

Christ As Angel: The Reclamation Of A Primitive Title

—
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This brief overview highlights one of the more important, and at the same time neglected, backgrounds¹ for the orthodox

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trinitarian formulations of Nicea. Such an overview should be helpful from a biblical as well as an historical point of view. For the trinitarianism of Scripture is implicit; and the explicit formulations of Nicea often appear, in the absence of their antecedents, quite removed from the scriptural data.

Unknown to many, the early church fathers often referred to Jesus as an Angel. And they gave him this appellation long before the (alleged) distortions of Constantine, the Controversies, the Councils, and the Creeds. Due to its antiquity, its longevity, and the

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¹ The most significant full-length treatment is J. Barbel's outstanding, and largely descriptive, *Christos Angelos: Die Anschauung von Christus als Bote und Engel usw.* (Theophaneia 3; Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1941). The 1964 reprint contains an appendix (pp. 335-52) which interacts with literature subsequent to initial publication; and cf. also his "Zur 'Engel-Trinitätslehre' im Uhrchristentum," *Theologische Revue* 54 (1958) 49-58, 103-12. Helpful also are the contributions, e.g., of W. Carr, *Angels and Principalities: The Background, Meaning and Development of the Pauline Phrase hai archai kai hai exousiai* (SNTSMS 42; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 143-48; J. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964) 117-46; id., *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973) 160-63; id., *The Origins of Latin Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1977) 149-52, 291, 329-38, 388-89; A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition. Vol. 1, From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975) 37-53, esp. 46-53; R. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (SBT 17; Naperville: Allenson, 1970) 26-32; W. T. Miller, *Mysterious Encounters at Mamre and Jabbok* (BJS 50; Chico: Scholars, 1984) 43-95, 119-38; J. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine. Vol. 1, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1971) 182-84, 197-98; W. G. Rusch, "Some Observations on Hilary of Poitiers's Christological Language in *De Trinitate*" in *Studia Patristica* (ed. E. A. Livingstone; Berlin: Akademie, 1975) 12.261-64; and H. E. W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth: A Study in the Relations between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church* (London: Mowbray, 1954) 20-23, 143-44.

The antithesis to Barbel's thesis was provided by M. Werner, *Die Entstehung des christlichen Dogmas* (Bern: P. Haupt, 1941; references here are to the ET, *The Formation of Christian Dogma* [New York: Harper, 1957] 120-61). But note the devastating critique of W. Michaelis, *Zur Engelchristologie im Uhrchristentum: Abbau der Konstruktion Martin Werners* (Basel: Heinrich Majer, 1942); as well as the briefer comments of Grillmeier, Pelikan, and Turner. Werner claims to have finally demonstrated, building uncritically on the foundation laid by A. Schweitzer, "the transformation of the eschatological Primitive Christianity [Arianism] into the Hellenistic mystery-religion of Early Catholicism [Nicene 'orthodoxy']" (vii). In the first edition (p. 725; cited in Turner, *Pattern*, 22) he again describes orthodoxy pejoratively as a "Hellenistic-syncretistic Mystery religion laden with the decadence of post-classical religiosity strutting about in Christian dress." The work on the whole, even apart from its anti-Catholic rhetoric, is unjustifiably dogmatic, selective, and insensitive to primary sources. Turner charitably describes it as brilliant, learned, and perverse. Werner's ad hominem attack (p. 130, n. 1) on Barbel is particularly repugnant. For two recent, and slightly less dogmatic, analyses, cf. J. D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980) 129-32, 149-62; and C. Rowland, *Christian Origins: From Messianic Movement to Christian Religion* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985) 35-39, 244-54.

unusual diversity of Greek and Latin theologians who use it, the word Angel has a *prima facie* claim to being a primitive, if not an apostolic, Christological title. Before pronouncing judgment on the Fathers, men who were often quite close to first-century apostles and eye-witnesses, we may recall that in antiquity the word "angel" had a broader semantic range than at present. When we think of angels, we immediately think of super-human, bodiless spirits, all of whom were created and some of whom fell with Satan in his rebellion. But in antiquity the word "angel" meant "messenger." It was primarily a functional (as opposed to an ontological) description and, thus, could refer to messengers who were human,² angelic, or divine (the best known of the latter being Hermes, "the messenger god"). Likewise in Scripture, in both the OT and the NT, the term angel refers to human as well as to angelic messengers.³ (Whether it refers in Scripture to "divine" messengers is, in a manner of speaking, the subject of this overview.)

The Fathers were keenly aware that Christ was the one who came down from heaven to reveal and to speak for God. He was God's agent,⁴ God's messenger. But this concept is given clear

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expression already in the NT—especially in the gospel of John. For there Christ repeatedly claims to be delivering only the word, or message, which the Father has given him (John 12:49; 14:10, 24; 17:8, 14; cf. also Heb 1:1–2, where we read that in the last days God has "spoken to us" in, or by means of, a Son). W. F. Howard notes in his analysis of the fourth gospel that:

the phrase *ὁ πέμψας*, "He who sent me," is found on the lips of Jesus no less than twenty-six times, whilst the verb *ἀποστείλει* (used by John with precisely the same

² E. Schweizer has recently noted from the writings of Epictetus that Stoic and Cynic philosophers were in the habit of calling themselves messenger (*ἄγγελος*), scout (*κατασκοπός*), and herald (*κέρυξ*) of the gods sent (*ἀποστείλει/καταπέμπω*) by Zeus. Schweizers references are to Epictetus *Discourses* 1.24.6; 3.22.56, 59, 69; 3.23.46; and 4.8.31 ("What Do We Really Mean When We Say 'God sent his son...?'" in *Faith and History: Essays in Honor of Paul W. Meyer* [ed. J. T. Carroll, C. H. Cosgrove and E. E. Johnson; Atlanta: Scholars, 1990] 299, esp. nn. 8-9). For evidence that prophets were often called "angels" see *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (ed. G. H. Lampe; Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), s.v. *ἄγγελος*, *DBI.A.*, 9-10; and W. D. Davies, "A Note on Josephus," *Antiquities* 15:136, *HTR* 47 (1954) 13540. Barbel (*Christos Angelos*, 7-33) traces the use of the term angel in antiquity and concludes that in both Greek and Jewish circles the generic or purely functional idea of "messenger" predominates. So also Daniélou, *Gospel Message*, 160-61.

³ In the MT the word *mal'ak* occurs 214 times. It is used equally of angels and humans. In the longer LXX the corresponding word *ἄγγελος* occurs 311 times to translate, in addition to *mal'ak*, a dozen other words. There also it is used equally of angels and humans. In the NT the word *ἄγγελος* occurs 175 times. At least six of these are clearly in reference to humans: e.g., Matt 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:24, 27; 9:52; and Jas 2:25. And it may also be possible to add to this list the "angels" of the seven churches in Revelation.

⁴ For several recent attempts to articulate a Christology in terms of agency see P. Borgen, "God's Agent in the Fourth Gospel" in *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* (ed. J. Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 1968) 137-48; and A. E. Harvey, "Christ as Agent," in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird* (ed. L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright; Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) 23950. A more successful attempt was made recently by L. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988). If Christ is not preexistent Deity, i.e., if God is not an ontological Trinity (the unstated assumption which seems to control both this work and that of Harvey), then Hurtado has given a possible explanation for the exaltation of Christ to quasi-divine status in the very earliest strata of Christian devotion. But see the review/critique by P. A. Rainbow, "Jewish Monotheism as the Matrix for New Testament Christology," *NovT* 33 (1991) 7891, esp. 86-91. A further criticism of Hurtado must also be noted: i.e., there is no consideration of the most obvious background material. The Pentateuch and its theophanies are completely ignored - as is, for all practical purposes, the entire OT prior to Daniel. Thus crucial messianic texts in the Psalms and Isaiah receive no treatment; while the Angel of the Lord receives a mere paragraph, being mentioned (p. 75) only to be summarily dismissed.

meaning) occurs eighteen times in the Gospel for the Son's mission from the Father, and three times in the First Epistle. The term "He who sent me" is in this Gospel a divine title,⁵ and when the *Auctor ad Hebraeos* called Jesus "the Apostle of our confession," he expressed in one noun what St. John proclaims in a verbal phrase on almost every page.⁶

Thus the fourth gospel portrays Christ as a messenger. But, as Logos, he is much more than a messenger. He is himself the message *par excellence*, "the message made flesh" (John 1:1, 14).⁷

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In view of these initial clarifications, perhaps the Fathers' use of the title Angel to describe Christ will not seem so strange (at least if they understood the title in some sense to mean "messenger" and not "created spirit"). But there are yet more profound reasons for their use of the title. And some of these will be noted in due course. First, however, several of the Fathers, particularly Justin Martyr, must be allowed to speak for themselves.⁸

Justin Martyr [AD 100–165]

Justin Martyr is universally recognized as "the most important of the Greek apologists of the second century and one of the noblest personalities of early Christian literature."⁹ It is only fitting that our first and most detailed analysis concern him,¹⁰ particularly since in many

⁵ No less, it might be argued, than its correlative of *εἰρcomeno*" Cf. N. Turner, *Syntax*, vol. 3 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963) 151; and L. Morris, *Jesus is the Christ: Studies in the Theology of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 79. John uses *ἀποστέλλω* twenty-eight times and *πέμψω* thirty-two times, more than any other NT book. These terms clearly indicate "one of the key thoughts of this Gospel" (Morris, *Jesus is the Christ*, 82, n. 25; cf. also his comments at 41, 81-82, 102-4, and 133).

⁶ W. F. Howard, *Christianity According to St. John* (London: Duckworth, 1943) 25. Also expressed in this one noun is the thesis of this overview. This is somewhat ironic given the stark contrast (polemic?) between the Son and angels which dominates the first chap. of Hebrews. Cf. A. Bakker, "Christ an Angel?" *ZNW* 32 (1933) 255-65; but note also the minority view of M. G. Kline, "Creation in the Image of the Glory-Spirit," *WTJ* 39 (1977) 250-72, esp. 253-54.

⁷ T. E. Pollard, *Johannine Christology and the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 11. Cf. also B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951) 101; and I. H. Marshall, *The Epistles of John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 101-3, who, *inter alia*, have noted this convergence or overlap between the concepts of message and messenger.

⁸ Space unfortunately does not permit analysis of more than a fraction of the Fathers who used the title angel. But there is a certain symbolic significance (noted *post facto*) to the present selection: for represented by these four Fathers are the four corners of the world. And thus the title may legitimately lay claim to that ubiquity which is the *sin qua non* of catholicity.

⁹ J. Quasten, *Patrology* (4 vols.; Westminster, MD: Newman, 1962-86) 1.196.

¹⁰ Technically, there was an influential Christian work earlier than Justin which has been dated by some to well within the life-span of John: i.e., *The Shepherd of Hermas* [c. AD 851-20]. For the earlier date see J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) 319-22; for the later date see W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 132; and for a date c. AD 100 see C. C. Richardson, *The Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Macmillan, 1970) 163. In this work Christ is repeatedly called an angel. But this is hardly surprising since so is everyone (and everything!) else. E.g., there are angels of repentance, righteousness, wickedness, luxury, punishment, etc. Given that there are angels of righteousness and wickedness living, and struggling, within the heart of a single individual in vivid depiction of the human condition (*Herm. Man.* 6); that an angel of luxury is plainly a euphemism for a self-indulgent attitude (*Herm. Sim.* 6:2); and that the promise to Hermas that the angel of repentance would never leave him is equivalent to the assurance of salvation (*passim*); one must be cautious of drawing premature subordinationistic conclusions from its use of the term. The work actually has very little to say about angels. Though one could sooner reconstruct Bunyan's Christology from *Pilgrim's Progress*, a number of scholars (e.g., Barbel, *Christos Angelos*, 47-50;

ways he set the trajectory that was followed by the apologetic argumentation and biblical interpretation of later orthodoxy. A contemporary of John's disciple, Polycarp [c. AD 70–156], Justin was active in Ephesus and in Rome. Both cities were key centers of Christianity. Ephesus, for example, was the final home of John the apostle (*Adv. haer.* 3.3.4), Mary the mother of Jesus,

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and one of Philip the evangelist's prophetess daughters (*Hist. eccl.* 3.23 and 3.31.3). Ephesus was also a short thirty-five miles from the thriving church at Smyrna (cf. Rev 2:8–11) where Polycarp, "the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians,"¹¹ was bishop for an extraordinary length of time—almost half a century. From Ephesus, Justin went to Rome where he taught converts in the catechetical school which he founded: the only such school in Rome in the middle of the second century. The importance of this last fact, from the perspective of doctrinal development in the early church, can hardly be overestimated. "Since services were private, and held from house to house, the residences of these teachers might be *the only publicly known Christian centers.*"¹² Thus a generation or two after the church in Rome had received Paul's great theological epistle, it would have been possible for one man to stand up and say (more believably, perhaps, than it was said a millennium and a half later), "Tradition; I am tradition." The apostolic tradition in Rome was effectively embodied in one man. And that one man was Justin: philosopher, apologist, martyr.

Justin repeatedly refers to Christ as an Angel. The origin of the title will be taken up again below. It will suffice for now to note that the primary source for Justin, and for all of the Fathers, appears to have been Isa 9:6. There Isaiah says that the Messiah's name will be called "Angel of Great Counsel."¹³ Justin himself

Longenecker, *Jewish Christianity*, 27; and Grillmeier, *Apostolic Age*, 49-50) appear to have demonstrated, as much as is possible given the genre, that Christ is absolutely unique in spite of the ubiquitous appellation. Christ has all the prerogatives of Deity and literally towers over the other angels, who are his servants. This fact accounts for the enormous popularity of the work before, during, and after Nicea. See, for example, the Muratorian Canon; Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 4.20.2 (cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.8.7); the fourth century Codex Sinaiticus (which contains it); and Athanasius, *De incarn.* 3, who calls it the most edifying book. Indeed, when taken on its own terms as a romance or allegory and not as a primer on primitive Jewish Christian theology or angelology - the work is quite engaging and full of *pastoral* encouragement.

¹¹ *Mart. Pol.* 12. Unless otherwise noted, citations from the Fathers are taken from the first three volumes of the American edition, ed. C. C. Coxe, of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (ANF) (10 vols.; ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson; Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885/96). Such phrases indicate his great age as well as his authority and influence. F. J. Foakes Jackson (*The History of the Christian Church From the Earliest Times to A.D. 461* [Cambridge: Deighton, Bell & Co., 1954] 119-21 and 251) has observed that Polycarp's influence was acknowledged even in far-away Rome: most notably by his opponent in the Easter controversy, Anacletus the bishop of Rome (cf. *Hist. eccl.* 5.24.1617); and that Polycarp's martyrdom was "regarded as a matter not of local but of universal interest" (cf. *Mart. Pol.* 1; *Hist. eccl.* 4.15). The simplest way to account for Polycarp's influence is to take the testimony of Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* 3.3.4) and Tertullian (*De praesc.* 32) at face value. Polycarp knew apostles (most notably John) and was appointed bishop of Smyrna by them. This is not a complete impossibility. John and Polycarp were contemporaries for approximately thirty years. John, states Irenaeus, "lived until the times of Trajan"; and Polycarp is known to have been bishop during the reign of Trajan [98-117]. Thus, even if one concludes that Polycarp could not have been "the angel of the church in Smyrna," one can hardly deny that he became bishop shortly after that phrase was penned.

¹² Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 230 (emphasis added). See *Act. Just.* 2.

¹³ Exactly how the translators of Vaticanus understood the Hebrew text is beyond the scope of this paper. It may be that they balked at attributing Deity to Messiah, for the Hebrew is not exceptionally difficult and the title *roBG! l a@s* translated correctly in 10:21. Moreover, Alexandrinus and Sinaiticus both follow the Hebrew text and read, "Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Potentate, Prince of Peace, Father of the Coming Age." Then again, it may well be that the alternate translations are referring to the same well-known individual *but in different language*

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quotes Isa 9:6 on three separate occasions;¹⁴ but nowhere does he attempt to prove or justify his messianic understanding of the verse. (Justin likewise makes no attempt to support the validity of his many uses of the title Angel by referring them to or deriving them from Isa 9:6, their primary source.) This is noteworthy, since his longest surviving work records a dialogue or debate with a well-informed Jew named Trypho. The dialogue took place in Ephesus (cf. *Hist. eccl.* 4.18.6) at the time of the Jewish Bar-Cochba War [AD 132–135], though it was not put in writing until some years later. Both Justin and Trypho assumed from the outset that Isa 9:6 was messianic and that Angel was an acceptable messianic title. They just strongly disagreed over whether Jesus, who was disgracefully crucified, and who was called God by the Christians, could be that Angel. Clearly the assumptions which Justin and Trypho held in common (assumptions consistent with what is known of Jewish thought at this time¹⁵) were of exceptional significance.

Justin's first citation of Isa 9:6 does not mention the title Angel. He quotes only the first few words of Isaiah's "prediction": "Unto us a child is born, and unto us a young man is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulders" (*I Apol.* 35).¹⁶ And all he notes in relation to this brief citation is the fact that Christ's childhood passed in obscurity and that there was great power in the cross which Christ symbolically placed "upon his shoulders." Justin is clearly assuming the messianic status of Isa 9:6 and, given the nature of his secondary applications, it would seem that this assumption had been held by him for some time.

Justin's second citation of Isa 9:6 does mention the title Angel. But he makes nothing of the word Angel itself—a word which from

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our perspective should have been surprising—and focuses instead on only the second part of the title:

And when Isaiah calls Him the Angel of mighty counsel, 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

(as, perhaps, one might refer to the "first President of the United States" one moment and to "Washington" the next. In each case the referent is known to be the same).

¹⁴ Isaiah appears to be Justin's favorite OT book; he quotes from it, or alludes to it, 246 times. Cf. *Biblia Patristica* (ed. J. Allenbach, A. Benoît, D. A. Bertrand, et al.; Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1975) 1.in loc. Although it must be noted that their criteria for determining a quote or an allusion appear to be quite generous. Following Isaiah in popularity are Genesis, Matthew, and Psalms.

¹⁵ It is well known that the LXX translators viewed Isa 9:6 as messianic. It is also viewed as messianic in the Hymns of Qumran (cf. M. Black, "Messianic Doctrine in the Qumran Scrolls" in *Studia Patristica* 1.449); and the Targum even goes so far as to add the word "Messiah" to its interpretive paraphrase. But the assumptions which Justin and Trypho held in common go far beyond a few mutually agreed upon proof-texts. They include the hermeneutical methodology for interpreting Scripture. Cf. Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 172 and 239; A. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism* (SJLA 23; Leiden: Brill, 1977) esp. 22125; L. W. Barnard, "The Old Testament and Judaism in the Writings of Justin Martyr," *VT* 14 (1964) 395-406; and, most importantly, the monograph by W. A. Shotwell, *The Biblical Exegesis of Justin Martyr* (London: SPCK, 1965).

¹⁶ This apology, addressed to the Emperor Antoninus Pius and his son, was written in Rome c. AD 150; see *I Apol.* 46, though it is quite likely that Justin is speaking in round figures. Eusebius in his *Chronicon* dates it as early as 141 (cited in the translation by T. B. Falls, *The Fathers of the Church: Saint Justin Martyr* [New York: Christian Heritage, 1948] 26). According to R. M. Grant (*Greek Apologists of the Second Century* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988] 53-54), the specific occasion for the writing of this apology was the gratuitous death of Polycarp at the hands of Quadratus, proconsul of Asia.

and shall be well-pleasing to Him, and also for those who have rebelled against His will.
(*Dial.* 76)

Justin's point here is that Christ was to be, *par excellence*, a Counselor or Teacher.¹⁷ He immediately goes on to discuss other matters.

His third and final citation of Isa 9:6 is also adduced without fanfare as if its use needed no justification or explanation. Here Justin merely cites, again without elaboration, the title "Angel of Great Counsel" (*Dial.* 126). Yet it may be added that the title appears in rather distinguished company (i.e., in a list of nineteen messianic titles) and it is perhaps significant, given some of the other titles, that this title comes first.¹⁸

Justin copiously uses the shorter title Angel in addition to the two references to the Angel of Great Counsel of Isa 9:6. This shorter title appears no less than thirty-seven times in his works in reference to Christ.¹⁹ And there can be little doubt that it plays a fundamental role in his interpretation of the OT and in his Christology. In terms of Justin's conceptual framework, his use of the title Angel rivals the title Logos and the "Logos Christology" for which he is famous. In fact, it will be suggested that what is distinctly biblical and apostolic about Justin's theology may have less to do with the title Logos, which is found (albeit rarely) in the NT, than with the title Angel which is not. Nevertheless, the title Angel reveals an extremely early and widely accepted Christology.²⁰ The title was not Justin's invention but was part of

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¹⁷ Cf. Morris, *Jesus is the Christ*, 75, who notes this belief as a Samaritan distinctive.

¹⁸ Some of the other titles are, e.g., Son of Man, Christ, God, Stone, Wisdom, Son of God.

¹⁹ The word angel, in the singular, occurs forty-five times in his works. But six of these occurrences (*Dial.* 34.2, 61.1, 86.3, and 128.1, 2, 4) are not immediately relevant since Justin there uses the word "angel" not as a title of Christ, but as a description of created spirits: e.g., the angel Gabriel who announces the birth of Christ to Mary.

²⁰ According to Bakker ("Christ an Angel?" 255), the title "belongs to the earliest stratum of Christian belief." This conclusion is arguably correct, although Bakker places too much weight on the "Testimony Book" hypothesis of J. R. Harris and on the independent witness of Josephus. For the tenability of a modified "Testimony Book" hypothesis cf. J. H. Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy: An Exegetical Examination of 1 Peter 2:4-10 and the Phrase basilion ibrateuma* (SNT 12; Leiden: Brill, 1966) 130-33; E. E. Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 98-107; id., *The Old Testament in Early Christianity: Canon and Interpretation in the Light of Modern Research* (WUNT 54; Tübingen: Mohr, 1991; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) 59-61 and 70-72; and B. Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic: The Doctrinal Significance of the Old Testament Quotations* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) esp. 1331. For an exhaustive treatment of Justin's use of testimonia see O. Skarsaune, *The Proof From Prophecy: A Study in Justin Martyr's Proof-Text Tradition: Text-Type, Provenance, Theological Profile* (SNT 56; Leiden: Brill, 1987). Again following Harris (and R. Eisler), Bakker accepts as authentic a remarkable passage in the Slavonic version of Josephus *Jewish War* where he says that it is not possible for him to call Christ "an angel." This, it is argued, indicates that Josephus is polemicizing against a primitive Christian description of Christ - if the passage is authentic, and if in actual fact "someone has been calling him an angel," and if that someone was Christian ... (Bakker's conclusion, in other words, depends upon quite a number of assumptions). For a brief discussion of the merits of this passage in Josephus see F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (5th ed.; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1960) 108-12. Bruce does note, however, that the authenticity of the passage was affirmed by no less an expert than H. St. John Thackary (Loeb *Josephus*, on 3.648-50).

A more promising line may have been taken by D. Daube in his essay "The 'I Am' of the Messianic Presence," in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: University of London/Athlone, 1956; reprint, New York: Arno, 1973) 325-29, 420 n. 4. Daube argues that the Passover Haggadah is archaic (cf. 9, 166) and that it contains unexpurgated statements "manifestly directed against Christianity." In particular the Haggadah underscores the fact that it was God alone who acted to bring about the Exodus: it was neither "a messenger" nor "the messenger" (i.e., Jesus).

the primitive tradition which Justin had inherited and which his works show him ungrudgingly "transmitting" (paradidonto) to others just as he himself had been "instructed" (epidacqhmi).²¹

This brings us to the real point of Justin's use of the title Angel. Why does Justin expend so much effort on this particular title if not to justify its use as a Christological title? Clearly it was for another reason. Justin is not attempting to prove that Christ was rightly called Angel, for that was plain from Isa 9:6, as anyone familiar with their LXX would know. Justin's point is, instead, that since it is universally acknowledged that Isa 9:6 is messianic, the title "Angel of Great Counsel" unquestionably follows. And once it is granted that Christ is rightly called Angel then, based on the similarity of both title and function, it also follows that Christ is the Angel of the Lord who appears elsewhere in the OT (e.g., to Abraham in Genesis 15–22; to Jacob in Genesis 28–35; to Moses in Exodus 3; and to Joshua in Joshua 5–6).²² Justin uses the title thirty-one times in reference to OT contexts in which the Angel of the Lord appears. Who, then, is this Angel?

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It does not take Justin long to point out from the OT appearances of the Angel of the Lord that this Angel is fully God.²³ Invariably when this particular Angel is seen, those who have seen him declare that they have seen God and are amazed that they have lived. In numerous places this Angel speaks in the first person as LORD and God, receives worship and sacrifices, and makes the very ground on which he stands holy; yet in other places he speaks of God in the third person and is functionally subordinate since, as Angel, he is sent by God to deliver a message from God. When these passages were combined with others (e.g., Gen 1:26;²⁴ 19:24; Ps 45:6–7; and 110:1) which on the surface seem to speak of a plurality of

²¹ *1 Apol.* 6. Cf. H. Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966) 18–19.

²² It has generally been assumed that Justin himself first made the identification. However it is quite possible that the identification of Messiah with the Angel of the Lord was first made by the LXX translator(s). For an analysis of Justin's primary theophany texts see D. C. Trakatellis, *The Pre-existence of Christ in Justin Martyr: An Exegetical Study with Reference to the Humiliation and Exaltation Christology* (HDR 6; Missoula: Scholars, 1976) 53–92. The work as a whole is most helpful in demonstrating that Justin presents a coherent Christology within a biblical, and not a philosophical, framework. Cf. also Skarsaune, *Proof From Prophecy*, 47–50, 206–13, and esp. 409–24; and the full length treatment of B. Kominiak, *The Theophanies of the Old Testament in the Writings of St. Justin* (SST 14; Washington: Catholic University of America, 1948).

²³ Cf. Dunn, *Christology*, 150–51. Though Dunn categorically denies any application to Christ, he correctly notes that "the angel of Yahweh is simply a way of speaking about Yahweh himself ... it is impossible to distinguish between the angel of Yahweh and Yahweh himself; they are obviously one and the same person." His argument against the application to Christ, however, lacks rigor, for he equivocates on the meaning of the term "angel." Thus his conclusion (e.g., 154ff.) that Christ could not have been an angel because he is "regularly exalted above the angels" [emphasis his] does not follow.

²⁴ Cf. *Dial.* 62. It may again be possible to detect tangential evidence of Justin's Samaritan background in relation to Gen 1:26 and 2:7. According to J. Fossum ("Gen 1:26 and 2:7 in Judaism, Samaritanism," and Gnosticism, *JSJ* 16 [1985] 202–39, esp. 221–27; and id., *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord* [WUNT 36; Tübingen: Mohr, 1985] 230–38 and passim), the Samaritans held the distinctive view that God and the Angel of the Lord were both involved in the creation of human beings: the Angel of the Lord created the human body while the Lord created the soul. Interestingly, however, it is also possible to interpret Fossum's primary Samaritan texts as instances of parallelism, in which case they even more closely approximate Justin's views: "The Angel of YHWH formed him from the dust of the earth... The Name, that is to be praised, breathed into him the breath of life, and he became a soul"; and "YHWH is the word referring to the form of Adam, for it was established by him. And by Elohim it was perfected [given a spirit]. 'Then YHWH Elohim formed man' [Gen 2:7]." Both texts are additionally noteworthy: the former since "the Name" (possibly with reference to Exod 23:21) was a primitive Christological title (cf. Daniélou, *Jewish Christianity*, 151–57; Longenecker, *Early Jewish Christianity*, 41–46); and the latter since it explicitly calls the Angel of the Lord YHWH.

persons in the Godhead, Justin's argument became irrefutable. Thus in a key passage which mentions the title Angel four times in relation to the OT theophanies, Justin can hardly be held guilty of an overstatement when he says of Christ that "He is called God, He is God, and shall always be God" (*Dial.* 58; Falls's translation).

But though Christ is fully God, and has the same nature as God,²⁵ he remains "numerically distinct"²⁶ from the Father. Justin

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takes great pains to make it clear that in arguing for the full Deity of Christ in an essentially Jewish and monotheistic context (i.e., Jesus of Nazareth is the God of the Jews—the Lord of Hosts²⁷—with all that this claim entails), he is not advocating any kind of rigid monarchianism or unitarianism. He would have been the last to consider himself a subordinationist.²⁸ And the modern scholarly consensus would have come as quite a surprise.²⁹ (To say that Justin sounds at times like a subordinationist is to say that Justin

²⁵ Cf. *Dial.* 61 and 128. Justin's preferred analogy, though possibly suggestive of ditheism if isolated from his system and pressed to the extreme, was one which found its way into the Nicene Creed: "Light from Light" (or "Fire from Fire"). One torch, or fire, kindles another without any loss or division of essence. Both fires "are the same" since each has the "essence" (ουσιᾶ) of the other. The second is not less than the first; the first is not made less by the existence of the second. Justin has with remarkable clarity articulated the Nicene *homoousios*. (Cf. Tertullian, *Apol.* 21, where he states that "Christ is Spirit of Spirit, God of God, as light of light is kindled... He is made a second in manner of existence - in position, not in nature.")

²⁶ Justin is here the first to attempt a term for personalities in the Godhead. He frequently uses εἰτερο" ἀριθμῶν which is always, and on the whole wisely, translated 'numerically distinct,' but which meant to Justin 'different in person'" (E. R. Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr* [Jena: Frommann, 1923; reprint, Amsterdam: Philo, 1968] 146). Goodenough's references are to *Dial.* 56.11, 62.2, 128.4, 129.1, 4. See esp. *Dial.* 62 and 129, where Justin argues from Gen 1:26, 3:22, and 19:24 that there must necessarily be "at least two" persons in the Godhead. For Justin, God was "intensely personal" (Goodenough, *Theology of Justin Martyr*, 137). Thus Justin's much abused phrase εἰτερο" θεῶν (cf. *Dial.* 55 and 56 [bis]) was simply his unsophisticated equivalent for *another divine person or the second person of the Godhead* (cf. *I Apol.* 13 and 60). The same could be said of the phrase δευτερο" θεῶν, though it was not literally used by the Apologists: i.e., by Justin (contra the impression given by Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 232), Athenagoras, and Theophilus. For the use of δευτερο" θεῶν in Philo and Origen, see Segal, *Two Powers*, 159-81 and 231.

²⁷ E.g., *Dial.* 36 and 85. Justin applies this title to both Christ and the Father. Its validity in reference to Christ he demonstrates primarily from the messianic Psalm 24 and from the appearance of the Angel of the Lord ("Captain of the Lord's host") to Joshua in Josh 5:13:5 (cf. *Dial.* 62). The application of the title Lord of Hosts to Christ antedates Justin, appearing already in the NT in connection with the primitive messianic Stone testimonia (Rom 9:29, 33 and 1 Pet 2:8; cf. Isa 8:13-14); and in connection with the OT theophanies (John 12:41; cf. Isaiah 6). It is likewise the NT which first calls Jesus God (cf. M. J. Harris, *Jesus as God: the New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992]) and Lord (LXX *kurios* for Heb. YHWH); and which also applies some dozen OT passages to Christ, which in their original contexts clearly referred to YHWH (e.g., Rom 10:9-13; Eph 4:7-11; and Heb 1:10-12). The citation of Joel 2:32 in Rom 10:13 may even suggest that salvation itself is contingent upon the confession that Jesus is YHWH (making the aforementioned Stone of Stumbling substantially larger than it initially appears).

²⁸ Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought*, 17 (and n. 44) points out that "there is nothing reduced about Justin's estimate of the person of Christ." He also points out Justin's "polemic against adoptionism" in *Dial.* 88.

²⁹ He would have been particularly surprised to discover that he was an Arian. But if M. Werner is correct, Justin was in good company. Fortunately Werner is only able to make Arians out of Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, et al. by a *tour de force* (cf. *Formation*, 158-60 and passim); and the comment by Tertullian, subject to this kind of selective misquotation already in his own lifetime, is still apropos (*Adv. prax.* 9). Regrettably symptomatic of Werner's selective handling of the primary source material is the picture which graces the cover, and is touted in the forward, of the abridged German edition of his work (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1959). It is a fresco depicting Christ, with wings, as the Angel of Great Counsel. But what Werner has failed to mention is the ὁ ἄγγελος written in Christ's halo. This is no ordinary angel! "Christ is thus clearly meant as God." (Grillmeier [*Apostolic Age*, 53 n. 72] has astutely pointed out Werner's omission.) Justin, who calls Christ an Angel, also calls him εἶπὼν εἰμὶ ὁ ἄγγελος (*I Apol.* 63; citing Exod 3:14).

sounds at times like a Christian. Justin, in other words, believed in the Incarnation: the paradigmatic revelation³⁰ of the divine "economy.") For in actual fact his Christology was so high, and he applied so many divine titles and prerogatives to Christ, that he

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perceived himself to be in danger not of subordinationism but of obliterating any personal distinction between the Father and the Son. However, the personality of the Son (as over against his distinction from the Father) was generally taken for granted, being based, as it was, on the "Memoirs" of the apostles. Two additional points may also be noted. First, as pointed out by Goodenough, "God was intensely personal to Justin."³¹ Thus Justin's argument for the Deity of the Son was simultaneously an argument for the personality of the Son. And, second, the Son of God was also the Angel of the Lord. And the Angel of the Lord, qua angel, was necessarily a person. He was neither the Father in another role, nor was he an attribute of (or impersonal emanation from) the Father.³²

Justin thus understood that the Son was an eternal person; and that permanent, personal distinctions existed within the Godhead. These distinctions could be seen in the OT between the Lord and the Angel of the Lord who was his messenger; and again in the NT between the Father and the Son.³³ The title Angel had no appreciable bearing on the ontological status of Christ.³⁴ For it was the eternal, pre-existing person who stood behind the title who alone determined the ultimate ontological status of this "Angel." That is, Angel was simply one title among many for the Son of God whose divine nature and eternal existence were not in the least contingent upon a single functional or "economic" title. And this applies *mutatis mutandis* to Justin's use of the title Logos.

Justin's Logos was personal; his Angel uncreated. Christ was God; yet he was not the Father. Justin's theology was implicitly trinitarian³⁵ even though, by an unfortunate historical accident, he

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³⁰ Cf. Trakatellis, *Pre-Existence*, passim.

³¹ Goodenough, *Theology of Justin Martyr*, 137. Cf. p. 172, where he notes that what immediately, and permanently, distinguishes Justin's Christian view of the Logos from that of Philo and all Hellenistic logos speculation was that "his Logos was always a divine *Personality*": a personality who was, first and foremost, the Son of God of the synoptic tradition.

³² Contra Segal (*Two Powers*, 223), Justin does not believe "that the *logos* is an angel in that it is a power (*dynamis*) radiating from God." Justin has a much higher view of angels than Segal allows. They are rational, moral beings who (like us) possess free will; they are persons. Moreover, in *Dial.* 128 Justin categorically repudiates the analogy that the relationship between the Son and the Father is like that between the ray of light and the sun. This analogy, says Justin in so many words, is modalistic and false: it denies that the Father and Son are distinct, eternal Persons.

³³ Cf. Goodenough, *Theology of Justin Martyr*, 141-47. Note also H. Chadwick, "Justin Martyr's Defense of Christianity," *BJRL* (1964-65) 290; and Trakatellis, *Pre-Existence*, 90-92. The OT theophanies not only reveal a distinction of Persons within the Godhead; they also provide a distinctively biblical analogy to the incarnation (e.g., *Dial.* 75).

³⁴ For ontology Justin preferred words like "God," "Son," and "Christ" (e.g., *2 Apol.* 6). And he repeatedly refers to Christ as being God [ὡς θεός] by nature: especially in contexts (e.g., *Dial.* 126, 127, 128) which highlight Christ's economic or salvation-historical role as Angel of the Father.

³⁵ G. W. Bromiley (*Historical Theology: An Introduction* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978] 17) is correct when he states that Justin's trinitarianism "rests on the biblical testimony to Father, Son, and Spirit." But in calling it "confused" instead of "implicit" he has been unnecessarily unsympathetic: for even the latter word may say too little.

did not know the word. He clearly grasped the fundamental biblical concepts behind the doctrine of the Trinity "and had he lived later, he would have subscribed to the Nicene creed."³⁶ According to Daniélou, the title Angel "was used in a restricted sense which constituted the ordinary form in which the Jewish Christian theology of the Trinity was cast." In fact, the word Angel functioned as "the old-fashioned equivalent" of the word person.³⁷ And it was used by Justin (and others) "to describe Christ's eternal nature."³⁸ Although the conceptual framework behind this use of the title Angel can be found throughout the NT, one need look no further than the Johannine Prologue:³⁹

In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with *the Father*, and the Logos was God... and the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory... No one has ever seen *the Father*; the unique God who exists in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.⁴⁰

The conceptual ties to Johannine theology are so numerous, and so strong, that they presuppose a profound and lengthy acquaintance with that theology via the fourth gospel, the church at Ephesus, and/or Polycarp (who for half a century was the primary living connection to the apostle John).⁴¹

Justin's use of the title Angel reveals his theological genius. By it he was able to formulate trinitarian theology as explicitly—and biblically—as possible in the absence of the necessary technical vocabulary. And in so doing he anticipated the later Creeds by several centuries. Could we, burdened with his terminological restrictions, have done better? His formulation also had tremendous apologetic value.⁴² Trypho, a well-informed Jew, would

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never for a moment have accepted the apparent polytheism of Christianity (e.g., of John 1) at face value. So Justin managed to find a point of contact (Isa 9:6) and then prove that the theology of John 1 virtually fills the OT. This explains why the title Angel appears so often in his *Dialogue* (thirty-five of Justin's thirty-nine references come in this book): both Justin and Trypho viewed the OT as "the exclusive court of appeals."⁴³ That Justin still managed to use

³⁶ P. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (8 vols.; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949-50) 2.550.

³⁷ Daniélou, *Jewish Christianity*, 117-18. Cf. n. 10 above and note that in *The Shepherd of Hermas* the word angel functions in place of the word person; and that "personifications" are accomplished by means of angels.

³⁸ Rusch, "Observations on Hilary," 261.

³⁹ According to Pollard (*Johannine Christology*, 14 [cf. 20-22]), the Prologue "provides a summary of the Gospel" and declares that the pre-existent Logos "was and is the mediator of all of God's activity *ad extra*... in creation, revelation and salvation."

⁴⁰ Cf. John 6:46. These "patristic" glosses are hardly special pleading given the necessary reference to the Father in John 1:1b; and the fact that in the NT the word God generally (but not always) refers to the Father. Cf. Harris, *Jesus as God*, 47 and passim.

⁴¹ That Justin was very well-versed in Johannine theology is beyond debate. "Though the question has been disputed, he certainly knew the Fourth Gospel" (Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 233; so also Grant, *Greek Apologists*, 58; and Chadwick, "Justin's Defense," 296). *Biblia Patristica* 1.in loc., lists forty-one quotations and/or allusions to the fourth gospel in Justin's genuine writings (e.g., *1 Apol.* 61 and *Dial.* 88). But note the caveat above (n. 14).

⁴² In a number of contexts this value has not diminished. For example, certain twentieth-century Arians, the Jehovah's Witnesses, have recently claimed Justin Martyr as one of their own ("Should You Believe in the Trinity? Is Jesus Christ the Almighty God?" [Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1989] 7). And the sole proof? He called Christ an angel. Indeed he did. And it is now possible, thanks to this admission, to counter their deficient Christology with more than a handful of anticipated proof-texts: it is now possible, following Justin's lead, to counter their deficient Christology with a biblical paradigm.

⁴³ T. Stylianopoulis, *Justin Martyr and the Mosaic Law* (SBLDS 20; Missoula: Scholars, 1975) 165; cf. 36-37 and passim. The fact that the OT had absolute, non-contradictory authority for Justin is evident not only in his

the title four times in his Apology to Antoninus Pius shows how firmly entrenched the title was in the apostolic tradition and "how much he took it for granted."⁴⁴ It would hardly have been appropriate in addressing the pagan Emperor, and in presenting Christianity in the best possible light, for Justin to substitute recent or doubtful theological inventions in place of "the faith once for all delivered to the saints."⁴⁵

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Thus of greater theological significance than his use of the title Logos⁴⁶ (or even, strictly speaking, the single messianic proof-text of Isa 9:6) was his connection between the "Angel of Great Counsel" and the Angel of the Lord. This was Justin's greatest apologetic and theological contribution, and this was justifiably where he expended most of his energy. The OT theophanies were "without exception" (*Dial.* 113) Christophanies because they were all appearances of the Angel of the Lord who was known from Isa 9:6 to be Christ. The title Angel, thus, not only functioned as the middle term in a singularly powerful apologetic syllogism for the Deity of Christ; it also functioned to unite the two Testaments and highlight the consistency of God's revelation over time (à la biblical theology). Justin paraded none of this as if it were his own invention. And for good reason—there was nothing conceptually distinctive about his Angel Christology.

numerous explicit statements to this effect (e.g., *Dial.* 65), but also in the twenty chapters (*Dial.* 10-30) that it takes Justin to deflect Trypho's first charge: why then does he not obey the law of Moses? On the other hand, consistent with his deliberate apologetic strategy, Justin's Logos theology comes to the fore in his two apologies. It simply provided a better point of contact with Greek thought. Quasten, for example, is thus not far from the mark when he states that, "The doctrine of the Logos is the most important doctrine of Justin, *because it forms a bridge between pagan philosophy and Christianity*" (*Patrology*, 1.209 [emphasis added]). This remark is essentially correct as concerns the two apologies. However, it does not take into account the fact that the *Dialogue* "is so different" from the apologies: Justin's distinctive Logos theology is entirely absent; as is his much popularized notion (cf. *1 Apol.* 46) that many of the noblest pagan philosophers were Christians "before Christ" (Stylianopoulos, *Mosaic Law*, 16-18 and 194). Justin's ability to "contextualize" his theology in such divergent contexts presupposes a fairly sophisticated understanding of that theology (cf. Shotwell, *Biblical Exegesis*, 108 and 116-17). He had obviously taken to heart the example set by the master apologist (1 Cor 9:20).

⁴⁴A. T. Hanson, *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1965) 88.

⁴⁵Jude 3. In his concluding comments, Goodenough (*Theology of Justin Martyr*, 293) repeatedly underscores this point:

He is first and always a traditionalist, whose chief desire is to explain Christianity as he learned it. The Christianity which Justin learned could have differed from his own theology in only the smallest details, else he, like Marcion, would have been rejected by his own generation. It is Justin's chief joy in Christianity that what he teaches is not his own, but is the revealed and accepted faith.

According to R. Holte ("Logos spermatikos: "Christianity and Ancient Philosophy According to Justin's Apologies," *ST* 12 [1958] 112), Justin shows an "unreserved attachment to the Christian doctrinal tradition" (cited approvingly by Trakatellis, *Pre-Existence*, 173-74, n. 4). Cf. D. E. Aune, "Justin Martyr's Use of the Old Testament," *B[J]ETS* 9 (1966) 17980; H. von Campenhausen, *The Fathers of the Greek Church* (London: A & C Black, 1963) 11; Chadwick, "Justin's Defense," 278; and Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 231. Justin strives to teach only what all Christians believe. And he painstakingly notes those instances where Christians differ among themselves: e.g., regarding observance of the ceremonial law (*Dial.* 47), the Virgin Birth (*Dial.* 48), the millennium (*Dial.* 80), and the suitability of a potentially misleading theological analogy (*Dial.* 128).

⁴⁶The misconception seems to have arisen due, in part, to two related factors: 1) the relatively large number of analyses which have taken as their starting point Hellenistic logos speculation and not Scripture, Justin's starting point; and 2) the general lack of familiarity with Justin's longer and less structured *Dialogue*. Shotwell (*Biblical Exegesis*, 103ff.) rightly notes that while the doctrine of the Logos is an indispensable part of Philo's philosophical system, *it is not indispensable for Justin*: "The Logos is not fundamental for the theology of Justin, but is merely an explanation of the really Christian doctrine of the Son of God." In further support of this conclusion it may be noted that out of 132 uses of the word logos in the *Dialogue* a mere seven refer to Christ (61.1, 3[bis]; 63.5; 84.2; 105.1; 128.2); while the title Angel is used of Christ thirty-five times - a 5:1 ratio!

Why is Justin the "supreme philosopher" (*Hist. eccl.* 4.16.2)? Ironically, or nearly so, it is because he maintained that Christ was an "Angel." In his own words:

Now the Word of God is His Son, as we have before said. And He is called Angel and Apostle; for [as Angel] He declares whatever we ought to know, and [as Apostle] is sent forth to declare whatever is revealed; as our Lord Himself says, "He that heareth Me heareth Him that sent Me."⁴⁷ From the writings of Moses also this will be manifest; for thus it is written in them, "And the Angel of God spake to Moses, in a flame of fire out of the bush, and said, I am that I am, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of thy fathers; go down into Egypt, and bring forth My people." ... But

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so much is written for the sake of proving that Jesus the Christ is the Son of God and His Apostle,⁴⁸ being of old the Word. (*I Apol.* 63)⁴⁹

I have taken great care to prove at length that Christ is the Lord and God the Son, that in times gone by He appeared by His power as man and angel, and in the glory of fire as in the bush, and that He was present to execute the judgment against Sodom... [He] was called Angel because He came to men (since by that power the Father's messages are communicated to men); ... Word, because He reveals to men the discourses of the Father. (*Dial.* 128; Falls's translation)

Theophilus Of Antioch [c. AD 115–181]⁵⁰

Theophilus was also an important theologian and apologist in the early church.⁵¹ His work *To Autolytus* was widely read and references to it (or "echoes" in the case of Irenaeus) appear in the writings of Tertullian, Novatian, Lactantius, and Eusebius.⁵² Theophilus was not just "of Antioch"; he was bishop of Antioch a few generations after the apostles.⁵³ Antioch was the city where believers were first called Christians (Acts 11:26), and it became the home base for Paul's missionary journeys. Antioch was (and remained for some centuries) one of the most important centers of Gentile Christianity. Theophilus' doctrine of God was based on traditional Jewish and Christian material. And though he interpreted this material within the framework developed earlier by Justin,⁵⁴ he did not literally use the title Angel of Christ. All

⁴⁷ Luke 10:16. According to Justin the idea of being "sent" is so closely tied to the title Angel that the idea (or word) *alone* is enough to justify the use of the title. "Now Isaiah shows that those prophets who are sent to publish tidings from God are called angels and apostles. For Isaiah says in a certain place, 'Send me'" (*Dial.* 75; cf. 56, 60, 61, 128). Note the essential equivalence of the terms "angel" and "apostle" in *Dial.* 75 (cf. Fossum, *The Name of God*, 14950, who adduces this as a Samaritanism); and of "angel" and "Logos" in *Dial.* 128. All three terms occur together in *I Apol.* 63, and there appears to be a significant degree of semantic overlap.

⁴⁸ Cf. *I Apol.* 12.9, where Justin says, "our Teacher ... is both Son and Apostle of God the Father."

⁴⁹ According to Trakatellis (*Pre-Existence*, 79), the most important feature of this passage is that "he quotes the theophanic appearance at the burning bush as if it were a part of a creedal statement."

⁵⁰ These are the dates given in *ANF* 2.87-88. Though partly conjectural, they are included here as a corrective to the tendency to see Theophilus as having had a punctiliar existence circa AD 180 (the approximate date of his only extant work, *To Autolytus*).

⁵¹ Space, unfortunately, does not permit a comparable analysis of Theophilus or the remaining Fathers. It must suffice to show that they substantially followed the trajectory set by Justin.

⁵² R. M. Grant, *Theophilus of Antioch: Ad Autolytum* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970) xix. Citations from Theophilus are taken from this work.

⁵³ Already by AD 168, "in the church of the Antiochenes, the famous Theophilus was the sixth from the Apostles" (*Hist. eccl.* 4.20.1).

⁵⁴ Grant, *Theophilus*, xvi; cf. id., *Greek Apologists*, 165.

of the church fathers prior to Augustine attributed the OT theophanies to the Son;⁵⁵ but not all of the Fathers explicitly used

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the title Angel. Nevertheless the validity of the title and their tacit acceptance of it is easy to deduce from their writings, as the following comments by Theophilus make plain:

And they heard the voice of the Lord God, who was walking in paradise in the evening, and Adam and his wife hid from the face [προσωπο] of God in the midst of the trees of paradise. (*Ad Autol.* 2.21)

You will ask me, "You say that God must not be confined in a place; how then do you say that he walks in paradise?" Hear my reply. Indeed the God and Father of the universe is unconfined and is not present in a place, for "there is no place of his rest" [Isa 66:1]. But his Logos, through whom he made all things, who is his "Power and Wisdom" [1 Cor 1:24], assuming the role [προσωπο] of the Father and Lord of the universe, was present in paradise in the role of God and conversed with Adam. For the divine scripture itself teaches us that Adam said that he "heard the voice [φωνη]." What is the "voice" but the Logos of God who is also his Son? ... the Logos, always innate in the heart of God. For before anything came into existence he had this as his Counselor, his own Mind and Intelligence... [He] constantly converses with his Logos... Since the Logos is God⁵⁶ and derived his nature from God, whenever the Father of the universe wills to do so he sends him into some place where he is present and is heard and seen. He is sent by God and is present in a place. (*Ad Autol.* 2.22)

Note the titles which he applies to Christ: was there ever a time when God the Father was without Power, Wisdom, Mind, or Intelligence? And note especially the title Counselor. This title suggests, as Theophilus quickly points out, not only a Person but communication between Persons who are equal.⁵⁷ God, as the Apostle had said, does not take the advice of creatures (Rom 11:34). The Son is himself God; yet he remains distinct from God, i.e., he is

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⁵⁵ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper, 1958) 273. See also the comment in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (ed. P. Schaff and H. Wace; 14 vols.; Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1890-1900) 4.465, n. 7. Here it is noted that:

The Catholic doctrine is that the Son has condescended to become visible by means of material appearances. Augustine seems to have been the first who changed the mode of viewing the texts in question and considered the divine appearance not God the Son, but a created angel. Vid. *de Trin.* ii *passim*.

Augustine also somewhat inconsistently attributed the theophanies to the Trinity, or to the Trinity as seen in the three men/angels (cf. his comments on Genesis 18 in *Adv. Max.* 2.26.5-7). Augustine's theology was, at times, reactionary and the fact that he was arguing against an Arian may have caused him to avoid the traditional view, since it could be accommodated more easily into a subordinationistic framework.

⁵⁶ Theophilus has quoted John 1:13 in the preceding ellipsis.

⁵⁷ There appears to have been a direct connection in the minds of the Fathers between the divine Counselor of Isa 9:6 and the plural pronouns of Gen 1:26. And Theophilus, just prior to his use of the title Counselor, has stated that the "Let us make" of Genesis was spoken by the Father "to none other than his own Logos and his own Sophia (*Ad Autol.* 2.18; cf. *Herm. Sim.* 9.12.2)." Gen 1:26 was a favorite trinitarian text, and it appears throughout the works of Irenaeus and Tertullian; cf. also *Barn.* 5.5, 6.12; and *Dial.* 62. On the patristic use of Gen 1:26 see R. Mcl. Wilson, "The Early History of the Exegesis of Gen. 1.26" in *Studia Patristica* 1.420-37.

with⁵⁸ God the Father. And in the divine economy it is the Son of God who becomes the "Voice"⁵⁹ or "Word" of the Father sent into the world to be heard and seen by men. He is the theophanic presence: he is "the face of God." It is hard to imagine a better definition of the traditional title Angel. The title itself is not needed in order for the concept to be present. Yet Theophilus does not, so far as we know, explicitly use the title Angel.⁶⁰ There are probably several reasons for this: first, Theophilus may have deliberately minimized the title Angel because, like Irenaeus (his contemporary) and Tertullian, he was writing in a context where the title would not be understood in its generic sense as messenger or in its highly specific OT sense as the Angel of the Lord. Christ, in other words, was not merely one of the countless created angels or intermediaries of Gnostic and Jewish apocalyptic speculation. Thus what Justin would have viewed as the apologetic *sin qua non* (i.e., common ground), others gradually began, at least in this instance, to view as a liability.⁶¹

Second, and more importantly, the writings of Theophilus presuppose a fairly explicit trinitarian understanding.⁶² This goes without saying in the case of Tertullian who coined the Latin word *trinitas*. But it must not be forgotten that Theophilus, several decades prior, had used the synonymous Greek word *triad* (*Ad Autol.* 2.15) in reference to the Father (God), the Son (Logos), and the Holy Spirit (Sophia⁶³). The importance and widespread usage of this alternate term should not be underestimated (especially among the Fathers who simultaneously, and copiously, used Tertullian's term). Citations of its use in the early church in

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reference to the Godhead fill six full columns in Lampe.⁶⁴ Theophilus himself introduces the term without elaboration or explanation in a way which suggests that the term was not his own recent invention. His point was not that there was "a Triad," but that "the Triad" (i.e., the well-known Christian Triad) was typologically prefigured in the first three days of creation. We may be too hermeneutically sophisticated to agree with all of the details of his typology, but we must admit the probability that the Triad had to have been known, and possibly for some time, before someone with a good imagination could begin to see it prefigured wherever

⁵⁸ The Greek word *prol'* is often translated "with" and may connote not only personal relationship but "active communion" (cf. BAGD and M. J. Harris in the appendix to *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (3 vols.; ed. C. Brown; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977-78) 3.120-46).

⁵⁹ Cf. J. H. Charlesworth, "The Jewish Roots of Christology: The Discovery of the Hypostatic Voice," *SJT* 39 (1986) 19-41.

⁶⁰ Unfortunately, a number of his significant theological works (e.g., *Against the Heresy of Hermogenes* [cf. *Hist. eccl.* 4.24]) have not survived. Yet the title was presumably available to him given that his numerous quotations of Isaiah in *To Autolycus* tend, on the whole, to conform to that version of the LXX (Vaticanus) which contains it.

⁶¹ It would doubtless be instructive to see how often the title Angel appeared in two of Justin's lost works: *Against all the Heresies* and *Against Marcion* (cf. *1 Apol.* 26.8; *Hist. eccl.* 4.18). One does suspect, however, that if the title appeared in an apology to a pagan emperor, it also would have appeared in these works. We might well imagine Justin saying something like, "You believe that Christ is an 'angel'? So do I. Now turn with me in your Septuagints to..."

⁶² Cf. Athenagoras who, writing in AD 176/7, stated that they are no atheists "who speak of God the Father, and of God the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and who declare both their power in union and their distinction in order" (*Leg.* 10.5; cf. 12.3, 24.2). "Athenagoras owes his theological ideas largely to Justin" (Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 296). And this explanation of the Trinity is essentially a paraphrase of *1 Apol.* 13.

⁶³ Cf. *Ad Autol.* 1.7, 13 where he also refers to the Spirit as Sophia.

⁶⁴ *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, s.v. *trial'*, II.B., 1404-7.

the number three happened to appear.⁶⁵ Thus Theophilus may not have used the title Angel because he was not constrained to do so. As early as AD 180 he already had other terminology whereby, building on the traditional understanding of the OT theophanies, he could adequately and more concisely than Justin express the same concepts. He could simultaneously affirm a radical Jewish monotheism, the Deity of the Son, the Son's existence as a person distinct from the Father, and the Son's unique revelatory role in the divine economy.

Irenaeus Of Lyons [c. AD 130–202]

Irenaeus' single goal was to preserve and transmit intact the apostolic traditions which he himself had received.⁶⁶ And his first and most devastating charge against the Gnostics was that they were speculative innovators whose teachings stood in stark contrast to what had gone before and to what was still being taught in the apostolic churches. As a youth in Smyrna, Irenaeus had been a devoted disciple of Polycarp (*Adv. haer.* 3.3.4; cf. *Mart. Pol.* 22.2; *Hist. eccl.* 5.4, 20). And Polycarp, the last surviving link to the apostles and eyewitnesses, had a profound influence on him. Irenaeus described Polycarp, his mentor and model, as a man who "always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the church has handed down, and which alone are true. To these things all the Asiatic churches testify, as do those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time" (*Adv. haer.* 3.3.4). It is also likely that Irenaeus was at some point

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a student of Justin Martyr.⁶⁷ Thus Justin, like Polycarp, also influenced Irenaeus and his theology.

Irenaeus became bishop of Lyons in AD 177 when his aged predecessor, Pothinus [AD 87–177], was martyred (cf. *Hist. eccl.* 5.1.29–31 and 5.5.8). It was then that "the great work of his life began."⁶⁸ Irenaeus became active in the evangelism of southern Gaul and in the international affairs of the church.⁶⁹ And it was then that he wrote the multi-volume work whose title became his epitaph: *The Refutation and Overthrow of Knowledge Falsely So-called*⁷⁰ (also known as *Against Heresies*). But he also wrote another recently discovered didactic or pastoral work titled *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*.⁷¹ And in both

⁶⁵ An analogy to this psychological phenomenon suggests itself in the way that Justin Martyr, after a lifetime of reflection, is able to see the image of the Cross wherever two objects appear at right angles: e.g., the mast of a ship, the handle of a plow, the human form with "the hands extended," the nose and eyebrows on a face, and the Roman "vexilla" or banners (*1 Apol.* 55).

⁶⁶ Cf. Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 20, 350; E. J. Goodspeed, *A History of Early Christian Literature* (rev. and ed. R. M. Grant; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1966) 119; and F. L. Cross, *The Early Christian Fathers* (London: Duckworth, 1960) 110.

⁶⁷ So, e.g., Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 347 (cf. 237), and Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 244. Cf. also Grant, *Greek Apologists*, 61, who notes that Justin "was Irenaeus' favorite apologist."

⁶⁸ ANF 1.309.

⁶⁹ E.g., in the Easter controversy between Rome and the churches of Asia Minor c. AD 190.

⁷⁰ *Hist. eccl.* 5.7.1. So thoroughly, in fact, did he refute and overthrow the Gnostics that they and their works all but disappeared.

⁷¹ Discovered in 1904, this work, as its title suggests, is primarily a synopsis or overview of biblical doctrine and apostolic preaching. Both of Irenaeus' works are indebted to Justin Martyr (Goodspeed, *Early Christian Literature*, 120–22), the *Demonstration* covering most of the same ground as Justin's *Dialogue* but in a somewhat more concise and orderly fashion (cf. Cyprian's *Testimonia* and Novatian's *On the Trinity*). For a more extensive treatment of Irenaeus and Tertullian's literary dependence on Justin see the appendix in Skarsaune, *Proof From Prophecy*, 435–53.

works Irenaeus refers to Christ as Angel.⁷² However, he did not use the title as extensively as Justin, and he did not use it as often apart from Isa 9:6. As already noted, this was most likely because the Gnostics could have turned careless use of the title to their own advantage. Their esoteric traditions included an elaborate hierarchy of angelic mediators (the fantastic system of Basilides, for example, may have allowed for as many as three hundred sixty-five such beings: one for each of his heavens [cf. *Adv. haer.* 2.35.1]), and they were only too happy to add another to their system. But Isa 9:6 was not only an invaluable messianic text, it was an inseparable part of the *exoteric* tradition which Irenaeus had received and which, as a traditionalist in the best sense of the term, he spent his life teaching and defending.

Thus Irenaeus, though more aware than most of the dangers posed by Gnosticism, used the title Angel five times. However, his view of Christ and the OT strongly supports his acceptance of the title—much more than one might suppose from a mere word count. The nearly universal validity of the title can be deduced from his method of interpreting the Scripture, since it is Jesus throughout who reveals himself as God:

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And how is Christ "the end of the Law" [Rom. 10:4], if He be not also the final cause of it? For He who brought in the end has Himself also wrought the beginning; and it is He who does Himself say to Moses, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people which is in Egypt, and I have come down to deliver them" [Exod 3:7–8]; it being customary from the beginning with the Word of God to ascend and descend [cf. John 3:13] for the purpose of saving those who were in affliction. (*Adv. haer.* 4.12.4)⁷³

This method of interpreting the OT is identical to that of Justin and Theophilus. (It can already be found as early as *The Epistle of Barnabas* [c. AD 70–135]⁷⁴ and Melito of Sardis' *Homily on the Passion* [c. AD 160–170]⁷⁵ although in both works typology remains dominant.) For when we turn to the OT itself, we find that the one speaking to Moses and giving him the law in Exodus 3, the one called Christ and Logos by Irenaeus, is actually the Angel of the Lord. Irenaeus could not have been ignorant of this fact either in Exodus 3 or

⁷² According to Barbel (*Christos Angelos*, 63), Irenaeus avoids the title Angel altogether due to the Gnostic threat. Barbel has correctly perceived the threat, and the subsequent attenuated use of the title, but he has inadvertently overlooked several important passages.

⁷³ This work is replete with references to the OT Christophanies. In one place where he again lists them (4.10.1), he states, "it would be endless to recount [the occasions] upon which the Son of God is shown forth by Moses." Cf. 3.6.12, where Irenaeus mentions the theophanies to demonstrate that the Son is "God, definitely and absolutely": he is "truly God" and may rightly be called "Lord" and even "I Am". Irenaeus again shows his dependence on Justin as he weaves Psalm 110, Genesis 19, and Exodus 3 into his argument.

⁷⁴ This range of dates is given in M. W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) 272. J. B. Lightfoot (*The Apostolic Fathers* [ed. J. R. Harmer; London/New York: Macmillan, 1891] 239–42) dated this epistle to the time of emperor Vespasian [AD 70–79]; as did Robinson (*Redating*, 313–19). On the theophanies, see esp. 14:1–15:1. Here it is the Lord Jesus who, consistent with his appearance in the NT, spoke "face to face" with Moses and gave him the Law and the covenant.

⁷⁵ Melito was the bishop of Sardis (cf. Rev 3:1–6). And his homily on the Passover and Exodus narrative has been well described as "an impressive fusion of rhetoric and theology" (cited in J. I. H. McDonald, "Some comments on the Form of Melito's Paschal Homily," in *Studia Patristica* 12.105). According to Frend (*Rise of Christianity*, 241), "the totality of the incidents refers to Christ and Christ alone." Note esp. *Homily* 81–86. Hanson (*Old Testament*, 15) notes that in attributing the theophanies to Christ, "Melito was drawing on a well-established tradition." Cf. R. A. Norris, *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 9. In addition, Melito had a well-developed two-natures Christology. Christ was "by nature both God and Man" (*Homily* 8; cf. *Homily* 4–10 as well as *Fragments* 6 and 8a, and *New Fragment* 2.4–6, 21–23). Melito makes it abundantly clear in *Homily* 104 what he means by the term God as he calls Christ "Alpha and Omega" and "Beginning and End." For text and translation, see S. G. Hall, *Melito of Sardis On Pascha and Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979).

elsewhere.⁷⁶ Because the one who reveals himself as God in the OT is consistently called the Angel of the Lord, it

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follows that Jesus is the Angel of the Lord. Thus even when he did not explicitly use the title Angel, Irenaeus helped to guarantee the widespread acceptance of Justin's direct use of the title and to make further development and elaboration possible (e.g., such as can be found in the works of Novation and Hippolytus).

It is not possible to understand the meaning, and the importance, of the title in Irenaeus' thought without careful attention to his biblical hermeneutic. But it is also not possible to understand his use of the title without taking into consideration Isa 9:6, which he cites ten times (three times in his most famous work *Against Heresies*; and six times in his lesser known *Demonstration*). For when Irenaeus uses the title Angel, he does so with a view to Isa 9:6. In his first citation of Isa 9:6 in *Against Heresies*, he makes almost nothing of the title but simply cites it matter-of-factly, along with other Messianic titles, in a section proving that Jesus was the Messiah predicted in the OT: "Knowing one and the same Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was announced by the prophets, who from the fruit of David's body was Emmanuel, 'the Angel of great counsel of the Father'" (*Adv. haer.* 3.16.3). This, it will be shown, is a very revealing conflation, since one would have expected the name Emmanuel to have been followed by "God with us" and not "Angel of Great Counsel." In the second citation of Isa 9:6 Irenaeus states the following as proof of the predicted nature of Christ:

For I have shown from the Scriptures, that no one of the sons of Adam is as to everything, and absolutely, called God or named Lord. But that He is Himself in His own right, beyond all men who ever lived, God, and Lord, and King Eternal, and the Incarnate Word proclaimed by all the prophets ... and that He is the Holy Lord, the Wonderful, the Counselor, the Beautiful in appearance, and the Mighty God, coming on the clouds as the Judge of all men—all these things did the Scriptures prophesy of Him. (*Adv. haer.* 3.19.2)⁷⁷

And in the third citation, Irenaeus begins with a proof from Ps 45:7 (cf. Heb 1:8–9) that Jesus is truly God. He then follows this proof with a catena of messianic titles and predictions which include the following: "his name is called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God ... Immanuel ... Word of God ... Son of God ... Son of man" (*Adv. haer.* 4.33.11). He repeats the title "Mighty God" a few lines later to show that Christ was fully God even though in the incarnation He became fully human. The most interesting feature of these citations of Isa 9:6 is not the expected emphasis on the Deity of Christ; it is the fact that Irenaeus has

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followed the Hebrew text two out of three times.⁷⁸ For Irenaeus, against the backdrop of Christ's Deity and "economic" role as One sent to men as teacher, the titles "Angel of Great

⁷⁶ E.g., in *Adv. haer.* 4.5.4, Irenaeus relates that Abraham conversed regularly with the Word of God and was commanded by the Word to sacrifice Isaac (a sacrifice with clear typological overtones). But the OT account (Genesis 22) attributes the command to God/the Angel of the Lord. Irenaeus likewise attributes to the Word the appearance to Balaam; and there again (Num 22:22-35) it is explicitly the Angel of the Lord who appeared.

⁷⁷ This was obviously an important text for the Deity of Christ. And it is interesting that Justin, who appears to have used the LXX consistently in citing Isa 9:6, still retains the alternate title "Mighty God" to prove that Christ is fully God and, therefore, worthy of worship (*Dial.* 76).

⁷⁸ He was familiar with the major Hebrew and Greek versions of the OT, as well as with several lesser known Greek versions such as those of Aquila and Theodotion (e.g., *Adv. haer.* 3.21.1).

Counsel” and Counselor/Mighty God were interchangeable if not actually synonymous. This Angel was God.

Irenaeus was determined to uphold the elementary truths of the apostolic tradition, and in Isa 9:6 he found a single text with which he could uphold two truths: Christ was both “angel,” sent by God, and “Mighty God” himself. Regardless of which version he cited, he was certain to say something “apostolic” and with that, it seems, he was content. The fact that he did not view these two truths as being contradictory indicates that he saw them as two ways of expressing a single truth about one person. The validity of the two ascriptions, and the remarkable synthesis of titles (Angel and Mighty God), was certainly not dependent on a single proof-text.

Irenaeus’ *Demonstration* is similar in its basic interpretive strategy: all of the OT Theophanies were appearances of Christ. It was Christ, “the Word of God,” who walked with Adam in the Garden of Eden “prefiguring what was to come to pass in the future, how He would become man’s fellow, and talk with him, and come among mankind, teaching them justice” (*Dem.* 12).⁷⁹ It was Christ, “the Son of God,” who appeared to Abraham as God and Lord in Genesis 18;⁸⁰ to Jacob in Genesis 28;⁸¹ and to Moses in Exodus 3.⁸² In fact, it was not God the Father “but the Word of God, who was always with mankind, and foretold what was to come to pass in the future, and acquainted man with God” (*Dem.* 45).

This work also follows his earlier *Against Heresies* in its use of different versions of Isa 9:6 in spite of the fact that, as a rule, Irenaeus strongly favored the authority and inspiration of the LXX (*Adv. haer.* 3.21). He cites Isa 9:6 four times in his *Demonstration* in agreement with the Hebrew text. And each citation is again made

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in order to demonstrate the unqualified Deity of Christ. In the first of these, for example, Irenaeus argues for the absolute supremacy of Christ based on the fact that he is both fully man and fully God:

Thus, then, does the Word of God “in all things hold the primacy,” [Col 1:18] for He is true man and “Wonderful Counselor and God the Mighty,” calling man back again into communion with God... He who spoke with Moses—He came into Judea, begotten by God of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary, of her who was of the seed of David and of Abraham: Jesus, God’s anointed, showing Himself to be the one who had been preached in advance through the prophets. (*Dem.* 40)⁸³

In the second citation of Isa 9:6, Irenaeus adduces the titles “Wonderful Counselor,” “God the Mighty” to explain the name Emmanuel. The one born of the Virgin, simply put, was God and was with us (*Dem.* 54). And in the third and fourth citations Irenaeus likewise emphasizes the Deity of Christ by means of the title “God the Mighty.” But he also makes an

⁷⁹ Citations of Irenaeus’ *Demonstration* are taken from the translation by J. P. Smith, *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 16 (ed. J. Quasten and J. C. Plumpe; Westminster: Newman, 1952). In *Dem.* 45-46 Irenaeus again states that the one who appeared to the patriarchs was “the Word of God, who was always with mankind, and foretold what was to come to pass in the future, and acquainted man with God ... for in these things our affairs were being rehearsed, the Word of God at that time prefiguring what was to be.”

⁸⁰ *Dem.* 24, 44-45. Irenaeus also adds from Gen 19:24 that it was the Son who, as the Lord on earth, rained fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah from the Lord in heaven (i.e., from “the Father”).

⁸¹ *Dem.* 45. These last two passages in particular have a long and distinguished history of interpretation. For an excellent diachronic survey of Jewish and patristic interpretation of Genesis 18 and Genesis 28 see Miller, *Mysterious Encounters*.

⁸² “He it was who spoke with Moses in the bush, and said: ‘I have indeed seen the affliction of my people in Egypt, and I am come down to deliver them’” (*Dem.* 46; cf. *Dem.* 2 and 40).

⁸³ Irenaeus goes on in this passage (cf. *Dem.* 55) to emphasize Christ’s role as teacher.

explicit connection to Gen 1:26: "For He is here seen clearly, the Father addressing the Son, as Wonderful Counselor of the Father" (*Dem.* 55). To this Irenaeus adds the pastoral insight that even though Christ is God, he graciously condescends to be our Counselor as well.

Irenaeus immediately goes on, however, to cite Isa 9:6 twice *according to the LXX text in which the title Angel appears*. He gives no indication that anything is amiss or that there is the slightest tension between the titles Angel and Mighty God. He explains his citation as follows:

And again Isaiah says: "And they shall wish that they had been burnt with fire; for a child is born to us, and a son is given to us, whose government is set upon His shoulders; and His name is called Messenger of Great Counsel." ... But the words "whose government is set upon His shoulders" mean allegorically the Cross, on which He held His back when He was crucified.⁸⁴ ... And he says "Messenger of Great Counsel": messenger of the Father, whom he announced to us. (*Dem.* 56)

The title Angel is also found in the collected fragments of Irenaeus' writings. The first instance occurs in a discussion of the false prophet Balaam: "Now the Angel who appeared to Balaam was the Word Himself; and in His hand He held a sword, to indicate the power which he had from above."⁸⁵ And the second occurs in an impressive catena of traditional Christological titles. Here Christ is described as:

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eternal King ... perfect Intelligence ... Word of God ... Founder of the universe ... Maker of man ... He is All in all: Patriarch among the patriarchs; Law in the laws; chief Priest among priests; Ruler among kings; the Prophet among prophets; the Angel among angels; the Man among men; son in the Father; God in God; King to all eternity.⁸⁶

Although he used the traditional title Angel, Irenaeus was very clear that Christ was not a created Angel. Christ was not by nature an angel but only functioned as a "messenger"⁸⁷ or "teacher"⁸⁸ in God's "economy."⁸⁹ A verse that he adduces to underscore this crucial point is Isa 63:9. According to the LXX text favored by the Fathers, this verse says that it was God himself—and not a created angel—who came to save his people. God, in other words, does not delegate the task of salvation. This verse was widely quoted by the Fathers and applied to Christ.⁹⁰ In particular, it was the Fathers who used and promoted the title Angel (e.g.,

⁸⁴ Cf. *1 Apol.* 35.

⁸⁵ *Fragment* 23 in ANF 1.572.

⁸⁶ ANF 1.577. This passage from Irenaeus has been preserved in both a Syriac (*Fragment* 53) and an Armenian version (*Fragment* 54).

⁸⁷ In *Adv. haer.* 4.6.3, for example, Irenaeus says in language reminiscent of Justin that "the Son performs the good pleasure of the Father; for the Father sends, and the son is sent and comes." The mere fact that the Son was sent proves the validity of the title Angel.

⁸⁸ Again, almost every citation of Isa 9:6 by Irenaeus includes some mention of Christ's role as teacher, that is, as Counselor. Cf. *Dial.* 76.

⁸⁹ One of Irenaeus' clearest statements on the economic or functional nature of the Trinity is found in *Dem.* 47 (cf. *Dem.* 57):

Therefore the Father is Lord, and the Son is Lord, and the Father is God and the Son is God; for He who is born of God is God. And thus God is shown to be one according to the essence of His being and power; but at the same time, as administrator of the economy of our redemption, He is both Father and Son: since the Father of all is inaccessible to creatures, it is through the Son that those who are to approach God must have access to the Father.

He goes on from this to cite Psalm 45 and Psalm 110 to prove the Deity of Christ.

⁹⁰ The primitive Passover Haggadah also echoes the language of Isa 63:9 but in stark contrast to the use made by the Fathers. Cf. Daube, "Messianic Presence," 326.

Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen, Eusebius, Athanasius, etc.)⁹¹ who cited this text often. This is conclusive proof, were it needed, that when the Fathers ascribed the title Angel to Christ they did not mean that he was a created spirit. Irenaeus refers to Isa 63:9 on four separate occasions:

On this account, therefore, the Lord Himself, who is Emmanuel from the Virgin, is the sign of our salvation, since "it was the Lord Himself who saved them," because they could not be saved by their own instrumentality... "He will come Himself and will save us."⁹² ... Again, that it should not be a mere man who should save us, nor [one] without flesh—for the angels are without flesh—[the same prophet] announced, saying, "neither an elder, nor angel, but the

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Lord Himself will save them because He loves them and will spare them: He will Himself set them free." (*Adv. Haer.* 3.20.3–4)

And Isaiah says that those who served God are in the end to be saved through His name... And that He was Himself to bring about these blessings in person, Isaiah declared in the words: "Not an intercessor, nor an angel, but the Lord Himself has given them life, because He loves them and has pity on them; He Himself redeemed them." (*Dem.* 88)

So through the new calling a change of heart comes about in the Gentiles, through the Word of God, when He became incarnate and tabernacled with men, as also His disciple John says: "and His Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." For this reason, too, the Church bears fruit in so great a number of saved, for it is no more by an intercessor, Moses, or by Elijah's angel,⁹³ that we are saved, but by the Lord Himself. (*Dem.* 94)

Thus what appears to be a contradiction at the purely verbal level, and an antithetical juxtaposition of texts and versions, is actually a profound synthesis of traditional and biblical material. Christ is the Mighty God. And though he is rightly called Angel, he is emphatically not a created angel.

Tertullian [AD 145–220]⁹⁴

The great Latin Father Tertullian "had obviously studied his various predecessors intensively," and he "has not abandoned any of the traditional material of the old apologetics."⁹⁵ Thus Tertullian also refers to Christ as Angel. But he hesitates to make extensive use of the title. When he wrote it was too easy for the title to be misunderstood.⁹⁶ But Tertullian has a decided advantage over many of his predecessors. He has at his disposal the word "Trinity" and the nexus of inter-related terms such as *substantia*, *status*, *gradus*,

⁹¹ The earliest reference to Isa 63:9 appears to be *Ep. Diog.* 7 [c. AD 129].

⁹² This citation is from Isa 35:3-4, a passage familiar to Justin as well (*Dial.* 69).

⁹³ Possibly a reference to 1 Kgs 19:5 (a slightly obscure instantiation of Isaiah's soteriological maxim); or possibly a scribal error - the intended reference may be to "Isaiah's angel," that is, to the *created angel* mentioned in Isa 63:9.

⁹⁴ *ANF* 3.3. Here it is also suggested (4) that Tertullian may have lived until as late as AD 240. This later date is accepted by Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 253.

⁹⁵ H. von Campenhausen, *The Fathers of the Latin Church* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969) 11 and 13.

⁹⁶ He is aware of some half a dozen false ways that the title Angel has been used to describe Christ (*De carn.* 14). And he is particularly wary of Jewish angelic speculations such as those of the Ebionites who held that Christ was a mere man in whom dwelt an "angel" or "spirit" of prophecy (cf. Daniélou, *Latin Christianity*, 139-88, esp. 139-61). It was for this reason, as well as for its offer of forgiveness for post-baptismal sins, that Tertullian derided *The Shepherd of Hermas*.

persona, and *oikonomia* (Tertullian here retaining the traditional Greek term used by Justin and Irenaeus).⁹⁷ Thus he is not dependent on the title Angel to distinguish the Son from the

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Father as a person in his own right. His acceptance of the title in spite of this testifies eloquently that the title is traditional and conceptually parallel to his own more precise formulations:

He has been, it is true, called "the Angel of great counsel," that is, a messenger, by a term expressive of official function, not of nature. For He had to announce to the world the mighty purpose of the Father, even that which ordained the restoration of man. But He is not on this account to be regarded as an angel, as a Gabriel or a Michael. (*De carn.* 14)⁹⁸

Tertullian concludes the chapter from which the above citation is taken with a proof of the absolute Deity and authority of Christ. And, interestingly, Isa 63:9 is integral to that proof.⁹⁹ If by the term "angel" Tertullian meant a created being, it is hard to imagine a more striking contradiction within the space of just a few lines (especially if one takes seriously Tertullian's forensic training). Clearly, in applying both Isa 9:6 and 63:9 to Christ in the same chapter, Tertullian shows that Christ is not by nature an angel. Nevertheless it is legitimate to use the title Angel as a functional description.¹⁰⁰

For Tertullian Christ is by nature God and Lord. By God Tertullian meant "verily God" (*De carn.* 14). And by Lord Tertullian meant Lord absolutely. He states categorically that "the Father is Lord, and the Son also is Lord. A much more ancient testimony¹⁰¹ we have also in Genesis: "Then the Lord rained down upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven" (*Adv. Prax.* 13).¹⁰² No, says Tertullian, it is not the Christians who believe that Christ was a created angel. Rather, it is "the heretics, who ... make the Creator Himself to have been either an angel or some subordinate agent" (*Adv. Prax.* 19). The Fathers are

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emphatic: angels had no part in creation (cf. *Dial.* 62; *Adv. haer.* 3.11.2 and 4.20.1).

Tertullian refers to Isa 9:6 on two other occasions but avoids, or at least does not mention, the title Angel (*Adv. Marc.* 3.19; *Adv. Jud.* 10.11). In both places he uses Isa 9:6 to show, in words almost identical to those of his predecessors (e.g., *I Apol.* 35; *Dem.* 56), that the child to be born was the Son of God and the "King of ages"; and that the cross which was

⁹⁷ On Tertullian's theological vocabulary (esp. *substantia*, which appears over three hundred times in his works), see Daniélou, *Latin Christianity*, 343–66.

⁹⁸ Tertullian adds to this, though not without some hesitation, "the Son is actually an Angel [angelum], that is, a Messenger [nuntium], from the Father."

⁹⁹ Neither, indeed, was ever used by Christ that familiar phrase of all the prophets, "Thus saith the Lord." For He was Himself the Lord, who openly spake by His own authority, prefacing His words with the formula, "Verily, verily, I say unto you." What need is there of further argument? Hear what Isaiah says in emphatic words, "It was no angel, nor deputy, but the Lord Himself who saved them." (*De carn.* 14)

Tertullian also cites Isa 63:9 in *Adv. Marc.* 4.22 to prove that Christ was not a created angel.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Adv. Jud.* 9; *Adv. Marc.* 3.16. In both passages Tertullian (following Justin) argues that the "angel" of Exod 23:20–23 is Joshua; and that the title accurately describes his "office." But Joshua is presented as a type of Christ, and thus Tertullian implies that the title accurately describes Christ's office as well.

¹⁰¹ That is, more ancient than Ps 45:6–7, John 1:1, Ps 110:1, etc.

¹⁰² Tertullian's Latin text reads "Dominus ... a Domino." But compare this with his citation of Gen 19:24 in *Adv. Prax.* 16. There the Latin text reads "Deus a Deo" which our translation (cited below) renders as "the LORD from the LORD." Although Tertullian was forced at times to make subtle distinctions between the words Lord and God (e.g., *Adv. Herm.* 3), he often used them interchangeably.

placed on his shoulders revealed his kingly glory and dominion. Although Tertullian hesitates to use the title Angel apart from the reference to Isa 9:6 noted above, he categorically and without hesitation refers all of the OT theophanies to Christ (e.g., *Adv. Jud.* 9; *Adv. Marc.* 2.27, 3.9, and 5.19).¹⁰³ In doing so he is clearly following in the footsteps of *Barnabas*, Justin, Melito, Theophilus, and Irenaeus. There is thus some justification for his claim that this belief was part of the Rule of Faith common to all the churches (even if it cannot finally be demonstrated that it was handed down by Christ himself):

It is the Son, therefore, who has been from the beginning administering judgment, throwing down the haughty tower, and dividing the tongues,¹⁰⁴ punishing the whole world by the violence of waters, raining upon Sodom and Gomorrah fire and brimstone, as the LORD from the LORD. For He it was who at all times came down to hold converse with men, from Adam¹⁰⁵ on to the patriarchs and the prophets... Thus was He ever learning even as God to converse with men upon earth, being none 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. (*Adv. Prax.* 16; cf. *De carn.* 6)

Now with regard to this Rule of Faith—that we may from this point acknowledge what it is which we defend—it is, you must know, that which prescribes the belief that there is one only God, and that He is none other than the Creator of the world, who produced all things out of nothing through His own Word, first of all sent forth; that this Word is called His Son, *and*, under the name of God, was seen “in diverse manners” by the patriarchs, heard at all times in the prophets, at last brought down by the Spirit and Power of the Father into the Virgin Mary, was made flesh ... crucified, He rose again the third day ... ascended into the heavens ... sat at the right hand of the

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Father; sent ... the Holy Ghost ... will come with glory... This Rule, as it will be proved, was taught by Christ. (*De praesc.* 13)¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Hippolytus, Clement, Origen, Cyprian, Novatian, Victorinus, Eusebius, Athanasius, Hilary, Epiphanius, the Apostolic Constitutions: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrote martyrdoms, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of heretics, quenched the violence of fire, turned to flight the armies of the demons. And these all referred to Christ by the title Angel (suggesting the paradoxical possibility that they still await the perfecting of our historical theology). But was it *taught by Christ*? It is, of course, possible that Tertullian’s claim is an exaggeration. However, it is also possible that his claim is an inference: one based as much on revelation as on the Rule of Faith.

¹⁰³ Cf. *De carn.* 6 (it was the Son who appeared to Abraham); and *Adv. Prax.* 14 (it was Christ who wrestled with Jacob). Tertullian’s works are replete with statements such as these.

¹⁰⁴ Gen 11:1-9 appears in such lists (cf. *Dial.* 127) because in addition to relating a theophany, the passage (Gen 11:7; cf. 1:26) contained a significant plural pronoun.

¹⁰⁵ Tertullian later in this passage states, in terms reminiscent of Theophilus, that it was the Son who asked Adam, “Where art thou?” (Gen 3:9). He also adds that it was the Son who tested Abraham by asking him to offer up Isaac (Genesis 22).

¹⁰⁶ Justin speaks similarly: “we were enjoined by Christ Himself to put no faith in human doctrines, but in those proclaimed by the blessed prophets and taught by Himself” (*Dial.* 48).

Justin's affinity to Johannine theology has already been noted.¹⁰⁷ For John, Christ was always the Logos, the Messenger, and Revealer of the Father. But for John Christ was also God. And it was Christ's glory which was seen in all of the OT theophanies: cf. John 1:14–18,¹⁰⁸ 3:13, 8:12,¹⁰⁹ 56–59, and 12:41. (While this may seem

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like a hasty generalization, we are virtually compelled to it by John's view of the transcendence and invisibility of the Father.)¹¹⁰ But John is not unique in this regard. That the preexistent Son of God was active in the OT is axiomatic to much of the NT. The best known passage is 1 Cor 10:1–4. But note also 1 Cor 10:9 and Jude 5. For in the latter two passages the best textual readings¹¹¹ place Christ squarely into the Exodus theophanies.¹¹² It is not simply a matter of typology, but of the "real presence" of Christ. Christ, as Hanson has

¹⁰⁷ In fact, it appears to be virtually impossible to discuss the Johannine Christ without at some point having recourse to the title "Messenger." E.g., Howard, *Christianity According to St. John*, 33; W. Manson, *The Incarnate Glory* (London: Clarke, n.d.) 138ff.; D. G. Vanderlip, *Christianity According to John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 47 (cf. 64), 103; R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* (2 vols.; New York: Seabury, 1980) 2.88, 211, 224. Rowland (*Christian Origins*, 246ff.) prefers the term "emissary."

¹⁰⁸ Cf. the article by A. T. Hanson, "John 1:14-18 and Exodus 34," *NTS* 23 (1976) 90-101, esp. 90-97. The scholarly consensus favors a reference here to the theophanies of Exodus 33-34; in particular, an explicit reference in John 1:14 ("full of grace and truth") to Exod 34:6. As Hanson says:

According to John, on those occasions in Israel's history when God is described as being seen, it was not in fact God who was seen, but the Logos. John says this *totidem verbis* in 12:41, where he describes Isaiah's vision in the Temple as Isaiah having seen Jesus glory; in other words, Jahweh Sabaoth is the Logos. (John 1:14-18, 96)

This last passage (John 12:41) is significant due not only to what is said (e.g., the loaded word *glory*), but to the off-hand way in which it is introduced, i.e., abruptly and without elaboration. The statement reveals an assumption fundamental to the whole Gospel. It is, moreover, the simplest assumption which accounts for all the data, NT and Patristic. Was Jesus fully God? Did Jesus pre-exist? Perhaps the questions are moot. These two doctrines were not the culmination but the fountainhead of Christology. Dunns unqualified statement is surely premature: "There is no evidence that any NT writer thought of Jesus as actually present in Israel's past, either as the angel of the Lord, or as the Lord himself" [emphasis his] (*Christology*, 158).

¹⁰⁹ A number of scholars have pointed out the significance of the imagery surrounding the Feast of Tabernacles: in particular the lighting of the candelabra alluded to here in John 8:12. Jesus is the true light of the world, and interwoven into his [Johns] festal pattern is the presentation of Jesus as the true fiery pillar (R. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975] 15354; cited approvingly by D. A. Carson, John and the Johannine Epistles in *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture: Essays in Honor of Barnabas Lindars, SSF* [ed. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988] 255). Cf. also Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 33738; and R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (AB 29; 2 vols.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) 1.34344. It is also possible to detect echoes of Gen 2:7 in John 20:21; and echoes of both Sinai and Dan 7:9 in the Synoptic transfiguration accounts.

¹¹⁰ John 1:18; 4:24; 5:37; 6:46; and 14:79; cf. 1 Tim 6:16. This very line of argument is a central feature of Patristic exegesis: no one has seen God at any time (John 1:18; Exod 33:20), yet God was seen. Thus, either no one has seen *the Father* at any time, or the Bible flatly contradicts itself. See for example, *Dial.* 127; *Adv. haer.* 4.20; and *Adv. Prax.* 14-15.

¹¹¹ On the former passage see UBS³ and C. D. Osburn's conclusive, "The Text of 1 Corinthians 10:9," in *New Testament Textual Criticism: Its Significance for Exegesis: Essays in Honour of Bruce M. Metzger* (ed. E. J. Epp and G. D. Fee; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) 201-12. On the latter passage see C. D. Osburn, "The text of Jude 5," *Bib* 62 (1981) 107-15; and J. Fossum, "Kyrios Jesus as the Angel of the Lord in Jude 57," *NTS* 33 (1987) 226-43. On both passages see B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London/New York: UBS, 1975) 560 and 723-24.

¹¹² Cf. also Heb 11:26 (easily reduced to the level of platitude); and John 5:46 and 8:56 (often understood only as vaguely predictive).

capably argued in his several books on the subject, can hardly be a type of himself.¹¹³ And even if Hanson has been guilty of overstating his case, the basic thesis appears to be as sound¹¹⁴ as it is unoriginal.

The OT theophanies were Christophanies. But if this is the case, then the title Angel is an almost inevitable development, given the pre-Christian messianic status of Isa 9:6 and the prominence of the Angel of the Lord in the OT theophanies.¹¹⁵ The question is not, how could the Fathers have come up with such a

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title? But rather, how could they possibly have avoided it? And again, if this is the case, then the trinitarian formulations of Nicea are also an almost inevitable development.¹¹⁶ Prior to the advent of Arianism the Nicene formulations had been, so to speak, in solution. But they crystallized quickly with the addition of the necessary catalyst.¹¹⁷ For it was not the old "Angel-Christology and the [new] Trinitarian dogma of Nicea" which were "absolutely incompatible."¹¹⁸ It was instead the old Angel-Christology (i.e., the apostolic tradition) and the new Arianism which were absolutely incompatible. In a very real sense the old Angel Christology was the new Nicene orthodoxy: a fact which accounts for the continued popularity of the title Angel *after Nicea* among the orthodox Fathers. Justin Martyr, it has well been said, "is easy to underestimate."¹¹⁹ Yet at the same time one must also be careful not to overestimate him. For all his genius, he was not a theological innovator. And when all is said and done, he may not have been the one who set the trajectory to Nicea and beyond. That prodigious feat may have required a greater than Justin.

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¹¹³ In particular note his *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament*.

¹¹⁴ F. F. Bruce, "Scripture and Tradition in the New Testament," in *Holy Book and Holy Tradition* (ed. F. F. Bruce and E. G. Rupp; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 84-86; id., *The New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 35-36.

¹¹⁵ Note as well the prominence of Mal 3:1 in the gospels. John the Baptist was the certified forerunner of "the Angel of the Covenant," i.e., the Angel of the Lord. For the identification of these two angels see C. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*. Vol. 10, *Minor Prophets* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 456-59; J. G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (TOTC; London: Inter-Varsity, 1972) 242-43; R. L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (WBC; Waco: Word, 1984) 327-28; and P. A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai & Malachi* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 287-90.

¹¹⁶ Cf. C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 1-10.

¹¹⁷ Cf. H. O. J. Brown, *Heresies: The Image of Christ in the Mirror of Heresy and Orthodoxy from the Apostles to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984); Turner, *Pattern*.

¹¹⁸ Werner, *Formation*, 137 (cf. 159).

¹¹⁹ Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought*, 20.