

Numenius and Greek Sources of Justin's Theology

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Introduction

Someone estimated that there have been about 23,000 Christianities. I would venture to say further that there are probably as many Christianities as there are believers claiming to be Christians. Such a statement, however, is not productive for the evaluation of evolution of a religion. It would be better if we could differentiate some general patterns in the development of a key religious doctrine. It seems that the evolution of Christianity can be analyzed in terms of four general patterns:

1. Jewish messianism with the figure of the messiah as a glorified man and the expected earthly Kingdom of God. This is the basic message of the Gospels.
2. Hellenistic Christianity in its two forms: in one the messiah figure was transformed into cosmic Greek Logos; and the other Gnostic, in which Logos is only one of many divine manifestations.
3. Trinitarian or syncretic Christianity which tends to reemphasize the unitarian character of the divinity preserving the Greek triadic speculations and incorporating especially the Egyptian triune doctrine.
4. Servetian unitarian Christianity which interprets divinity and its manifestations as a historical, modalistic process.

My interest in studying Christianity is focused on the evolution of this religion and finding the sources of theological doctrines and links between its various stages.

Justin Martyr (114-165 C.E.) is the first Christian apologist who speculated on religious matters in philosophical terms of his time and developed one of the first systems of Christian theological thought.ⁱ Due to his background in Greek schooling, he reinterpreted the story of the New Testament in terms of Greek religious-philosophical concepts just like Philo reinterpreted the Old Testament, and followed his road to Hellenization of the Hebrew myth. The primary influence exerted on him was the writings of Philo of Alexandria, whom he mentions by name three times in the *Dialogue with Trypho*,ⁱⁱ and the Greek Middle Platonic philosopher Numenius.

Justin's Triadic Formula

When Justin mentions that Christians believe in the Triad -- the Most true God who is the Father, the Second (God), and the Third (God) -- he refers directly to the discussion among his contemporary Middle Platonists. We have testimony of this discussion preserved in the fragments of the philosophical writings of Numenius of Apamea in Syria (fl. ca 150 C.E.).ⁱⁱⁱ We know nothing about his life. Johannes Laurentius Lydus (ca 410-465 C.E.), a Byzantine philosopher, mentions his name with the sobriquet Roman (Νουμήνιος ὁ Ῥωμαῖος) which would indicate that Numenius stayed in Rome.^{iv} His name is mentioned by Clement of Alexandria (ca 150-215 C.E.).^v Preserved fragments are from: *On the Good* (Περὶ τὰ γαθοῦ), a work modeled on the dialogues of Plato; a treatise, *On the Infidelity of the Academy to Plato* (Περὶ τῆς Ἀκαδημαϊκῆς πρὸς Πλάτωνα διαστάσεως); *On the Secrets of Plato* (Περὶ τῶν παρὰ Πλάτωνι πορρήτων); *On the Incorruptibility of the Soul* (Περὶ φθαρσίας ψυχῆς).

The triadic speculations are nothing new. We find them in Greek philosophy, as well as in Egyptian religion.^{vi} Particularly striking is the agreement of the Numenius doctrine with that presented in the so-called *Chaldaean Oracles*.^{vii} The reason probably is because both the Numenius and the *Chaldaean Oracles* have the same source, namely, the Platonic tradition via Xenocrates. This was the current theological doctrine of the second century. Numenius, in turn, influenced the Christian apologist, Justin, the Greek philosophers Plotinus and Porphyry, and later Eusebius of Caesarea.

Greek Sources of Justin's Theology

Xenocrates of Chalcedon^{viii} (d. 314 B.C.E.) was the second successor of Plato in his Academy after Speusippus. We have only fragments of their writings and testimonies left by others about their doctrines. They both elaborated further on the existence of cosmic principles stated by Plato in his *Philebus*.^{ix} Eventually such speculations led to the abandonment of the theory of Ideas as separate entities and to postulating the Ideas as the thoughts of the divine intellect. As Pythagoras ascribed a great role to the numbers and Plato described the cosmos as an expression of geometrical and mathematical regularities,^x it seems that Speusippus and Xenocrates substituted numbers for the Ideas just fusing the ideal and mathematical entities. Xenocrates, however, claimed that there are no separate numbers from sensible things.^{xi}

Xenocrates's philosophy constitutes an important transition to Middle Platonism. He derived everything that exists from the supreme Monad (ἓκ τοῦ Ἐνοῦ) identified with the Intellect and from the Non-One (ἐνάον) which he identified with matter or the indefinite Dyad (ἡ ὀρηστος δυάς) due to its multiplicity.^{xii} He tried to preserve the Platonic concept of Ideas as the models of things so he treated them as numbers because just as numbers are defining things, so Ideas are defining matter. They are the invisible, comprehensible by intellect, and incorporeal principles of the sensible reality imparted from the supreme Monad.

In his theology, Xenocrates^{xiii} differentiated two cosmic principles as divinities -- the Monad (Ὁ μονάς) and the Dyad (ἡ δυάς). One was the masculine divinity, and, as such, had a role of the Father and ruled in heaven. He proclaimed it to be the one (singular) and the intellect. This was the supreme deity, the First God, immovable and unchanging, called Zeus. The other was the feminine divinity, that had a role of the Mother of Gods and ruled over the gods beneath the heaven -- she was the Soul of the Universe. Clement of Alexandria ascribed to Xenocrates the distinction between Zeus the supreme God, the Father, and the other inferior God, the Son (τον μὴ ἄπατον Δία, τὴν δὲ νέατον καλῶν, ἡμφασιν πατρὶς πολεῖπει καὶ υἱὸς).

Others, like Tertullian, claimed that Xenocrates differentiated only two groups of Gods: the astral Olympians and the Titans derived from earth. Thus the astral bodies would be the instruments of the Monad, and the sublunar Titans and Demons linked to the invisible corporeal elements would represent the manifestations of the Dyad.

Numenius: Immediate Source of Justin's Theology

Numenius is most interesting because he developed further such concepts of Greek philosophical tradition (as One, Demiurge, Father, Logos, Mother, World Soul) into a theological system by introducing explicitly a system of hierarchical cosmic entities, two or three Gods, interrelated by πρόσχησις, which signifies a desired dependence and provenance. Such a conception could have an appeal to the philosophically oriented early Christians who operated within the framework of the biblical formulations. Moreover, Numenius was acquainted with the Hebrew and Christian scriptural tradition,^{xiv} a fact which could have gained for him sympathy from the Christian side. Eusebius praised Numenius for deriving his ideas from Plato and Moses. Numenius himself declared Plato to be just "Moses who speaks the Attic language."^{xv} There is a complete correlation between the two systems, that of Justin and that of Numenius (**Table 1**). The major difference is in the identification by Justin of the historical Jesus with the Second and subordinate Divinity, and his transformation into a cosmic being: Christ, Logos or Son of God.

The starting point for Justin, as well as later for Tertullian, is the baptismal formula which had a significance defined by its Hebrew and ritualistic original character. Justin and Tertullian added to it a cosmic dimension and transferred it from the religious platform to the philosophical level explaining it in cosmic ontological terms. Justin was influenced by the triadic Middle Platonic solution of Numenius and adopted his cosmic ontological concepts to Christian historical mythology. Tertullian will mix it later with the Egyptian trinitarian pattern.^{xvi}

The innovation which was introduced by Numenius to the Pythagorean-Platonic religious doctrines was the introduction of a second transcendental and noetic entity between the supreme being and the universe. He, undoubtedly influenced by Plato's statement about the three principles in the universe transmitted by Xenocrates, derived the concept of the three Gods from distinguishing "all things in their rank and order." First, after thorough analysis of the Platonic concepts of Being and Becoming, he establishes, that which exists is incorporeal (σώματος) and intelligible (νοητόν), and has the name of Substance and Being (τοῦ σώματος εἶναι Ἦνομα

οὐσίαν καὶ Ἐν).^{xvii} Having established that Existing Substance and the Idea are intelligible and the Mind is their cause, Numenius concludes that the Mind alone is Good.^{xviii} Now from the life-process of the supreme Divinity (Mind) he derives his statement about the three Gods (or Minds):

The First God, who exists in himself, is simple; for as He absolutely deals with none but Himself, He is in no way divisible; however, the Second God and the Third God are One. When however this (unity) is brought together with Matter, which is Doubleness, the (One Divinity) indeed unites it, but is by Matter split, inasmuch as Matter is full of desires, and in a flowing condition. But inasmuch as He is not only in relation with the Intelligible, which would be more suitable to His own nature, He forgets himself, while He gazes on Matter, and cares for it. He comes into touch with the Perceptible, and busies Himself with it; He leads it up into His own nature, because He was moved by desire for Matter.^{xix}

Thus the First God is characterized as the First Mind, the Good-in-itself (αὐτοαγαθον), Self-existence (αὐτὶ Ἐν). He exists in himself, is simple and not divisible.^{xx} He does not create and remains idle (ργόν) from all the labors of the creation as would a king.^{xxi}

The Second God, the Creator (ποιητής, δημιουργός) rules by passing through the heavens. What is his function? On his passage the mind is projected down to earth on all who are destined to participate. Whenever the divinity looks on any of us, life and animation of bodies is the result, and whenever the divinity turns himself toward himself, all animation is extinguished.^{xxii}

The Second Divinity remains in a subordinate position to the First One. As the Creative Divinity he is the principle of Becoming (γένεσεως), so must the Good be principle of existing Being (οὐσίας). And the Creative Divinity is analogous to the First, so must Becoming be related to Being (Substance), because he is his image (εἰκόνα) and imitation (μίμημα).^{xxiii}

The Second Divinity in this theory is the Demiurge who has a double character -- either he participates in the First God, then he is called the Second God, or he turns himself to the matter and produces the World out of formless matter (since his nature is being Creator), then he is called the Third God and even may be regarded as the World. His essence, too, inasmuch as he is the Good of Becoming, must be Good-in-itself connatural or cognate (σύμφυτον) to the substance of the First God. Thus Numenius classifies the Demiurge, the Second God, as analogous to the First God, his image and imitation.

The Second God and the Third God are one whenever he is united with the Matter (dyad). Because the Second God not only remains in relation with the intelligible (appropriate for his nature), but also with the perceptible, so, whenever he gazes on

Matter, he forgets himself and comes into touch with the perceptible moved by desire for Matter.^{xxiv}

In this philosophy, since the First transcendental God was unknown to man, did not create, was impassible, and contented himself with contemplation, the Second God was needed as an agent of creation and animation. Moreover, if it was not necessary for the First God to create, then he could be considered the Father of the Second God, the Demiurge. And it was for reason of piety that Numenius denied the direct creative function to the First God. The

Demiurge rules in heaven, and is busy with both the intelligible and the sensible, through him happens all that happens.^{xxv} Just as the pilot who sails at sea and looks to the sky to find his way, similarly does the Creator that is linked to matter by many connections, regulates its harmony through ideas. By looking up to God on high he receives his critical judgment, but his impulsive motion from the desire for Matter.^{xxvi}

And we humans exist in our terrestrial life when the Intellect (animation) is sent down to us. When God looks at us and turns to each one, the bodies become alive by uniting with his radiation (divine *nous*). When God turns away, all that animation is extinguished while the Intellect continues its blissful life.^{xxvii}

The participatory relation between the First God and the Second God Numenius illustrates by using several analogies: that of a farmer and planter, that of donor and receiver, of a fire kindled from another fire, of knowledge partaken by the receiver from the donor.^{xxviii} This participation of the Second God in the First becomes still more pronounced as he receives his goodness from the First by a process of thought so that the Good is One (τὴν γὰρ ἑνὸν ὅτι ἴσταν ἄν). He really becomes one with the First God.

This relation to the First God remains in complete accord with the Platonic paradigm of Ideas: just as humans and everything else are modeled on Ideas, so the Good which is the Idea of Good is the Idea of the Demiurge.^{xxix}

In another fragment Numenius is reported to teach a triad formulated using another metaphor, namely that there are three Gods -- the First whom he calls Father (πατέρα), the Second, whom he calls Creator (ποιητῆν), and the Third -- Creation (ποίημα). Thus the Creator would be double -- as the First and the Second God. And using poetic language, they could be described in terms of filial descentance as the Fore-Father (πάππον), Offspring or Son (ἑγγονον), and Descendant or Grandson (πόγονον).^{xxx} Thus, in the final analysis, the First God is the cause of everything and has absolute control. For though he is impassible, he has an innate motion from which derives the order (i.e. beauty) of the world, and the salvation of all.^{xxxi} And he uses the Second God who is his different function to organize the Matter, thus creating the world:

Numenius relates the First (Mind) to that which is really alive (κατὰ τὴν ὄντως ζῆον); and he says, that it thinks, out of desire (ἐν προσχρήσει) for the

Second (God). The Second Mind he relates to the Intellect that becomes creative out of desire for the Third; and the Third he relates to discursive Thinking (κατ τὴν διανοούμενον), that is human thinking.^{xxxii}

In conclusion to this reasoning, Numenius declares that there are four entities (πραγμάτα) with the following names:

1. The First God who is the Good-in-itself, pure Intellect;
2. The good Demiurge, God Creator, his imitator;
3. The one Substance (Essence) which is shared by the two -- the First God, and the Second God;
4. The copy of this Substance (Essence), the beautiful (i.e. ordered) World which is beautified, i.e. ordered from disorder, by its participation in the Beauty.^{xxxiii}

Conclusions

Justin's theology derived from the Hellenistic interpretation of the scriptural material and constitutes the first step leading to Nicaea.

According to Justin, there are three (or two) separate divine entities popularly worshiped by the Christians: God the Father whose substance is God's Pneuma, the second Pneuma is the Logos or the Son of God, and the third Pneuma is the Holy or Prophetic Pneuma. Justin, however, claims that in reality the two Pneumas, the Holy Pneuma and the Logos Pneuma are one and the same Pneuma and, only according to the functions it performs, it assumes different characteristics and identities, and therefore is described by different names. The names of the three divine entities are derived from biblical terms found in the Old and New Testament and the baptismal formula. These terms were hypostatized and interpreted in the light of Greek philosophical and theological speculations.

By extension, the three Pneumas differentiated by Justin must be the same as God's Pneuma since they originated from it. So they would be three aspects or functions within the unity of God's substance. Such an interpretation can also be applied to the Greek divinities. But this point was not emphasized by Justin, on the contrary, he insisted on the subordination of these two Pneumas to the First Pneuma, God the Father. Thus there is no trace of the post-Nicaean Trinity in Justin's writings understood as the triune divinity, but a hierarchically organized triad as he believed in only one God, God the Father. The Logos and the Holy Pneuma had subordinate ranks, being in the second and third place, respectively, and entirely dependent on the will of God the Father.

Table 1
Comparison of the Two Systems:

Justin Martyr

God is the Father,
the **First God**;
Father of all
His substance is Pneuma;
He is ungenerated (unbegotten);
He is unchangeable;
He is impassible;
He is ineffable (unutterable);
He is nameless;
He is eternal (always existing);
He is Demiurge, creator or
begetter of all things but
not directly, through the
second God, his Son or
Logos;
He sows the Logos;
He is Master of all;
He is the cause of the second
God's power and existence.
He is principle of life;

Numenius

The First God,
The First Mind;
Father of the Second God;
He is simple, indivisible;
Good-in-itself, source of being
and idea;
He is principle of being
(ou)si&a);
Is idle, does not create directly;
Is impassible (stable);
Is occupied with the intelligibles;
In final analysis He is the cause
of everything;
From him comes the order of the
world, its eternity and
salvation;

He thinks out of desire
(prosrhsij) for the
 Second God;
 The First God is related to the
 Second like farmer to the
 planter, for he sows the seeds
 of all souls;
 He is related to that which is
 alive, is a principle of life;

The Second in rank:
the Logos (Word), the Son,
Jesus Christ; Scond)Pneuma;
 First Power of God;
 Identified with Logos;
 Logos is with? God and is
 his first-generated (begotten)
 of God as the Son of God;
 It (He) came from the Father
 before the beginning of the
 world;
 Logos generated the universe out
 of shapeless substratum;
 It (He) generated himself as a

man Jesus (quite in Greek
 manner of Zeus's sons) by
 taking shape of man through
 the power and will of the
 Father;
 It (He) depends on the Father;
 is identified often with the
 Third entity in rank, the
 Prophetic Pneuma);
 It (He) is a teacher;
 Every human partakes of Logos
 i.e. has a part of it;
 It (He) is Seed of God;
 Son and Logos as generated
 being has names:
 as Christ - name associated
 with being anointed by God
 for ordering all things
 as Jesus - name associated
 with being Savior and for
 the destruction of demons;
 Lawgiver of the new covenant;
 also angel and apostle;
 Justin identified Logos with the
 World Soul of Plato;
 He does not accomplish
 anything
 without the power and will of
 God the Father

The Second God or Mind
 It (He) direct agent of creation,
 Demiurge;
 Is agent of animation;
 It (He) is occupied with the
 intelligibles and sensibles;
 It (He) becomes creative out of
 desire for the third God;

when he is turned toward us
the bodies are animated by his
radiations with which they
are

united;

It (He) is principle of becoming;

The Second God, the lawgiver,

transplants and distributes
what was planted from above,

i.e. by the First God;

The Second God is good by

participating in the Good of

the First;

As God Demiurge is to the Good

so is becoming to being

(substance) i.e. as image

to an imitation;

It (He) has double character

- when he participates in the
First God then he is the

Second God,

- when he participates in the
world (matter) which he
creates then he is the Third

God;

It (He) produces from himself his
own Idea and the World;

It (He) generates the world out of
desire for the Third God;

It (He) implants, distributes, and

transplants into each of men

the seed planted by the First

God -- the noetic part of the
soul.

The Third in rank

The Prophetic Pneuma (Spirit);
 also called the Holy Pneuma (Spirit);
 Divine Pneuma (Spirit);
 often identified with the
 Second in rank, with the
 Logos and God;
 It (He) moves prophets;
 It (He) speaks as a human person;
 It (He) speaks as person of God;
 It (He) speaks as person of
 Christ;
 It (He) speaks as person of
 people;
 If it (he) is separate from the
 Second Pneuma its generation
 must be by analogy the same as that
 of the Second in rank;

Relationship between the Three

The Son, Logos born by
 emanation from the Father
 without abscission, by
 analogy to **fire kindled from
 the fire**, rays of sun to the
 sun, voice uttered from the
 source.
 The same mechanism must be
 supposed for the Prophetic
 Pnuema (Spirit) since in
 reality it is the same being.

The Third God or Mind

The Third God - Creation;
 As world it is produced by the
 Second God.
 As intellect it is related to human
 discursive thinking.

Relationship between the Three

Relationship between the First and
 the Second is as:

fire kindled from the fire,
 farmer and planter,
 donor and receiver,
 knowledge partaken by the
 receiver from the donor;
 Relationship as between Father-
 Creator to Creation;
 Other metaphor:

Father - Son (Offspring) -
 Descendant (Grandson)
 There are four things

(pragma&ta):

1. **the First God, Good in itself;**
2. **his imitation, good**

Demiurge;

3. **being (substance) (ou)si&a)**

which is shared between the
 two: that of the First God and
 that of the Second God;

4. **imitation of being
 (substance) which is**

beautiful cosmos,

ordered (beautified) by

participating in the Beauty of
the First God.

Everything is in everything;
The Good is one because the
second God partakes of the
First.

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xxxⁱ. Numenius, Frags. 13, 14, 15 (Des Places); Frags. 28, 29, 30 (Guthrie).

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