONISM” of the Son to the Father.

“...Tertullian could not shake off entirely the influence of SUBORDINATIONISM. The old distinction between the Logos endiathetos and the Logos prophorikos, the Word internal or immanent in God and the Word emitted or uttered by God...made him regard the divine generation as taking place gradually. Although Wisdom and Word are identical names for the second person in the Trinity, Tertullian distinguishes between a prior birth as Wisdom before the creation, and a nativitas perfecta at the moment of creation, when the Logos was sent forth and Wisdom became the Word: ‘Hence it was then that the Word itself received its manifestation and its completion, namely SOUND AND VOICE, when God said: Let there be light. This is the perfect birth of the Word, when it proceeds from God. IT WAS FIRST PRODUCED BY HIM ... The Lord established me as the beginning of his ways (Prov. 8, 22). Then he is generated for action: When he made the heavens, I was near Him (Prov. 8, 27). Consequently, making the one of whom He is the Son to be His Father by his procession, He became the first-born, as generated before all, as only Son, as solely generated by God’ (Adv. Prax. 7). Thus THE SON AS SUCH IS NOT ETERNAL (Hermog. 3 EP 321) ...The Father is the whole substance ... while the Son is only an outflow and a portion of the whole, as He Himself professes, Because my Father is greater than I (John 14, 28). The analogies by which Tertullian tries to explain the Godhead also indicate his subordinationist tendencies, especially when he states that the Son goes out from the Father as the beam from the sun...(Adv. Prax. 8 ANF).” Patrology, vol. II: The Ante-Nicene Literature After Irenaeus; Westminster: Christian Classics, 1990, Pg. 326-327).

Tertullian wrote that the Modalistic Monarchians were “ALWAYS THE MAJORITY OF THE FAITHFUL” in the West and Origen admitted that the Modalistic Monarchians were “THE GENERAL RUN OF CHRISTIANS” in the East. Origen’s Commentary of the Gospel of John, book 1, Chapter 23

Tertullian wrote a book entitled “Against Praxeus” containing his polemic against the most influential leader of the Modalistic Monarchians within the late second century and early years of the third century. In “Against Praxeus” chapter 3

Tertullian wrote,

“For all THE SIMPLE PEOPLE, that I say not the thoughtless and ignorant, WHO ARE ALWAYS THE MAJORITY OF THE FAITHFUL ... ARE STARTLED AT THE DISPENSATION OF THREE IN ONE ... THEY CLAIM THAT THE PLURALITY AND ORDINANCE OF TRINITY IS A DIVISION OF UNITY ...” *Tertullian, Against Praxeus, Chapter 3 was written somewhere between 195-225 AD.*

Tertullian clearly stated, “THEY WHO ARE ALWAYS THE MAJORITY OF THE FAITHFUL (Christians) rejected “THE PLURALITY AND ORDINANCE OF TRINITY.”

The famed Eastern Orthodox Historian, Jaroslav Pelikan, admitted that Tertullian’s statement in Against Praxeus (chapter 3) proves that,

“... the Modalistic Monarchians” were **“the simple people ... who are always the majority of the faithful.”** *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition, Vol. 1, Pg. 177*

TERTULLIAN HIMSELF PROVED FOUR HISTORICAL FACTS

Fact 1. Tertullian was the first Christian writer on record to use the word “Trinity” with “three persons.”

Fact 2. Tertullian believed that the Son was created as a subordinate lesser god person in heaven before his birth in Bethlehem which is akin to Arianism.

Fact 3. Tertullian admitted that the Oneness Modalists were “always the majority of the faithful” Christian believers in his lifetime and that this Christian majority believed that Jesus had eternally existed as the Father before becoming a man.

Fact 4. No early Christians that lived during the lifetime of Tertullian (190-225) believed that Jesus pre-existed as the timeless Eternal God except the Modalistic Monarchians.



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