

## **Adoring the Holy Trinity by a pictorial language:**

### **The ways and manners in which the Christians of the early centuries expressed their faith in the Triune God - Part 1**

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#### **Abstract**

*The article presents a survey over the early (2nd to 6th century) representations of the Holy Trinity in pictorial form in relation to its debate in sermon and theological writing.*

#### **Keywords:**

Christian theology, trinity, history of dogma, sacred art

#### **Zusammenfassung**

*Der Artikel gibt einen Überblick über die Geschichte der Trinität in bildlicher Form im Vergleich mit seiner Diskussion in Predigt und theologischem Schrifttum während der frühen christlichen Jahrhunderte (2.-6 Jahrhundert.).*

#### **Schlüsselwörter:**

Christliche Theologie, Trinität, Dogmengeschichte, sakrale Kunst

#### **Preamble**

It is very interesting to observe that although the belief in the Trinitarian Godhead constitutes the fundamental basis of the Christian faith, there is yet, only one sole passage where the bible explicitly speaks of God as Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, it is interesting to observe in this context that for the particular case of the Holy Spirit, even if strong insinuations are made in that sense, the biblical scriptures avoid to refer to this as divine openly. This reluctance seems to have had been principally due to the fact that first the evangelists and the apostles and later the great Christian authors and apologists of the apostolic and patristic period felt that hereby they might risk making open assumptions about the substance of God's deity, something that according to the norms of the Old Testament<sup>2</sup> equalled the greatest blasphemy. For this reason, in absence of any adequate theological vocabulary (indeed such a terminology in reference to the Holy Spirit in its feature as the third divine person of the Trinity will only begin to evolve after the 360's) the Christian believers preferred to express their faith into the Trinitarian Godhead mainly through various paradigmatic images and analogies. It is also interesting to observe in this context that although during the period we are studying here (2<sup>nd</sup> to the early 6<sup>th</sup> century) we find a real thriving of the most various Trinitarian typologies in the Christian predication, there is, however, a quasi general absence of any religious icon that depicted the Holy Trinity as such. A paradox, that was mainly due to the fact that especially Latin Christian art did not know of any visible symbol by which the person of the Father could be validly characterised; and to the fact that many Christians continued until the 6<sup>th</sup> and even 7<sup>th</sup> century having doubts if Jesus on the cross represented really the second person of the Trinity, even if the bible affirmed Him to be the Son of God<sup>3</sup> and the first ecumenical council of Nicaea had officially affirmed the divine consubstantiality between Father and Son. (Therefore, except the representation of Augustine's Trinitarian/ontological model by Michelangelo in the far 16<sup>th</sup> century, this paper is not going into any other artistic depiction of the Trinity). In conclusion, I want to indicate that the early formulations have to be interpreted as to express the particular relation between Son and Holy Spirit (Filioque/ Prototilioquist), as about this subject eastern and western Trinitarian perceptions will principally separate after the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>1</sup> "Go therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19).

<sup>2</sup> Exod. 3:14-15; Deut. 6:4-5.

<sup>3</sup> "The centurion, together with the other guarding Jesus, had seen the earthquake and all that was taking place and they were terrified and said: In truth, this man was the son of God" (Matt. 27:54).

## 1. Trinitarian images and analogies of the Pre-Nicean period

### 1.1 *The first Trinitarian typological expressions and paradigms (2<sup>nd</sup> -3<sup>rd</sup> century)*

From its very beginning, what distinguished the Christian community was its faith and adoration of the one God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The ground for this perception laid in the fact that although God in his essence is unknown and unreachable for us, He, however, choose to reveal Himself to the world through his Son Jesus Christ who is God's image<sup>4</sup>. In the eyes of Christians, God's immanence, though continuing to be an uncompressible mystery, did not remain anymore a foreign reality to them. This deep consciousness of the Trinity, which the early church experienced, got primarily expressed in its baptismal and rituals, all of whom, based on Matthew 28:19, explicitly welcomed and incorporated the neophytes in the ecclesial body in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

While in the liturgical context there seems to have had been no serious problem, for the early church remained the defy how to express its faith in the Trinitarian God in an adequate way in its teachings. Because contrary to the other religions, Christianity did not possess its own theological vocabulary during the first centuries of its existence, and hesitated to borrow for this matter the terminology of other religious or philosophical movements of that period.

Searching for an at least provisory settlement at a primary stage, the early Christians seem to have found a first response in some texts of the Old as of the New Testament<sup>6</sup>. Notably the book of Wisdom<sup>7</sup> suggested reflecting God's immense creative and merciful action by the application of a pictorial language in the form of analogies. Indeed, in the context of the interpretation of that biblical proposal we discover first traces of "Proto-Trinitarian" reasoning in the analogical and allegorical manners of verbalisation<sup>8</sup> of the Christian theology in the

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<sup>4</sup> "No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (John 1:18); "He is the image of the unseen God, the first-born of all creation... all things were created through him and for him" (Col. 1:15; 16b).

<sup>5</sup> A. Stenzel, *Il battesimo. Genesi ed evoluzione della liturgia battesimale*, ed. Paoline, Torino, 1962 p. 72-73.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Kardinal Kasper, *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, ed. Grünewald, Mainz, 1995 p. 124-134.

<sup>7</sup> "... since through the grandeur and the beauty of the creatures we may by analogy, contemplate their author" (Wisdom 13:5).

<sup>8</sup> The main difference between analogy and allegory lays in the fact that the first one appeals more to reason and logic, whereas the second more to that of creativity and linguistic metaphors. Allegories were mainly used in the predication of the Alexandrian catechetical school and found their culmination in the Origenist theology of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AC (M. Peinodor, *El alegorismo de la escuela alejan-*

middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. By this, we usually understand figurative modes of representation conveying often a meaning other than that of their literal significance, by the means of signs, symbolic actions, and other forms of mental depicting. Despite that both most famous types of this ancient pictorial reasoning, notably the Alexandrian and Antiochian forms were only of a relatively short endurance<sup>9</sup>, they definitively influenced yet, the deepening of a Trinitarian conscience and the shaping of a primary Trinitarian vocabulary. Like that, to ***elucidate better the immutability and perfection of the Holy Trinity in view of its Inter-Trinitarian functioning***<sup>10</sup>, they induced patterns, which inspired themselves on impersonal models like the water or the sun or on paradigms of everyday life.

Nevertheless, because of the pictorial language's dissimilar ways of portraying, it got impossible, although it concerned always the same reasoning, to produce and to develop a uniform theological mentality for the whole Christian community. We also have to remember that during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, most Christians lived under persecution, a fact that rendered almost impossible the frequent communication and information exchange between the local churches. Therefore, we observe instead, already, for that early stage of Christian theology, the formation of numerous and diverse modes of contemplating the

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drina, in, *virtud y letras*, 1951 p. 1317-1319). In contrast, analogies were mainly used by the theological school of Antioch and found their main exponent in the person of St. Eustathius of Antioch in the 4<sup>th</sup> century (M. Spanneut, *Os padres da igreja: séculos IV-VIII*, São Paulo, ed. Loyola, 2002 p. 34-35).

<sup>9</sup> The Alexandrian allegoric and the Antiochian analogical ways of expression, while historically very famous, however, survived only within the ecclesiastical literature up to the 6th century, when they got suspected to imply a number of heretical elements (Origenism) that were not compatible with the Christian predication. Consequently, the theological currents, in particular in the West, that desired to continue to use a pictorial language had to look for new, doctrinally more sound, figurative forms and norms. In this context the early & high medieval scholastic exegesis started to analyse instead a religious text according: a) its literary sense, b) its allegoric sense (which however had nothing to do with the Alexandrian form of allegory but meant more to consider things from the aspect of faith), c) its tropological sense (in regard to the aspect of love) and from d) its anagogic sense (that is from an eschatological point of view; not to be confused with the rational/analogical way of thinking of the Antiochian school). Nevertheless, as many scholastic researchers and theologians forgot the evolution that had taken place, they often mistakenly tended to apply to the Trinitarian analogies and images from the patristic period, their own interpretive normative arriving thus so frequently to erroneous conclusions (H. Gosebrink, *Hildegard von Bingen begegnen*, Sankt Ulrich Verlag, Augsburg, 2002 p. 7, 87-89; J. Pieper, *Scholastik. Gestalten und Probleme der Mittelalterlichen Philosophie*, Ruhdiger, München, 1986 p. 36-39).

<sup>10</sup> W. Kern, *Der Gottesbeweis Mensch. Ein konstruktiver Versuch*, in, *Atheismus, Marxismus, Christentum: Beiträge zur Diskussion*, [ed. W. Kern], Styria, Innsbruck, 1976 p. 152-182.

Trinity. Likewise, the faithful got so accustomed to articulate the same thought through different notions and formulations (sometimes even in apparent opposite terms). It was through this process that proto-filioquist and proto-antifilioquist conceptualisations came to make equally part of the Christian theology.

### 1.2 *The impersonal Trinitarian models of Athenagoras of Athens and Theophilus of Antioch*

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and in some occasions even nearly up to the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the Christian predication, in the context of its pictorial language, preferred to speak of the Holy Trinity mainly in the form of impersonal models (taken as well from the material as from the immaterial world)<sup>11</sup>. Most of them were very simple in their conception, and contrary to the later generally diffused idea, dared to speak of the Godhead and especially of the Holy Spirit only in very vague term; actually in much more restrictive than this got ever to be the case in the biblical scriptures. This reluctance particularly regarding the Holy Spirit seems to have been due to the fear of risking otherwise overstating its role, which the first Christian community of the apostolic times faced, and make it appear as another main Trinitarian principle.

One of the first paradigms that we encounter in this sense (perhaps even the earliest) might be that of Athenagoras of Athens (133-190). In it Athenagoras paralleled **the unity of the Godhead with “Dynamis” (the Greek term for strength and potency), whereas he qualified the distinction between Father, Son and Holy Spirit as “Taxis” (order)**<sup>12</sup>. It is also important to notice that he used this analogy explicitly referring to Father, Son and the Holy Spirit as the Threefold God “*Trias*”: actually the first time that a Trinitarian term got to be used in a theological document<sup>13</sup>. Nevertheless, in other parts Athenagoras continued to speak of the Holy Spirit simply as the “*emanation of God*”<sup>14</sup>.

In contrast, Theophilus of Antioch (+185), a Syrian apologist a few years later presented an impersonal Trinitarian analogy. Theophilus, however, is in general

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<sup>11</sup> G. A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and secular Tradition from ancient to modern times*, UWC press, Huston, 1999 p. 142.

<sup>12</sup> Fr. Adorno, *La filosofia antica*, vol. iv, Feltrinelli ed, Milano, 1991 p.129.

<sup>13</sup> *Fathers of the second century: Hermas, Tatian, Theophilus, Athenagoras and Clemens of Alexandria* [introduction/ translation: P. Pratten], *Christian classics/ ethereal Library*, Calvin College/Michigan, 2004 p. 84.

<sup>14</sup> J. B. Petersson, *Athenagoras*, in, *The Catholic encyclopaedia* vol. 2, Robert Appleton & co, New York, 1907 p. 18-21.

more remembered for his Christological paradigm formulated on the basis of John 1: 1-2, developed between the Son as the immanent verb *Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος* (*Logos endiathetos*) and as the verb sent into the world as *Λόγος προφορικός* (*Logos proforikos*)<sup>15</sup>. He addressed the Trinitarian Godhead as “**God, His word and His wisdom**”<sup>16</sup>. In this sense, he was the first one attempting to make a clear distinction between the being of the Father and that of the Son, and between the Son’s being and that of the Holy Spirit *and to treat especially the Son and the Holy Spirit as distinct individualities*. In this way, he referred to the Father in particular as “*God*” (in his quality as being the source of the Trinity) whereas to the Son as being explicitly the “*Word*” and to the Holy Spirit as being specifically the “*Wisdom*” [until then both attributes of Word and Wisdom had been used interchangeably in reference to the sole Son]<sup>17</sup>. Instead, Theophilus marked their essential equality by comparing them respectively in his (impersonal) Trinitarian analogy with each of the first three days of the world’s creation<sup>18</sup>.

### 1.3 Clements’ of Alexandria Trinitarian & Origen’s dualistic pattern of the Godhead

Finally, within the range of the above enlisted impersonal Trinitarian models have to be mentioned the proposals of Clement of Alexandria (150-211) and of Origen (185-254). Both of them were successively directors of the famous Alexandrian catechetical school and contributed at rendering this into perhaps the most significant Christian religious centre of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century<sup>19</sup>.

Clements’ suggested pattern maybe constitutes the first simultaneously Unitarian as Trinitarian<sup>20</sup> perception of the Godhead by a Christian author: “*Oh Wonderful mystery: One is the Father of the universe and one also the Father of the universe; The Holy Spirit again is **one** and everywhere the **same***”<sup>21</sup>. Clement sustained God as an absolute and ineffable unity but at the same time **tran-**

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<sup>15</sup> Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum*, 2, 10.22, in, SC 20 p. 122-124; 154.

<sup>16</sup> Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum*, ii 25.

<sup>17</sup> J.N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian doctrines*, Adam & Charles Black ed., London, 1960 p. 111.

<sup>18</sup> F.R. Prostmeier, *Doxa bei Theophilus von Antiochien*, in, R. Kampling, *In Herlichkeit: Zur Deutung einer theologischen Kategorie*, Schönning Verlag, Paderborn, 2008 p. 125-156.

<sup>19</sup> St. J. Davis, *The early Coptic papacy. The Egyptian church and its leadership in late antiquity*, The American university in Cairo Press, Cairo, 2004 p. 17-20.

<sup>20</sup> Because of his fondness and admiration for the ancient Greek (especially Platonism), Clement over centuries was suspected of being really a Gnostic and thus his perception of God not being Trinitarian but merely triadic. Only in modern times his theology was reevaluated and the orthodoxy of his thought proved (R. Feulner, *Clemens von Alexandrien*, ed. Lang, Frankfurt am Main, 2006 p. 6-13).

<sup>21</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* I, 42 (ed. Brill, Leiden, 1995).

**scending beyond the concept of a monad**<sup>22</sup>. The **Principle** of this unity was underlined by the fact that the Father can only be known through His Word/Son as the Father's **Image**<sup>23</sup>. Furthermore, Clement strongly emphasised the inseparability that existed between the being of the Father and the Son<sup>24</sup>. A fact, which, nevertheless, did not signify, in Clement's eyes, that their figures could not be distinguished. For this purpose, and also in order to anticipate any modalist confusion (indeed because of an often excessive association of the Son with the Platonic concept of the Logos sometimes the impression was given that the Son constituted simply a facet of the Father), he differentiated explicitly between the immanent logos (intelligence) of the Father as such, and the Logos who became personified in the Son and contained his proper body<sup>25</sup>.

As to the Holy Spirit Clement referred to him as "*the light radiating from*<sup>26</sup> *the Word, divided without any real division, illuminates the faithful. (...) He [the Spirit] is the Power of the Word which pervades and attracts men to God*"<sup>27</sup>. We see here how Clement, in order to prove the Trinitarian character of the Holy Spirit, applied consciously the criterion of the "*Possession of the Spirit*"; this, before its Homoiousian distortion in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, was an often employed rule (even for the case of the Holy Spirit itself) for demonstrating the character of the Trinity. Especially in Clement's formulation, it becomes clear how the first Christians employed the divine/Trinitarian qualification of the Son as "*divided without any real division*" for the Spirit as well, and as a guarantee for the Spirit's relation to the father (independent if on the economic or the immanent level), as he "... *pervades and attracts men to God*"<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, Paedagogus I, 71; Stromateis 2,6.1.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, Protreptikos pros Ellinas 98,3; Stromateis 5,16.

<sup>24</sup> "The Father is not without His Son, for a long with being Father He is the Father of the Son" (Ibidem, Stromateis 3:7; 4.162).

<sup>25</sup> A. Méhat, Clemens von Alexandrien, in, Theologische Realenzyklopädie, Vol. 8, De Gruyter, Berlin, 1981 p. 101-113.

<sup>26</sup> An expression that read in the terms of the Neo-Platonists (Alcinous) by whom Clement was influenced, that the procession of the Spirit was something immanent that thus was not submitted to any chronological limitation. If that should be true, it might provide an excellent refutation to the critics that were revolved to Clement in the 9th century accusing him of denying the eternal character of the Son and the Holy Spirit as we are going to see further down (H. Dörrie & M. Baltes, Der Platonismus in der Antike Vol. 5, Fromman/Holyboog Verlag, Stuttgart, 1998 p. 442).

<sup>27</sup> Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis 4.156; 6.138.

<sup>28</sup> M. Rizzi, Il fondamento epistemologico in clemente Alessandrino, in, Origene: Maestro di vita spirituale [Studia patristica Mediolansia no 22], a cura di M. Rizzi & L. F. Pizzolato, ed. Vita e Pensiero, Milano, 2001 p. 91-123.

Under the effect of Clement's reasoning, in the decades that followed that great Alexandrian father's death, the catechetical school of Alexandria in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century came up with a more explicit type of impersonal Trinitarian analogies. These were mostly formulated by Clement's successor Origen<sup>29</sup>. Here we see the Godhead compared with the light<sup>30</sup>, while the Son is presented as emerging from the Father like the brilliance from its lighting source; also with the water, where the Son is considered as the stream coming from its fountain, as which the Father is portrayed. Nevertheless, in the set of impersonal analogies as proposed by Origen above, we observe a sharp differentiation between the highlighting of the divine here, in comparison to those that we saw formulated previously. While in the patterns of Athenagoras, Theophilus and Clement we have a (proto)Trinitarian perception of the Godhead, in Origen, in contrast, we see God mainly presented as a dyad, where frequently the Holy Spirit is missing. Indeed, while generally considered to have been a faithful follower of Clement, Origen, in contrast to his master, did not conceive a triadic but mainly a dualistic perception of the Godhead<sup>31</sup>. In that sense, Origen considered mainly the Father to be truly God; while to the Son was admitted only an inferior (divinized) substantiality. As for the Spirit, Origen attributed to him mainly the role of a prolongation of the Father's activity, and thus considered mentioning him within the context of his interpretation often as superfluous<sup>32</sup>.

Returning to the further development and reception of Clement's initial theological thought, it has to be admitted that after its initial upholding by the early Christian church, it progressively, towards the end of the first millennium, became the object of a strong and sometimes even unjust criticism. These accusations emerged less due to the dualistic use that Origen had made of them than mainly because of Clement's alleged Gnostic tendencies. They were especially

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<sup>29</sup> Origenes, *De principiis* 1-8, in, SC nr. 252 p. 142-165.

<sup>30</sup> Not to be confused with the paradigm of the sun that more than thousand years later was to give St. Gregory Palamas, so as to distinguish between divine essence and divine energies (P. K. Christou, *The herald of grace and light. St. Gregory Palamas archbishop of Thessalonica* [in Greek], ed. H. convent of St. Gregory Palamas, Thessalonica, 1984).

<sup>31</sup> L. Ayres, *Nicea and its Legacy. An approach to fourth century Trinitarian theology*, Oxford university press, New York, 2004 p. 24-25.

<sup>32</sup> Like that in the paradigm of the light, only the Father got explicitly to be compared with the light, which in the eyes of Origen was a clear sign of goodness, influenced by Neo-Platonism and Platonism (metaphor of the Sun), whereas radiation and brilliance, in the sense used by Origen referring to the Son's being, metaphysically was merely regarded as some secondary derivation. For the Spirit, however, it was not mentioned at all (St. Watt, *Introduction: the theory of forms* (Books 5-7), Wordsworth ed., London, 1997 p. xix-xiv).

felt in the East of the Photian era regarding Clement's Trinitarian doctrine<sup>33</sup>. Although not attacking his pneumatological positions as well, they ignored completely the significant testimony that Clement's proposals bearded in favour of the criterion of the *"Possession of the Spirit"*, which implicitly was another reason for the East's rejection of the Filioque.

These criticisms arose on the one hand as Clement's differentiation between the Son/Logos and the immanent logos of the Father were taken as an insinuation that the Son therefore could not be eternal. This suspicion was even more reinforced on the other hand, because compared to the sophisticated style of Byzantine theology, Clement's simplistically formulated analysis of Col. 1:15: *"He is the image of the unseen God the first-born of all creation"* gave the impression of the Son as being only the first-born power of creation. As a result, St. Photios I of Constantinople (810-893) declared that Clement's reasoning allegedly *"degraded the Son so to the rank of a creature"*, while according to Photios *"though apparently separated from the world, as its principle of creation, He is yet essentially in it as its guiding principle"*<sup>34</sup>. Subsequently, the Holy Spirit, who through Clement's (proto)Filioquist expression was already implied as belonging allegedly to the creational order, was *put under the will of the human Jesus* (though St. Photios, as he wanted to give the impression of Filioquism being an exclusively western matter, never stated this last accusation formally or addressed directly to the theology of Clement)<sup>35</sup>.

#### 1.4 Reasons for the progressive abandoning of the impersonal Trinitarian models

Most of the (impersonal) Trinitarian analogies, favoured as an instrument of theological expression during the 2<sup>nd</sup>, the 3<sup>rd</sup> and most of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, began progressively to fall into disuse after the Council of Nicaea of 325 and definitively after the Constantinopolitan synod of 381 (2<sup>nd</sup> ecumenical council). This on the one hand was, as already indicated in the last chapter, because the majority of them were products of a pictorial language that only served as a surrogate, provisionally, until more sophisticated and adequate concepts were elaborated. So when that terminology was developed, most of the precedent (impersonal) Trinitarian patterns and images were judged superfluous. On the other hand, the

<sup>33</sup> R. Feulner, Op. cit, p. 45-51.

<sup>34</sup> St. Photios, Myriovivlos 108,89a, in, Chr. Krikonis, selection of patristic texts [in Greek], ed. university studio press, Thessaloniki, vol. II 1998 p. 249-293.

<sup>35</sup> V. Tatakis, Byzantine philosophy [in Greek], Society of Modern Greek studies & General education, Athens, 1977 p. 28.

evolution of a more concrete terminology brought also into light the theological deficits that a number of those analogies (besides of the above enlisted dualistic errors of Origen) insinuated, but until then had passed more or less unobserved. So most of the impersonal Trinitarian analogies mentioning the Holy Spirit in an explicit manner tended to treat It, though always addressing It as sacred and supernatural, mainly as a mere divine element without taking into consideration any of Its attributes that revealed Its Trinitarian character (except the model of St. Clement of Alexandria, which, however, as we saw above, presented its own set of difficulties).

For these reasons, the later patristic theology became suspicious of the Filioque-friendly expressions that had appeared in that context (such as Origen's or Tertullian's distinctive conceptions of the *Per Filium*), as it was not anymore sure to what exactly they had initially referred or stood for. Furthermore, it has to be noticed that the introduction of a pictorial language, even when used only as a tool for the better comprehension of the Christian truth, met with the increasing hostility by a number of faithful. Indeed many people feared that by paradigms taken from creation, Christianity could easily be lead to back idolatry and that an analogical or allegoric kerugmatik language was most probable to propel ideas such as they were encountered in paganism but were incompatible with the Christian ideal. In particular, they were anxious that such a pictorial language if interpreted literally, risked eliminating the mystery around God rendering him into a worldly and rationally comprehensible event<sup>36</sup>.

Finally, some theologians, among whom a few of the most pre-eminent figures of early Christendom, as St. Gregory of Nazianzus (330-390), while not objecting the pictorial analogies and allegories for explicitly theological motives, were against their application out of pastoral concerns. Like that, St. Gregory argued that comparing the Holy Trinity and specifically the Father with the Sun, while the person of the Son only with the sunlight and the Holy Spirit with the sun's radiation, could easily be mistaken as implying an Inter-Trinitarian subordination; rendering so Son and Spirit into simple facets of the Father<sup>37</sup>. As a result, the early church began to be more cautious about the limitations that the analogical approach represented and to stress further the fact that while analogies tell us of how certain things are similar to others in some chief aspects, at the same time, however, they warn us as well that the compared things are very

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<sup>36</sup> H. U. von Balthasar, Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie, Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln, 1951 p. 17-39; K. Hammer, Festschrift für Karl Barth: Analogia relationalis gegen analogia entis, Parrhesia, Zürich, 1966 p. 288-304.

<sup>37</sup> G. Florofski, The eastern fathers of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Büchervertriebsanstalt, München, 1978 p. 194-195.

unlike to each other<sup>38</sup>. In addition, due to the above critic, the theological literacy began to focus more on theological paradigms that highlighted as well the factor of the Trinitarian consubstantiality, as did for example the more personalised models of the Holy Trinity<sup>39</sup>.

### 1.5 *The (Proto)Filioquist idea as implied by the personalised Trinitarian models*

Besides the impersonal Trinitarian models that were used for the better comprehension of the Holy Trinity in Its immanence, early Christian theology served itself also of more personalised Trinitarian patterns the most famous of which seems to have had been that of Theophilus of Antioch “*soul as psychic mirror of the Trinity*”<sup>40</sup>. In contrast to the formers, these last ones, based on Genesis 1:26<sup>41</sup> and of Romans: 8: 28-30<sup>42</sup>, were originally intended as making understandable the Trinitarian God’s economic action. Also in this kind of paradigm, great care was taken to present God’s immanence as an incomprehensible mystery for the human mind but also to portrait it as the basis of our salvation<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> R. McBrien, *Catholicism*, Geoffrey Chapman editions, London, 1984 p. 296.

<sup>39</sup> W. Pannenberg, *Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Anwendung des Analogie-Prinzips in der evangelischen Theologie*, in, *Theologische Literaturzeitung (ThLZ)*, no 85, 1965 p.225-228.

<sup>40</sup> The paradigm of the “soul as the psychic mirror of the Trinity” goes also back to Theophilus of Antioch who brought it up in his apology to Autolycom, yet, independently of his previously mentioned [impersonal] Trinitarian analogy. It was in this allusion that for the first time the [Trinitarian] God was brought in direct connection with the human reality: “If you say show me your God, I would reply: Show me yourself and I will show you my God. Show then that the eyes of your soul are capable of seeing... for [the Trinitarian] God is seen by those who are enabled to see Him when they have the eyes of their soul opened [that is when not overspread by sin]” (Theophilus of Antioch, *Apologia ad autolycom* i 14; ii 24 in, *Dictionary of Christian biography and literature to the end of the 6th century with an account of the principal sects and heresies* [ed. H. Wace], Christian Classics Ethereal library, Grand Rapids, 1924 p. 353-355 (for more information see further down).

<sup>41</sup> “God said, ‘Let us make man in our image. In the likeness of ourselves...God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them’ (Genesis 1:26a, 27).

<sup>42</sup> “We are aware that God works within those who love him, those who have been called with his purpose and turns everything to their good. He decided beforehand who were the ones destined to be moulded to the patterns of his son, so that he should be the eldest of many brothers: it was those so destined that he called; those that he called, he justified, and those that he has justified he has brought in to glory”.

<sup>43</sup> Within the economic plan of salvation [economic Trinity], the Trinity thus is identified with its transcendental immanence, although it does not exhaust or even confine the idea of the immanent Trinity as such; modern Catholic theologians often therefore choose to speak of “the non adequate distinction that characterises the identification of the economic and the immanent Trinity” (G. Greschake, *An den drei-einen Gott glauben*, Herder Verlag, Freiburg, 1996 p. 324; translated by me).

Likewise, the Trinitarian feature that embodies God's immanence, while always remaining exclusively reserved to the Triune Godhead, got to be regarded as well as the pattern according to which we, in response to God's plan of salvation, are called to form ourselves at<sup>44</sup>, and to be spiritually reborn again<sup>45</sup>. In this sense, God's Trinitarian character came to stand as a model for humanity<sup>46</sup>. Vice versa also, creation and especially ***the human being came to be considered as reflecting although never reproducing***<sup>47</sup> God's Trinitarian feature and as properly mirroring God's brightness<sup>48</sup>. As a consequence of the application of the personalised Trinitarian paradigm, a more "*human-like*" theological language has been developed from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century on. However, "*human-like*", this terminology was not at all "*human-centred*", as often suggested. Neither did it ever implicate presenting God with human features (anthropomorphism) nor had it aspired to make any direct speculation about the Godhead's immanent character. Instead, it primarily proposed the human element as a valid tool of the Christian predication<sup>49</sup> that initially served educative purposes<sup>50</sup> as well as in order to

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<sup>44</sup> G. Salvati, *Io uno e trino. La trinità come modello del cristiano*, Città nuova, Roma, 1997 p. 8-21.

<sup>45</sup> "In all truth I tell you no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born through water and the Spirit" (John 3.5a).

<sup>46</sup> Therefore, we often speak in this context of a precisely Trinitarian anthropology (Tr. Rowland, *A Christocentric Trinitarian anthropology*, John Paul II institute press, Melbourne, 2009; E. Scognamiglio, *Il volto del' uomo. Saggio di antropologia Trinitaria. La domanda e le risposte*, ed. San Paolo, Milano 2006).

<sup>47</sup> J. Alfaro, *Rivelazione Cristiana, fede e teologia* [bibliotecari teologia contemporanea no 50], ed. Querininiana, Brescia, 1986 p. 22-66; L. F. Ladaria, *Antropologia teologica*, editrice pontificia università Gregoriana, Roma p. 187-190.

<sup>48</sup> H. Gosebrink, *Hildegard von Bingen begegnen*, Sankt Ulrich Verlag, Augsburg, 2002 p. 66-73.

<sup>49</sup> K. Rahner, *Visionen und Prophezeiungen*, in *Questiones Disputatae*, no IV, Laurent Volker Verlag, Freiburg, 1958 p. 76-88.

<sup>50</sup> Apart from the difficulties that the early church had in explaining the H. Trinity in an adequate manner without risking to fall in any sort of paganism or anthropomorphism, as in the case of the impersonal Trinitarian models, there was also a second defy that had to be faced: namely what precisely distinguished the Christian through his faith in the Trinitarian Godhead from the rest of society, and what specific effect had this faith on his moral deeds. Consequently, it became very important to include the Trinity not only within the proper theological message but also in the pastoral reflection that the church proposed to its adherents. We see this diversity of highlighting when comparing the two Trinitarian paradigms of Theophilus of Antioch. Whereas Theophilus made his impersonal Trinitarian paradigm explicitly in reference to the Holy Trinity, by his personalised analogy, he focused primarily on the human soul that he portrayed on hand of (but not in) Trinitarian terms. So he intended to have illuminated the human soul in the light of the Trinitarian God, as the soul's creator. Nevertheless, this first contemplation of the soul in the light of the Trinity had an exclusively moral purpose: notably to remind people of their human sinfulness. Therefore, no one thought at that time to bring Theophilus' suggestion in connection with the contemplation of the H. Trinity in Itself, or to insinuate behind it any mystic allusion. It was to be only towards the end of the

make more accessible the significance<sup>51</sup> of the Christian truth for humanly imperfect minds<sup>52</sup>. It is in that context that a few further proto-filioquist formulations were developed such as “*alike/ from the Son*”, used to highlight the Spirit’s substantial similarity with the Father and the Son<sup>53</sup> (not to forget that the formal notion of Trinitarian consubstantiality was only applied by the 1<sup>st</sup> council of Nicea, more than one hundred years later).

What finally helped to specify the pictorial language, generated by the personalised Trinitarian paradigm, was its effort to express the incarnation of Christ in more Trinitarian terms and to include the whole Trinity more in the process of the world’s salvation. The terms that have to be selected in this sense were thought to present the Triune Godhead as participating at Christ’s suffering on the cross. An approach that, however, was strongly criticised throughout the first centuries of the history of the church. On the one hand it was seen as implying a modal perception of the Trinitarian God: that is, as if the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit were simply three different modes of the Godhead’s operations, but were deprived in themselves of a substantial being that enabled them eventually to be regarded as the three (distinct) divine persons<sup>54</sup>.

On the other side, it has been rejected because it was considered by many Christians, and especially by the famous catechetical school of Alexandria, as an attempt, allegedly, to undermine God’s divine immutability, as throughout the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium that notion was often identified with that of apathy and of absolute tranquillity<sup>55</sup>. Understanding God’s immutability as divine apathy, suffering, or

4<sup>th</sup> century that the proposal of the “soul as the psychic mirror of the Trinity” began to acquire a more spiritual sense through the reflection of St. Gregory of Nyssa (M. Magrassi, *Umiltà*, in, *Dizionario di mistica* [a cura: L. Borriello, E. Caruana, M. del Genio & N. Suffi], Libreria editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1998 p. 124o. M. Ruasenda (Mariano da Torino), *Essenza e valore dell’ umiltà*, tesi di Laurea/Antonianum, Roma, 1949 p. 160).

<sup>51</sup> Walter Kardinal Kasper, *Op. Cit.*, p. 116-146; J. Splett, *Gottes Erfahrung im Denken. Zur philosophischen Rechtfertigung des Redens von Gott*, Herder, Freiburg, 1973.

<sup>52</sup> St. Augustine, *De libero arbitrio* II, 6,14, 54, in, CCL no 29.

<sup>53</sup> G. Florofski, *The Byzantine ascetic and spiritual fathers*, Büchervertriebsanstalt, München, 1978 p. 294.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Decker, *Die Monarchianer. Frühchristliche Theologie im Spannungsfeld zwischen Rom und Kleinasien*, VSA Verlag, Hamburg, 1987 p. 78-112.

<sup>55</sup> The assimilation of God’s immutability to divine apathy had no precise biblical background, but seems to have had primarily prevailed among a number of early eastern Christian authors (especially desert fathers) in order to contradicting the Christian Godhead from the pagan divinities often characterized for giving in to their passions. However, epistemologically this assimilation had little theological foundation (in contrast, the bible stresses at several occasions how God participates at the suffering of His people), but was more the effect of the current of ancient stoicism on the early

even the slightest emotion came to be regarded as a limitation and as dependence from an exterior factor. The truly divine could not demonstrate any weakness that belonged per se to the creational order. Similarly, the supporters of God's apathy argued initially that Christ had suffered only in his human nature, this raising a series of speculations in how far the Son, when being on the Cross, was really God or only a human carrier of the divine grace who after the resurrection became "divinised" by the Father. From this perspective, filioquist expressions appeared as allegedly seeking to induce and extend Jesus' *human* weakness to the Trinity, which apart of depriving thereby Father, Son and Holy Spirit of their divine personhood (Patripassianism)<sup>56</sup>, gave so the impression of a Holy Spirit determined in Its actions by sentimentalism of the moment<sup>57</sup>. Therefore, for the first time in its history the filioquist(-like) expression (as well in its affirmation as in its negation) was simultaneously received both with hostility as with benevolence by the Christian theology.

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church. Today, the concept of divine apathy is rejected as such, because it implied the image of a creator God, who after having finished with his creation, abandoned it to its own fate, and was insensitive to the pleas of His people. Nevertheless, it also had some good effects, as it repudiated the image of a vindictive God (as would often be the case in the middle Ages) and avoided to think of the gifts of the H. Spirit in terms of mystical exhilaration ( D. Pedrini, *Quietismo*, in *Dizionario di mistica*, [a cura di L. Borriello, E Caruana, M. R. Del Genio & N. Suffi], Libreria editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 1998 p. 620-621).

<sup>56</sup> Perhaps the most notorious side-effects of the primitive extension of the Trinity by Jesus suffering on the cross was, as already indicated in the previous chapter, the heresy of patripassianism, most probably induced by the Greek Theodotus called the Shoemaker at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, who proposed that God the Father had co-suffered together with the human Jesus on the cross. Apparently, Theodotus had originally come up with his patripassianist theory in order to prevent Christian renegades from justifying themselves by telling that they had only abjured at the human Jesus on the cross, but that by this disavowing they did not intend to deny God the Father (P. Lam, M. Johnson & M. Steinhauser, *From Paul to Valentinus. Christians at Rome in the first two centuries*, Fortress press, Minneapolis, 2003 p. 344-349).

<sup>57</sup> L. Uspenski, *L' Icône. Quelques mots sur son sens dogmatique* [Greek translation by P. Konedoglou] ed. Kivotos, Athens, 1952 p. 32; 43.