

Estudios

The Functional Modalism of the *Logoschristologie*

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Abstract: The present study aims to demonstrate that, of all the theological proposals of the patristic era, the one that comes closest to what contemporary textbooks on the history of dogmas call “modalism” is, paradoxically, not those of Noetus, Sabellius, and Praxeas, but, precisely, that of their adversaries, representatives of the *Logoschristologie*. The cases of Justin, Irenaeus, and the author of the treatise *Against Noetus* are analysed. The error committed by historians has its source in the way in which the author of the *Refutation Against All Heresies*, a representative of the *Logoschristologie*, reformulated the doctrine of Noetus. The study concludes by explaining how Melito of Sardis can be called a modalist, precisely because he is a representative of the *Logoschristologie*, and not, as R. Hübner claims, because of the alleged influence of a substrate common with Noetus.

Keywords: modalism, Trinitarian theology, Justin, Irenaeus, *Against Noetus*, Hippolytus, Melito of Sardis

Resumen: El presente estudio pretende demostrar que, de todas las propuestas teológicas de la época patristica, la que más se acerca a la que los manuales contemporáneos de historia de los dogmas llama “modalismo” es, paradójicamente, no las de Noeto, Sabelio y Praxeas, sino, precisamente, la de sus adversarios, representantes de la *Logoschristologie*. Se analizan los casos de Justino, Ireneo y el autor del tratado *Contra Noeto*. El error cometido por los historiadores tiene su fuente en la manera en que el autor de la *Refutación contra todas la herejías*, un representante de la *Logoschristologie*, reformuló la doctrina de Noeto. El estudio concluye explicando que se puede calificar a Melitón de Sardes de modalista, justamente por ser un representante de la

Logoschristologie, y no, como lo pretende R. Hübner, por una presunta influencia de un substrato común con Noeto.

Palabras clave: modalismo, teología trinitaria, Justino, Ireneo, Contra Noeto, Hipólito, Melitón de Sardes

INTRODUCTION

The title of this study¹ is a paradox. The legend, established and spread in the history of dogmas since the beginning of the nineteenth century, tells that modalism is a doctrine that the representatives of *Logoschristologie* fought against. Then, how can one speak of *their* modalism? It all depends on what is meant by “modalism,” a term which, as I demonstrated in a previous study,² is an anachronism, since it was coined during controversies of the modern era. No theologian of the patristic era spoke of “modes” in Trinitarian theology, except for Basil of Caesarea and his fellow Cappadocians,³ whom no one, today, would accuse of “modalism,” if not, rather, of tritheism. However, starting from a definition of modalism as a theology which distinguishes the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit “only according to the manner of their appearing or operating”,⁴ the manuals of patrology keep transmitting the inaccurate information that Noetus, Sabellius or Praxeas spoke of modes of being or modes of

¹ This paper presents the results of the research project FONDECYT Regular 1220106. A first version was presented at the XI Seminar of Patristic Studies of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, in August 2023.

² X. MORALES, “‘Modalism’ - A Critical Assessment of a Modern Interpretative Paradigm”, in *Papers presented at the Eighteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2019*, Vol. 20: *Biblica; Judaica; Philosophica, Theologica, Ethica* (Studia Patristica 123; Leuven 2021) 237-248.

³ On the expression τρόπος τῆς ὑπόρξεως, see X. MORALES, “Basile de Césarée est-il l’introducteur du concept de relation en théologie trinitaire?”, *Revue des études augustiniennes et patristiques* 67 (2017/1) 141-180 : 172-177.

⁴ L. LANGE, *Geschichte und Lehrbegriff der Unitarier vor der nicänischen Synode* (Leipzig, 1831) 33.

manifestation,⁵ when, in reality, their theological proposal was much simpler. They did not need to conceive a *mode of manifestation* of the one God, distinct from his/her⁶ being, with which to identify Christ, since, for them, Christ was identified with the one God *full stop* or, at least, through the divine *pneuma* that resides in him. For this reason, it is preferable not to speak of their theology as “modalism”⁷ but as a “theology of identification.”⁸

The hypothesis of this study is that, of all the theological proposals of the patristic period, the one that comes closest to what is commonly designated “modalism” is, paradoxically, that of the adversaries of Noetus, Sabellius and Praxeas, that is, that of the representatives of the *Logoschristologie*.

The definition of *Logoschristologie* and the determination of the list of its representatives would require a study in itself. Let us assume, with Adolf von Harnack⁹ (from whom I borrow the German term), that the *Logoschristologie* identifies Jesus of Nazareth with the *logos* of God, an entity whose mode of being and ontological alterity from God are problematic, and which we find for example in Stoicism, in Philo of Alexandria or in the first verse of the Gospel of John.

⁵ For example, C. MORESCHINI and E. NORELLI, *Manuale di letteratura Cristiana antica greca e latina* (Brescia 1999) 164, regarding Sabellius: “predicava che il Padre, il Figlio e lo Spirito Santo non sarebbero tre ‘persone’ divine distinte, ma tre ‘modi’ di manifestarsi del solo Dio Padre.”

⁶ I apologize for using the masculine pronoun in subsequent references to God, for no other reason than brevity.

⁷ Along the same lines, G. URÍBARRI BILBAO, in his study, *Monarquía y Trinidad. El concepto teológico “monarquía” en la controversia “monarquiana”* (Madrid 1996) 6, notes that the label “modalism” “is not free from problems” and prefers to speak, rightly, of “monarchianism”.

⁸ I take up the expression attributed to Luise Abramowski by Chr. MARKSCHIES, *Alta Trinità Beata. Gesammelte Studien zur altkirchlichen Trinitätstheologie* (Tübingen 2000) 294, n. 33.

⁹ A. von HARNACK, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte. I. Die Entstehung des kirchlichen Dogmas* (Freiburg, 1886) 556. Ferdinand Christian BAUR’s handbook, *Lehrbuch der christlichen Dogmengeschichte, I* (Stuttgart 1847) 71-73, already spoke of the *Logosidee*. See also A. AAL, *Der Logos. Geschichte seiner Entwicklung in der griechischen Philosophie und der christlichen Literatur, II. Geschichte der Logosidee in der christlichen Literatur* (Leipzig 1899).

The question of whether Justin is the first to use this identification to elaborate a coherent Christology would also require a study in itself.¹⁰ In any case, his *Apology*, written in the middle of the second century, in the context of a polemical dialogue with Hellenistic philosophical monotheism, is the first substantial work in which this identification appears. A second distinguished representative of the *Logoschristologie* would be Irenaeus of Lyons, at the beginning of the 180s, in the context of the refutation of Gnostic dualism. And a third representative to whom I will turn is the author of the refutation *Against Noetus*, whom I consider to be active at the end of the second century or in the early years of the third century, and who is traditionally identified as "Hippolytus." I have chosen these three authors because they write in three different polemical contexts in which the identification between Christ and the *Logos* plays a decisive role. In the case of Justin, the identification of Christ with the divine rational faculty that presides over the ordered constitution of the universe and the revelation of his will allows him to articulate the transcendence of the one God with his presence in the world. In the case of Irenaeus, the description of the sending of the *Logos-Christ* and the *Sophia-Spirit* into the world allows him to defend the unicity of God's action, against the distribution of the phases of the cosmic drama among the various aeons of Gnosticism. In the case of the author of *Against Noetus*, the identification of Christ with the *logos* allows him to defend himself against the accusation of ditheism launched by the theology of identification.

¹⁰ CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA claims that this identification is already expressed in the *Preaching of Peter*, prior to Justin's *Apology* (*Str.* I, XXIV, 182). The identification also seems to be found in a fragment of the *Dialogue of Jason and Papiscus*, attributed by testimonies of the beginning of the seventh century to Luke the Evangelist or to Ariston of Pella, to whom another testimony of the seventh century attributes an apology addressed to Hadrian. One should also mention the existence of a "theology of the *Logos*" in Judeo-Hellenistic authors such as Aristobulus, Ezekiel the Tragic or Philo of Alexandria (see a state of the question in A. G. CRISTAUDDO, *Giustino e la protoortodossia Giovannea. Il superamento della cristologia pneumatologica e la nascita della teologia del Logos* [Rome 2023] 335-343). The *Apology* of Aristides, also addressed to Hadrian, does not make the identification, nor does the letter of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians, nor Hermas in his *Shepherd*.

Then, how could the historians of dogmas be mistaken and come to call “modalists” the adversaries of the *true* modalists, the representatives of the *Logoschristologie*? To answer this question, I will analyze the way in which a fourth representative of the *Logoschristologie*, the Roman author of the *Refutation of All Heresies*, presents the doctrine of Noetus, and I will demonstrate that the alleged modalism of the theology of identification is a projection of the heresiologist.

Finally, by way of an excursus, I will recall some problematic passages of Melito of Sardis, the interpretation of the which will benefit from my hypothesis of a “functional modalism of the *Logoschristologie*.”

1. CHRIST, LOGOS OF GOD IN JUSTIN

Why identifying Christ with the *Logos* of God would lead to consider him as a mode of manifesting the one God and, therefore, to profess a modalistic Christology? A first answer is obvious. The word *logos*, object the opponents of the *Logoschristologie*, properly designates “the struck air that has a meaning for the ear.”¹¹ Therefore, “the Son of God is, so to speak, an utterance of the Father, constituted of syllables”¹² and devoid of real existence. Evidently, this is not the consequence that Justin and the other representatives of the *Logoschristologie* want to reach when they affirm that Christ is the *Logos* of God. On the contrary, the real and distinct existence of the *Logos* is a central element of their theology. However, it is undeniable that to identify Christ with the *Logos* of God is to give him the function of expressing or manifesting the thought of the Father. Now, what has the function of expressing thought, according to the anthropological analogy, is the faculty or power of language. In fact, in addition to *logos*, the name *dynamis* or “power” is also predicated of Christ by

¹¹ TERTULLIAN, *Prax.* VII, 6 (ed. Gianni Scarpata, *Contro Prassea* [Corona Patrum 12; Torino, 1985] p. 156, l. 29 - p. 158, l. 31): *aer offensus intellegibilis auditu*, puts this definition in the mouth of his adversaries, that is, as an objection against the *Logoschristologie*. The definition derives from Stoicism (ZENON, Frag. 74, see NOVATIAN, *Trin.* XXXI, 183).

¹² ORIGEN, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, I, xxiv, 151 (GCS 10) p. 29, l. 23: *προφορὰν πατρικὴν οἰονεὶ ἐν συλλαβαῖς κειμένην εἶναι τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ*.

Justin, based on Scripture (1 Cor 1:24) and on the philosophical¹³ and Judaeo-Hellenistic¹⁴ traditions. It even seems that, for Justin, the name *dynamis* serves as a generic name for all biblical appellations of Christ:

... ἀρχὴν πρὸ πάντων τῶν κτισμάτων ὁ θεὸς γεγέννηκε δύναμιν τινα ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ λογικὴν, ἣτις καὶ δόξα κυρίου ὑπὸ τοῦ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου καλεῖται, ποτὲ δὲ υἴος, ποτὲ δὲ σοφία, ποτὲ δὲ ἄγγελος, ποτὲ δὲ θεός, ποτὲ δὲ κύριος καὶ λόγος, ποτὲ δὲ ἀρχιστράτηγον ἑαυτὸν λέγει, ἐν ἀνθρώπου μορφῇ φανέντα τῷ τοῦ Ναυῆ Ἰησοῦ.¹⁵ God begot as a principle (cf. Pr 8:22), before all creatures (cf. Col 1:15) a rational power that comes from him, which the Holy Spirit also calls “Glory of the Lord”, or “Son”, or “Wisdom”, or “Messenger”, or “God”, or “Lord” and *Logos*, or calls himself “chief general” (Jo 5:14), when he appears to Joshua, son of Navi, in a human form (Jo 5:13).

To attribute to Christ the names *logos*, *dynamis*,¹⁶ *intellect*¹⁷ or *spirit*¹⁸ of the Father, would seem to describe him, not as an independent substance, but as the faculty of expression of a rational substance. By metonymy, these names can also describe the product of this faculty of expressing itself, that is, what God the Father manifests of himself outside of himself, his *mode* of manifestation.

This is exactly what Justin does, although without using the term “mode”. God is “ineffable”¹⁹ and it would be absurd to maintain that “the maker and Father of the universe would abandon all that is beyond heaven to appear in a small corner of the earth.”²⁰ No man

¹³ For example, Ps. ARISTOTLE, *On the World*, 6, 397b20-21 (LCL 400) p. 384: τῇ μὲν θεία δυνάμει [...] οὐ μὴν τῇ γε οὐσία (“by the divine power [...] and not by his substance”).

¹⁴ ARISTOBULUS, frag. 2; see R. RADICE, *La filosofia di Aristobulo e i suoi nessi con il “De mundo” attribuito ad Aristotele* (Milano 1995²) 69-96, who comments on the use of *δύναμις* in *On the World*, in Aristobulus and in Philo of Alexandria.

¹⁵ JUSTIN, *Dial.* 61, 1 (ed. Ph. Bobignion, *Justin Martyr, Dialogue avec Tryphon* [Paradosis 47/1-2; Academic Press, Fribourg 2003], vol. I) p. 346.

¹⁶ For example, JUSTIN, *Dial.* 4, 11; 11, 1; 16, 1.

¹⁷ *Dial.* 7, 3; 11, 2.

¹⁸ *Dial.* 4, 11; 16, 7 quoting Jn 3, 6.

¹⁹ *Apol.* I, 9, 3; I, 61, 11; II, 10, 8; II, 12, 4; II, 13, 4; *Dial.* 126, 2; 127, 2.4.

²⁰ *Dial.* 60, 2 (ed. Ph. Bobignion, vol. I) p. 344: τὸν ποιητὴν τῶν ὄλων καὶ πατέρα, καταλιπόντα τὰ ὑπὲρ οὐρανὸν ἅπαντα, ἐν ὀλίγῳ γῆς μορίῳ πεφάνθαι. See *Dial.* 127, 1-3.

“saw the Father and ineffable Lord of the universe.”²¹ In other words, respect for the absolute transcendence of God precludes thinking that God manifested *himself*. Then, in the theophanies of the Old Testament, what appears is not God himself but his “power,” retrospectively identified with Christ.²² Justin is aware that this way of describing Christ as a power is problematic. In a very famous passage, the Christian philosopher rules out an interpretation²³ that denies this “power” an existence independent of God himself:

... γινώσκω καί τινες [...] φάσκειν [...] ἄτμητον δὲ καὶ ἀχώριστον τοῦ πατρὸς ταύτην τὴν δύναμιν ὑπάρχειν... [...] ὁ πατήρ, ὅταν βούληται, λέγουσι, δύναμιν αὐτοῦ προσηδᾶν ποιεῖ, καὶ ὅταν βούληται, πάλιν ἀναστέλλει εἰς ἑαυτόν.²⁴

I know that there are people [...] who claim [...] that this power exists indivisibly and inseparably from the Father. [...] The Father, when he wants, they say, brings forth his power, and when he wants, makes it return to him.

This precision of Justin permits to conclude with the paradox already announced that, in the patristic era, the theologians who describe Christ as the mode in which God manifests himself in the world, in other words, the “modalists,” are, at the same time, those who insist on the real distinction between Christ and the Father. Here, the concept of mode of manifestation serves precisely to point at the otherness between the Son and the Father, thanks to the opposition

²¹ *Dial.* 127, 4 (ed. Ph. Bobignion, vol. I) p. 528: οὔτε ἄλλος ἀνθρώπων εἶδε τὸν πατέρα καὶ ἄρρητον κύριον τῶν πάντων...

²² On the Christological interpretation of Old Testament theophanies, the works of Bogdan BUCUR are essential, in particular “Justin Martyr’s Exegesis of Old Testament Theophanies and the Parting of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism”, *Theological Studies* 75 (2014) 34-51, and the recent monograph, *Scripture Re-Envisioned: Christophanic Exegesis and the Making of a Christian Bible* (The Bible in Ancient Christianity 13, Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2019).

²³ Probably Jewish, as demonstrated by B. BUCUR, “Justin Martyr’s Exegesis of Old Testament Theophanies and the Parting of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism”, 42, and not Christian “modalist” (*sic*), as stated, for example, by Ph. BOBIGNON, *Justin Martyr, Dialogue avec Tryphon* (vol. II) 893: “allusion à l’explication modaliste de la génération du Verbe”.

²⁴ *Dial.* 128, 2-3.

between “the one seen by no one” and “the one seen by Abraham”²⁵ and the other characters of the Old Testament.²⁶ Contrariwise, Noetus, Sabellius and Praxeas affirm that Christ is God manifesting himself, without distinction between himself and his mode of manifestation, which would be the *Logos*. Then, Marcellus of Ancyra is right when he writes that “Sabellius himself [...] knew neither God nor his holy *Logos* correctly.”²⁷

2. THE *LOGOS*, VISIBILITY OF GOD, IN IRENAEUS

This opposition between invisibility of the Father and visibility through the *Logos* is essential in the refutation that Irenaeus of Lyons opposes to the Gnostic system²⁸.

The Gnostic logic is a logic of multiplication, from the transcendent one to the multiplicity of the reality in which we human beings live. This logic is verified, for example, in biblical interpretation. For the disciples of Ptolemy, each name in the prologue of the Gospel of John, “beginning,” “*logos*,” “life,” “light,” “only-begotten,” “savior,” and “Christ,” designates a distinct entity:

οὔτοι [...] ἄλλον μὲν τὸν μονογενῆ θέλουσιν εἶναι κατὰ τὴν προβολήν, ὃν δὴ καὶ ἀρχὴν καλοῦσιν, ἄλλον δὲ τὸν σωτήρα γεγονέναι θέλουσι, καὶ ἄλλον τὸν λόγον υἱὸν τοῦ μονογενοῦς, καὶ ἄλλον τὸν χριστὸν.²⁹

They [...] want the “only-begotten” according to the emanation, which they also call “principle”, to be one <person>, the “savior” to have been another, the *logos* son of the “only-begotten”, another, the “Christ”, another...

²⁵ *Dial.* 56, 1 (ed. Ph. Bobignion, vol. I) p. 322: ὁ ὀφθεις τῷ Ἀβραάμ [...] ἄλλου τοῦ [...] οὐδενὶ ὀφθέντος.

²⁶ Cf. *Dial.* 126, 2; 127, 2; 127, 4; *Apol.* I, 9, 3; 61, 11; II, 10, 8; 13, 4.

²⁷ MARCELLUS OF ANCYRA, frag. 69 (ed. S. Fernandez, Fuentes Patristicas 36) p. 192, l. 1-2: Σαβέλλιος γὰρ καὶ αὐτὸς οὔτε τὸν θεὸν ἀκριβῶς ἔγνω οὔτε τὸν ἅγιον αὐτοῦ λόγον.

²⁸ On the visibility of the Son, in particular in Irenaeus, Antonio ORBE wrote a brief but remarkable study in *Hacia la primera teología de la procesión del Verbo. Estudios Valentinianos*, vol. I/2 (Romae 1958) 655-659.

²⁹ IRENAEUS, *Haer.* I, 9, 2 (SC 264) p. 140, l. 1002 - p. 141, l. 1008.

Irenaeus, on the other hand, maintains that all these names designate the same and “one only-begotten Christ Jesus.”³⁰

Likewise, to the Gnostic logic of multiplication of intermediary entities between the transcendent principle and the world, Irenaeus substitutes a logic of unity and insists on the unicity of God’s intervention in the world. The creation of the world, the manifestations of God in the Old Testament, the coming of the Son of God in the flesh, the sending of the Spirit, are not the actions of distinct agents, they are the various “economies” of the same divine agent. There is

*unum et eundem deum ab initio usque ad finem uariis dispositionibus adsistentem humano generi...*³¹

one and the same God, who makes himself present to the human race from the beginning to the end, through various economies.

To express this thesis, Irenaeus uses what, in another study, I have called the trifunctional formula:³²

*Solus pater, condens et faciens omnia [...] uerbo uirtutis suae, et omnia aptauit et disposuit sapientia sua.*³³

There is only one Father who creates and makes all things [...] through the *Logos* of his power, and he assembled and arranged all things through his Wisdom.

This formula allows, by means of circumstantial complements, to associate the *Logos* and the Spirit-Wisdom to a single action, whose principal agent, represented by the grammatical subject of the formula, is the Father. The most radical example of this formula is the Trinitarian interpretation of Eph 4:6, where the Father, the *Logos* and the Spirit are correlated with three prepositional groups:

³⁰ IRENAEUS, *Haer.* I, 9, 2 (SC 264) p. 139, l. 996: ἓνα μονογενῆ χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν. On the anti-Gnostic strategy of the “One and the same,” see the analyses of S. E. WAERS, *Monarchianism and Origen’s Early Trinitarian Theology* (Leiden 2022) 29-34 on Paul, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian.

³¹ *Haer.* III, 12, 13 (SC 211) p. 236, l. 453-455; cf. III, 10, 5 (SC 211) p. 134, l. 172-174; IV, 28, 2 (SC 100, II) p. 758, l. 34-36.

³² See X. MORALES, “Las operaciones personales en la teología trinitaria de Orígenes,” *Teología y Vida* 58 (2017) 447-471.

³³ *Haer.* II, 30, 9 (SC 294), p. 318, l. 222 - p. 320, l. 225. See for example III, 24, 2 (SC 211), p. 476, l. 57-58; IV, 20, 1-4.

*Et sic unus deus pater ostenditur, qui est super omnia et per omnia et in omnibus. Super omnia quidem pater, et ipse est caput christi; per omnia autem uerbum, et ipse est caput ecclesiae; in omnibus autem nobis spiritus, et ipse est aqua uiua quae praestat dominus in se recte credentibus et diligentibus se et scientibus quia unus pater qui est super omnia et per omnia et in omnibus nobis.*³⁴

And this is how is revealed the one God the Father, he who is “above all things, through all things and in all” (cf. Eph 4:6). The Father is “above all things”, and he is “the head of Christ” (1 Cor 2:3); the Word is “through all things”, and he is “the head of the Church” (Eph 5:23); the Spirit is “in” us all, and he is “the living water” (Jn 7:38) that the Lord grants to “those who believe in him” (Jn 7:39) rightly, love him and know that there is “one Father who is above all things, through all things and in” us all (Eph 4:6).

Therefore, we could speak of three grammatical-actantial functions, one principal and two secondary or instrumental. Another formula, this one proper to Irenaeus, is the image of the two hands with which God models creation, representing the *Logos* and the Spirit.³⁵

In this framework, Irenaeus can reformulate the fundamental structure of Gnosticism, the distinction between a first principle absolutely “incomprehensible and invisible,”³⁶ and a derived principle, the only entity “through”³⁷ which that first principle can be known, so that this derived principle is “that which, from that one, is conceivable.”³⁸ Now, in the logic of multiplication of the Gnostic

³⁴ *Haer.* V, 18, 2 (SC 153) p. 240, l. 35-42. I have already commented on this passage in X. MORALES, *La théologie trinitaire d’Athanasie d’Alexandrie* (Paris, 2006) 159-162.

³⁵ First appearance with *Logos* alone, in III, 21, 10 (SC 211) p. 428, l. 224; with *Logos* and Spirit: IV, pr., 4 (SC 100, II) p. 390, l. 63-64, etc.

³⁶ *Haer.* I, 1, 1, 1 (SC 264) p. 28, l. 77-78 (gr.). See for example the *apocryphal Book of John (AJ)*, one of the oldest preserved Gnostic treatises, in which the “monad” (BG 2, 22, 17 [ed. Bernard Barc - Wolf-Peter Funk, BCNH 35] p. 68) is “invisible” (BG 2, 23, 21, p. 70).

³⁷ *Haer.* I, 2, 5 (SC 264) p. 45, l. 217 (gr.). In *AJ*, the second principle, is “principe médiateur”, the one that “aura pour mission de manifester” the first principle (B. BARC, BCNH 35, p. 42): it is “the first power” “by means of” which the light “was manifested” (the light “was manifested by the first power” (BG 2, 30, 12-13, p. 84).

³⁸ *Haer.* I, 2, 5 (SC 264) p 46, l. 220-221: τὸ καταληπτὸν αὐτοῦ. In *AJ*, the second principle is “image of the invisible one” (BG 2, 27, 12-13, p. 78), an allusion to Col 1, 15.

system, the derived principle is only the first link in a long chain of intermediate “emanations” that *distance* the first principle from the reality in which we human beings live. On the other hand, in the logic of Irenaeus, the reduction of mediation to a single visible *Logos* allows for a relationship between the world and the invisible Father:

*In novissimis temporibus per filium suum donat humano generi, incomprehensibilis per comprehensibilem et invisibilis per visibilem.*³⁹

At the end of time, <God> gives his gifts to mankind through his own Son, the incomprehensible through the comprehensible, the invisible through the visible.

This division between the invisible Father and the visible Son is key in the passage in which Irenaeus takes up Justin’s interpretation of the theophanies:⁴⁰

*Inuisibile etenim filii pater, visibile autem patris filius.*⁴¹

The invisibility of the Son is the Father, and the visibility of the Father is the Son.

In this framework, the Son is characterized primarily by his function of manifestation, even before his incarnation:⁴²

*Filius reuelat agnitionem patris per suam manifestationem. Agnitio enim patris est filii manifestatio.*⁴³

The Son reveals the knowledge of the Father by his own manifestation.

In fact, the knowledge of the Father is the manifestation of the Son.

³⁹ *Haer.* III, 11, 5 (SC 211) p. 154, l. 127-130; see also V, 16, 2 (SC 153) p. 216, l. 8-9: συνεξομοίωσας τὸν ἄνθρωπον τῷ ἀόρατῷ πατρὶ διὰ τοῦ βλεπομένου λόγου (“making the human being be like the invisible Father through the *Logos* which is seen”); V, 20, 7 (SC 153) p. 168, l. 175-179: *inuisibilitatem quidem patris custodiens, [...] visibilem autem rursus hominibus per multas dispositiones ostendens deum* (“watching over the invisibility of the Father [...] while, instead, showing the visible God to human beings by means of numerous economies”).

⁴⁰ *Haer.* IV, 5, 2 - 8, 1; see also IV, 10, 1 and the analyses of B. BUCUR, “Scholarly Frameworks for Reading Irenaeus: The Question of Theophanies,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 72 (2018) 250-282.

⁴¹ *Haer.* IV, 6, 6 (SC 100, II) p. 450, l. 99-100.

⁴² It can be compared to Marguerite HARL’s celebrated study, *Origène et la fonction révélatrice du Verbe incarnée* (Paris 1958¹).

⁴³ *Haer.* IV, 6, 3 (SC 100, II) p. 442, l. 45-47.

The various stages in the history of the relationship between God and the world are interpreted by Irenaeus as various modes of revelation, expressed by three adverbs of manner:

*Potens enim in omnibus deus, uisus quidem tunc per spiritum propheticę, uisus autem et per filium adoptiue, uidebitur autem et in regno caelorum paternaliter.*⁴⁴

God is potent in all things, the one who was seen then through the Spirit, prophetically, the one who was also seen through the Son, adoptively, and will also be seen in the kingdom of heaven, paternally.

However, these three modalities are manifestations of one God:

*Non, quemadmodum quidam dicunt, inuisibili patre omnium existente, alterum esse eum qui a prophetis uideretur.*⁴⁵

It is not that, as some say, the Father of the universe remains invisible, while another is the one who was seen by the prophets.

... ἀόρατος ὢν ἐφάνη τοῖς προφήταις ὁ θεός, οὐκ ἐν μιᾷ ἰδέᾳ ἀλλὰ ἄλλοις ἄλλως.⁴⁶

God, being invisible, appeared to the prophets, not in a single aspect, but a different aspect for each one.

The same articulation between uniqueness and diversity and between invisibility and visibility is reflected in the Son himself. There is

*... unus christus Iesus dominus noster ueniens per uniuersam dispositionem et omnia in semetipsum recapitulans.*⁴⁷

... one Christ Jesus, our Lord, who comes through the whole economy and recapitulates all things in himself.

*inuisibilis uisibilis factus et incomprehensibilis factus comprehensibilis et impassibilis passibilis et uerbum homo uniuersa in semetipsum recapitulans.*⁴⁸

⁴⁴ *Haer.* IV, 20, 5 (SC 100, II) p. 138, l. 111-114; see also IV, 25, 3 (SC 100, II) p. 708, l. 36 - p. 710, 40.

⁴⁵ *Haer.* IV, 20, 5 (SC 100, II) p. 636, l. 94-96.

⁴⁶ *Haer.* I, 10, 3 (SC 264) p. 163, l. 1164-1166.

⁴⁷ *Haer.* III, 16, 6 (SC 211) p. 312, l. 211-213.

⁴⁸ *Haer.* III, 16, 6 (SC 211) p. 312, l. 215 - p. 314, l. 217; see IV, 24, 2 (100, II) p. 702, l. 36 - 37: *huius uerbum, naturaliter quidem inuisibilem, palpabilem et uisibilem in hominibus factum* ("his Logos, invisible by nature, became palpable and visible among human beings").

The invisible was made visible, the incomprehensible was made comprehensible, the impassible was made passible, and the *Logos* man, recapitulating all in himself.

In short, Irenaeus reduces the distinction between invisibility and visibility, exacerbated by the Gnostics, from an ontological opposition to a functional articulation: plurality predicates the manifestation of a God who is ontologically one.

3. MODALISM AGAINST THE THEOLOGY OF IDENTIFICATION IN *AGAINST NOETUS*

At the end of the second century, the author of the small treatise *Against Noetus*,⁴⁹ whose identity is problematic,⁵⁰ takes up the elements already analyzed in Justin and Irenaeus. In the treatise, the first intervention of the *Logos*, its participation in the creation of the world, is immediately described as a passage from invisibility to visibility. God

ἔδειξεν τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ καιροῖς ὠρισμένοις παρ' αὐτῶ- δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐποίησεν. [...] ὃν λόγον ἔχων ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἀόρατόν τε ὄντα, τῷ κτιζομένῳ κόσμῳ ὄρατόν ποιεῖ.⁵¹

showed his *Logos* at the times determined by him, <*Logos*> by which he made all things. [...] This *Logos* which <God> has in himself and which is invisible, he makes visible to the world he creates.

⁴⁹ For a remarkable study on the treatise, see the first chapter of G. URÍBARRI BILBAO, *La emergencia de la Trinidad inmanente: Hipólito y Tertuliano* (Madrid 1999).

⁵⁰ For the distinction between the author of the treatise *Against Noetus* and the author of the *Refutation of All Heresies*, I refer to X. MORALES, "The Biblical Hermeneutics of Noetus of Smyrna," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 27 (2023) 391-412 (393 and footnotes 6 and 7).

⁵¹ *Noet.* 10, 3 (ed. Manlio Simonetti, *Biblioteca Patristica* 35; Bologna 2000) p. 170-171 et 10, 4, p. 171.

The “generation according to the flesh”⁵² is the culminating point of this manifesting function of the *Logos*. The “*Logos* incarnate”⁵³ is the God “seen on earth” of Ba 3:38,⁵⁴ the “manifest” God of Is 65:1:⁵⁵

Τίς δέ ἐστιν ὁ ἐμφανῆς γενόμενος ἀλλ’ ἢ ὁ λόγος τοῦ πατρὸς, ὃν ἀποστέλλων πατήρ ἐδείκνυεν ἀνθρώποις τὴν παρ’ ἑαυτοῦ ἐξουσίαν; οὕτως οὖν ἐμφανῆς ἐγένετο ὁ λόγος καθὼς λέγει.⁵⁶
Who is it that “became manifest” (cf. Is 65:1), but the *Logos* of the Father, whom the Father sent to human beings to show them the power that comes from him. Therefore, the *Logos* was made manifest, just as <Is 65:1> says.

The application of the concept of “generation” to this passage of the *Logos* from invisibility to visibility, whether for the creation of the world or for the incarnation, is striking and controversial. The invisible *Logos* was “the *Logos* which <God> possessed in himself;”⁵⁷ it became visible because God “generated the *Logos* as the worker” of creation.⁵⁸ This generation of the *Logos*, which makes it a “Son,” culminates in the incarnation:

Ποῖον οὖν υἱὸν ἑαυτοῦ ὁ θεὸς διὰ τῆς σαρκὸς κατέπεμψεν ἀλλ’ ἢ τὸν λόγον, ὃν υἱὸν προσηγόρευε διὰ τὸ μέλλειν αὐτὸν γενέσθαι; [...] οὔτε γὰρ ἄσαρκος καὶ καθ’ ἑαυτὸν ὁ λόγος τέλειος ἦν υἱός, καίτοι τέλειος λόγος ὢν μονογενής.⁵⁹

What did God send through the flesh as his Son, but the *Logos*, whom he called “Son” because it was to become <his Son>? [...] The *Logos* not incarnate and in itself was not perfectly Son, even though it was the perfect only-begotten *Logos*.

If the *Logos* before the incarnation and even before its participation in the creation of the world was not yet perfectly Son and, therefore,

⁵² *Noet.* 16, 6 (ed. Simonetti) p. 182: τὴν μὲν κατὰ σάρκα γέννησιν.

⁵³ *Noet.* 12, 5 (ed. Simonetti) p. 174: ἔνσαρκον λόγον.

⁵⁴ Quoted in *Noet.* 2, 5 and commented on in *Noet.* 5, 1-5.

⁵⁵ *Noet.* 12, 1 (ed. Simonetti) p. 174: ἐμφανῆς; comment on 12, 2-4; new allusion in 13, 1. The “generation according to the flesh” is described with the cognate verb φανερωθῆναι (16, 6, p. 182; 17, 4.5, p. 184).

⁵⁶ *Noet.* 12, 2 (ed. Simonetti) p. 174.

⁵⁷ *Noet.* 10, 4 (ed. Simonetti) p. 172: ὃν λόγον ἔχων ἐν ἑαυτῷ.

⁵⁸ *Noet.* 10, 4 (ed. Simonetti) p. 172: ἐργάτην ἐγέννα λόγον.

⁵⁹ *Noet.* 15, 6 and 7 (ed. Simonetti) p. 180; same idea in 4, 10-12, p. 160.

distinct from the Father, it was only “*Logos*, it was spirit, it was power.”⁶⁰ The description of the *Logos* as *power*, already analyzed above in Justin, attenuates the real distinction between the Father and the Son, so characteristic of the *Logoschristologie*, to answer the accusation raised by its adversaries, that of confessing two gods. On the other hand, for Noetus and the other theologians of identification, describing Jesus as a “power” of God makes no sense, since Jesus is God himself, full stop.

In short, the vocabulary and theme of God’s manifestation and his passage from invisibility to visibility through the incarnation of his Son are typical of the representatives of the *Logoschristologie*, not of its adversaries.⁶¹

4. MODALISING NOETUS

How is it, then, that the historians of dogma came to reverse the roles and label the opponents of the *Logoschristologie* as “modalists”? One reason may be the way in which the author of the *Refutation of All Heresies*, another representative of the *Logoschristologie*, describes the theology of identification by means of the invisibility-visibility bipolarity characteristic of his own *Logoschristologie*.

That this bipolarity is a projection of the heresiologist is easy to demonstrate.⁶² First, we have just seen that, in the treatise *Against*

⁶⁰ *Noet.* 4, 11 (ed. Simonetti) p. 160: λόγος γὰρ ἦν, πνεῦμα ἦν, δύναμις ἦν.

⁶¹ Therefore, I do not fully agree with St. WAERS, *Monarchianism and Origen’s Early Trinitarian Theology*, 64, when he states that the theme of visibility is a central theme of Noetus’ theology. Rather, the theme is central to Noetus’ adversaries, the author of the treatise *Against Noetus*, Tertullian, and the author of the *Refutation of All Heresies*. This explains, for example, why the author of *Contra Noeto* and Tertullian “do not include the same passages in their discussion of visibility and invisibility” (83, n. 177), which they would do if these passages were passages proposed by their common adversary.

⁶² My demonstration is briefer than the detailed analyses in M. DECKER, *Die Monarchianer. Frühchristliche Theologie im Spannungsfeld zwischen Rom und Kleinasien* (diss.; Hamburg 1987) 131-151; Serge N. MOURAVIEV, “Hippolyte, Héraclite et Noët (commentaire d’Hippolyte, Refut. omn. haer. IX 8-10,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* 2.36.6 (1992) 4375-4402; J. MANSFELD, *Heresiography in Context:*

Noetus, the distinction between invisibility of the Father and visibility of the Son is absent from the statements attributed to Noetus. Nor does it appear in the descriptions of Sabellius' doctrine in Novatian's treatise *On the Trinity*. Second, the theology of Noetus is presented twice in the *Refutation*—not only in the section devoted to Noetus and his Roman disciples,⁶³ but also in a slightly earlier section on a subdivision of the Montanists,⁶⁴ not to speak of the presentation of the doctrine of Zephyrinus⁶⁵ and Callistus,⁶⁶ supposedly derived from that of Noetus through Sabellius. Now, in the section on the Noetian Montanists, the theology of identification is reduced to what we already know thanks to the treatise *Against Noetus*: "they say that the Father himself is the Son, and it is he who came to submit to generation, suffering and death."⁶⁷ The distinction between two poles, the invisible and the visible, is absent.

Finally, the theme of the visibility and invisibility of God appears for the first time in the laborious and clearly polemical demonstration of the assimilation of the doctrine of Noetus to that of the philosopher Heraclitus. The structure of this demonstration is simple:

(a) The *Refutation* proposes a synthetic interpretation of Heraclitus' doctrine, as a hypothesis.

(b) It then supports the various elements of this interpretation with quotations from Heraclitus.

Hippolytus' Elenchos as a Source for Greek Philosophy (Leiden, 1992); R. E. HEINE, "The Christology of Callistus," *Journal of Theological Studies* 49 (1998) 56-91 and H.-J. VOGT, "Noet von Smyrna und Heraklit. Bemerkungen zur Darstellung ihrer Lehren durch Hippolyt," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 6 (2002) 59-80.

⁶³ *Ref.* IX, 10, 9-12 (ed. Miroslav Marcovich, PTS 25; Berlin - New York 1986) p. 347-349 and its summary in X, 27, 1-2, p. 403. Marcovich's critical edition should be used with great caution. The text of the only surviving manuscript of the *Refutation* is manifestly corrupt. Marcovich chose to intervene in the text with numerous corrections. Like many of my colleagues, I opt for a more conservative reconstruction.

⁶⁴ *Ref.* VIII, 19, 3 (ed. Marcovich) p. 338-339 and its summary in X, 26, p. 402.

⁶⁵ *Ref.* IX, 11, 3 (ed. Marcovich) p. 350, l. 16-19.

⁶⁶ *Ref.* IX, 12, 16-19 (ed. Marcovich) p. 352, l. 80 - p. 353, l. 21 and its summary in X, 27, 3-4, p. 403-404.

⁶⁷ *Ref.* VIII, 19, 3 (ed. Marcovich) p. 338, l. 16-18, without Marcovich's correction: τὸν πατέρα αὐτὸν εἶναι τὸν υἱὸν λέγουσι, καὶ τοῦτον ὑπὸ γένεσιν καὶ πάθος καὶ θάνατον ἐληλυθέναι.

(c) Again, it proposes a synthetic interpretation of the doctrine of the disciples of Noetus, which highlights the similarities with that of Heraclitus. Here, the theme of bipolarity between visibility and invisibility becomes insistent.

(d) Finally, it supports the elements of this interpretation with an alleged direct speech of Cleomenes, the leader of the Roman disciples of Noetus. Interestingly, here, the bipolarity is more discrete, which leaves one to suspect that its presence in the previous paragraph is, in fact, a projection of the reading of Heraclitus in the reformulation of the doctrine of the adversaries. In turn, the alleged bipolarity of Heraclitus' doctrine, proclaimed in the first paragraph of the Demonstration (a), is not perfectly supported by the philosopher's quotations (b), which leaves one to suspect that the reading of Heraclitus was biased by a pre-comprehension that points toward what I have called the "modalism" of the *Logoschristologie* to which the author of the *Refutation* subscribes.

Let us return to this passage to analyze it in more detail:

(a) The doctrine of Heraclitus is characterized by the author of the *Refutation* as a doctrine of identity between opposites:

Ἡράκλειτος μὲν οὖν φησιν εἶναι τὸ πᾶν διαιρετὸν ἀδιαίρετον γενητὸν ἀγένητον θνητὸν ἀθάνατον λόγον αἰῶνα πατέρα υἱὸν θεὸν δίκαιον.⁶⁸

Heraclitus affirms that the whole is divisible, indivisible, begotten, unbegotten, mortal, immortal, *logos*, eternity, father, son, god, just.

(b) For each of these twelve contradictory predicates of the whole, the *Refutation* quotes Heraclitus. At the center of the exposition, two new contradictory predicates appear, visibility and invisibility:

ὅτι δὲ ἐ(στιν) ἀφανῆς [ὁ] ἀόρατος ἄγνωστος ἀνθρώποις [...] λέγει. [...] ὅτι δὲ ἐστιν ὄρατος ἀνθρώποις, καὶ οὐκ ἀνεξεύρετος [...] λέγει. [...] ὡς ἔν τι τὸ ἐμφανὲς καὶ τὸ ἀφανὲς ὁμολογουμένως ὑπάρχον.⁶⁹
 <Heraclitus> says that it is unmanifest, invisible, unknowable for human beings. [...] And he says that it is visible for human beings and

⁶⁸ *Ref.* IX, 9, 1 (ed. Marcovich) p. 344, l. 1-3.

⁶⁹ *Ref.* IX, 9, 5, p. 344, l. 18 - p. 345, l. 19; p. 345, l. 22; IX, 10, 1, p. 345, l. 2-3, adopting Marcovich's corrections.

not inscrutable. [...] As if the manifest and the unmanifest were, of course, one and the same thing.

(c) The *Refutation* then proposes a first formulation of the doctrine of the disciples of Noetus clearly inspired by the previous interpretation of Heraclitus:

λέγουσι γὰρ οὕτως ἓνα καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν θεὸν εἶναι πάντων δημιουργὸν καὶ πατέρα, εὐδοκήσαντα δὲ πεφηνέναι τοῖς ἀρχῆθεν δίκαιοις, ὄντα ἀόρατον. ὅτε μὲν γὰρ οὐχ ὄραται, ἦν ἀόρατος, <ὅτε δὲ ὄραται, ὄρατός,> ἀχώρητος δὲ ὅτε μὴ χωρεῖσθαι θέλει, χωρητός δὲ ὅτε χωρεῖται. οὕτως κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον ἀκράτητος καὶ κρατητός, ἀγένητος <καὶ γενητός>, ἀθάνατος καὶ θνητός.⁷⁰

Thus, they say that the *one and same* God is the craftsman and *father* of all things, and that he wished to appear to the righteous of old, even though he was invisible.⁷¹ When he is not seen, he was *invisible*, <and when he is seen, *visible*> incomprehensible, when he does not want to be understood, and comprehensible, when he is understood. Thus, according to the same logic, it is ungraspable and graspable, unbegotten and begotten, *immortal* and *mortal*.⁷²

As can be seen, in this first formulation, part of the predicates are allusions to fragments of Heraclitus previously quoted. However, the author of the *Refutation* does not simply apply the opposition between the predicates “visible” and “invisible”. He gives it a temporal meaning, in accordance with the idea of the *passage* from invisibility to visibility, characteristic of the *Logoschristologie*.

⁷⁰ *Ref.* IX, 10, 9-10, p. 348, l. 8-14, modifying Marcovich’s text. It is a pity that the transmission of the text of this and the following paragraph, central to the theme of the bipolarity between invisibility and visibility, has suffered so much. Marcovich’s corrections, which I accepted out of spite, accuse precisely a preunderstanding in the sense of attributing this theme to Noetus.

⁷¹ An implicit refutation of the attribution of Old Testament theophanies to the *Logos*. See S. E. WAERS, *Monarchianism and Origen’s Early Trinitarian Theology*, p. 134: “Using this same logic, the monarchians focused on biblical theophanies and argued that one and the same God was both invisible and visible.” I agree that Noetus refutes the disjunctive interpretation of the theophanies of the Old Testament, but I consider that the theme of the invisibility or visibility of God is not characteristic of Noetus, but of his adversaries.

⁷² The italicized words appear in the fragments of Heraclitus quoted by the *Refutation*, IX, 9, 1-8.

(d) The second formulation of the doctrine of the disciples of Noetus, which should support this first amalgamated formulation, further attenuates the contradiction between visibility and invisibility:

ὄνοματι μὲν πατέρα κατὰ υἱὸν καλούμενον κατὰ χρόνων τροπῆν, ἕνα δὲ εἶναι τοῦτον τὸν φανέντα καὶ γένεσιν ἐκ παρθένου ὑπομείναντα καὶ ἐν ἀνθρώπο(ις) ἀνθρώπον ἀναστραφέντα· υἱὸν μὲν ἑαυτὸν ἑαυτὸν τοῖς ὁρῶσιν ὁμολογοῦντα διὰ τὴν τὴν γενομένην γένεσιν, πατέρα δὲ εἶναι καὶ τοῖς χωροῦσιν (μ)ῆ ἀποκρύψαντα.⁷³
 <He himself is father and son,> called father and son by name according to the change of times. Yet one is who appeared, submitted to generation from a virgin and resided as a human being among human beings (cf. Ba 3:38), acknowledging himself son before those who saw him, thanks to the generation that occurred. Nevertheless, he is father, even though he has not hidden himself from those who understand him.

In the summary proposed by the *Refutation* in its last pages, once the scaffolding of the demonstration has been removed, and the name of Heraclitus omitted,⁷⁴ the attribution of contradictory predicates to the same divine principle directly characterizes the disciples of Noetus and the supposed Montanists with Noetian tendencies. We arrive then at what is a chimera, the reformulation of the theology of identification (“the Father himself is the Son”) within the framework of *Logoschristologie* (passage from invisibility to visibility):

ἕνα τὸν πατέρα καὶ θεὸν τῶν ὅλων τοῦτον πάντα πεποιηκότα· ἀφανῆ μὲν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις γεγονέναι ὅτε ἠβούλετο, φανῆναι δὲ δὲ τότε ὅτε ἠθέλησε. καὶ τοῦτον εἶναι ἀόρατον ὅτε μὴ ὁρᾶται, ὁρατὸν δὲ ὅταν ὁρᾶται. [...] τοῦτον τὸν πατέ(ρ)α αὐτὸν υἱὸν νομίζουσι, κατὰ καιροὺς καλούμενον πρὸς τὰ συμβαίνοντα.⁷⁵

One is this father and God of the universe, who made everything. He made himself unmanifest to human beings when he willed it, and

⁷³ *Ref.* IX, 10, 11 (ed. Marcovich) p. 348, l. 62-66. Again, I remove Marcovich’s corrections to the manuscript text, despite concurring in its poor condition.

⁷⁴ To explain this omission, Hübner, whose thesis will be addressed in the next section of this study, resorts to the hypothesis that the final summary of the *Refutation* was written prior to the main text, when the author did not yet intend to link Noetus with Heraclitus. The argument is incoherent, since, despite the omission of the name, Heraclitean logic does guide the final summary of Noetus’ doctrine.

⁷⁵ *Ref.* X, 27, 1-2 (ed. Marcovich) p. 403, l. 4-7 and 10-12.

manifested himself when he wished it. And he is invisible when he is not seen, and visible whenever he is seen. [...] This father, they think, is the son, called according to the times in relation to what happens.

Finally, the author of the *Refutation* attributes to his main enemy, Pope Callistus, a final synthesis of the theology of identification:

ἐν οὖν τοῦτο πρόσωπον⁷⁶, ὀνόματι μὲν μεριζόμενον, οὐσία δὲ οὐ.⁷⁷
This is a single person, divided into parts by name, but not by being.

This profession of a difference of *names* for a single *person* is as close as there is, in ancient times, to the doctrine of “different modes belonging to the same hypostasis”⁷⁸ which was attributed to Sabellius in modern times.

5. MELITO’S MODALISM

If modalism, that is, the attribution to God and his *Logos* of distinct modes of being or of manifesting themselves, is a characteristic of the *Logoschristologie*, and not of its enemy, the theology of identification, the paradox proposed by Reinhard Hübner,⁷⁹ according to which Ignatius of Antioch and Melito of Sardis, among others, classically described as theologians of the *Logos*, would share the theology of

⁷⁶ R. E. HEINE, “The Christology of Callistus,” 72-74, taking up an opinion of J. von DÖLLINGER, *Hippolytus und Kallistus, oder die Römische Kirche in der ersten Hälfte des dritten Jahrhunderts* (Regensburg 1853) 233-234, showed that the mention of “person” was probably an intervention of the author of the *Refutation*, and not a word used by Callistus.

⁷⁷ *Ref. X, 27, 4* (ed. Marcovich) p. 403, l. 19-20; cf. EPIPHANIUS OF SALAMIS, *Pan.* 62, 1, 4 (GCS 31) p. 389, l. 13: ὡς εἶναι ἐν μιᾷ ὑποστάσει τρεῖς ὀνομασίας.

⁷⁸ Th. STACKHOUSE, *A Complete Body of Speculative and Practical Divinity* (London 1729)136. See X. MORALES, “‘Modalism’ - A Critical Assessment of a Modern Interpretative Paradigm,” 243, n. 53.

⁷⁹ R. M. HÜBNER, *Der paradox Eine. Antignostischer Monarchianismus in zweites Jahrhundert* (Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 50; Leiden 1999). Numerous colleagues refuted Hübner’s hypotheses. I will only mention H.-J. VOGT, “Monarchianismus im 2. Jahrhundert,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 197 (1999) 237-259 and “Vertreten die Ignatius-Briefe Patripassianismus?,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 180 (2000) 237-251; M. J. EDWARDS, review in *Journal of Theological Studies* 52 (2001) 354-356; A. BRENT, review in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 53 (2002) 114-117; Stephen E. WAERS, *Monarchianism and Origen’s Early Trinitarian Theology*, 126-129.

identification of Noetus of Smyrna, is resolved. Hübner hypothesizes the existence of an early “modalism” prior to the controversy recorded in the treatise *Against Noetus*.⁸⁰ However, this hypothesis rests on several others, themselves controversial or feeble.

The first, which cannot be discussed here, posits that the *Refutation of All Heresies* is a more reliable source of information on Noetus than the treatise *Against Noetus*.⁸¹ I have developed the opposite hypothesis in a recent article⁸².

The second hypothesis, which I have just refuted, is that the presentation of the theology of Noetus in the form of bipolarities or, to use Hübner’s term, of “antitheses,”⁸³ is authentic and central to the theology of Noetus⁸⁴. Moreover, according to Hübner, the similarities between the doctrine of Heraclitus and that of Noetus, that the author of the *Refutation* detects to condemn the latter as an imitator of the former, would have some foundation: Noetus and his disciples would have been inspired by the half-Platonic Albinos *alias* Alcinoos of Smyrna;⁸⁵ *vice versa*, the interpretation of Heraclitus proposed by the author of the *Refutation* would be inspired by a “perhaps modalistic” commentary of the philosopher.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ As HÜBNER, *Der paradox Eine*, 145-154, reminds, the thesis has predecessors, from Ferdinand Christian Baur (1848) to Wilhelm Bousset (1913), passing through Friedrich Loofs and his description of a “Kleinasiatischen Theologie,” which would go from the fourth Gospel to Ignatius of Antioch, Melito of Sardis, Irenaeus and Noetus.

⁸¹ R. M. HÜBNER, *Der paradox Eine*, 3: “nur die *Refutatio*, nicht aber *Contra Noëtum* als Quelle für Noët und die Noëtianer zu berücksichtigen.”

⁸² X. MORALES, “The Biblical Hermeneutics of Noetus of Smyrna,” *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 27 (2023) 391-412.

⁸³ R. M. HÜBNER, *Der paradox Eine*, p. vii and *passim*.

⁸⁴ R. M. HÜBNER, *Der paradox Eine*, 15: “Wenn irgendetwas irgendetwas von den Überlieferten Lehraussagen der Noëtianer, dann sind es diese Antithesen, die von Noët selbst stammen.”

⁸⁵ R. M. HÜBNER, *Der paradox Eine*, 13.

⁸⁶ R. M. HÜBNER, *Der paradox Eine*, 9, n. 28, citing Luise Abramowski.

Now, Hübner detects the same antitheses for him characteristic of the doctrine of Noetus in several passages of the work of Melito of Sardis, who would be, therefore, a “modalist Monarchian.”⁸⁷

Hübner is partially right. Indeed, Melito is a modalist, but he is so because modalism is characteristic of the *Logoschristologie*, not of the theology of identification.

That Melito is a representative of the *Logoschristologie* is not evident at first glance: the use of the word λόγος to refer univocally to Christ is scarce in the discourse *On the Passover*.

At the beginning of his discourse, Melito affirms that Jesus Christ is, among other predicates, “*logos* insofar as he teaches,”⁸⁸ but here, *logos* does not designate a mediating entity between God and the world, as in the *Logoschristologie*, but the second element of the bipolarity “old law”/“new word,” which structures the whole exordium of the discourse.

In the centre of the discourse, Melito, describing the creation of the world, affirms:

Ὁ θεὸς ἐν ἀρχῇ ποιήσας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν
καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς διὰ τοῦ λόγου,
ἀνεπλάσσωσατο ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς τὸν ἄνθρωπον
καὶ ἰδίαν πνοὴν μετέδωκεν.⁸⁹

God, in the beginning, when he made the heavens, the earth,
and all that is contained in them, by means of the *logos*,
modelled from the earth the human being,
and gave him his own breath.

It is not clear whether *logos* designates, here, Jesus Christ or only the words by which, in the account of the book of Genesis, God calls the world into being. The first hypothesis is at least very likely, because Melito clearly assigns to Christ a participation in the creation

⁸⁷ R. M. HÜBNER, *Der paradox Eine*, 1: “die modalistischen Monarchianer.” Hübner inherits this label from Harnack, as I explained in X. MORALES, ““Modalism” - A Critical Assessment of a Modern Interpretative Paradigm,” 246.

⁸⁸ MELITO, *Pasch.* 9, l. 56. I use the edition of A. C. STEWART, *Melito of Sardis. On Pascha* (Popular Patristics Series 55; St Valdimir’s Seminary Press, Yonkers 2016²) p. 52, which is based on S.G. HALL’s edition (Oxford, 1979), modifying it in some passages.

⁸⁹ MELITO, *Pasch.* 47 (ed. Alistair C. Stewart) p. 64, l. 311-314.

of the world and in the theophanies of the Old Testament,⁹⁰ as do Justin, Irenaeus and the other representatives of the *Logoschristologie*. Moreover, at the end of the discourse, Melito identifies Christ as the one “through whom the Father made <what exists> from the beginning to the ages,”⁹¹ using the same preposition *διὰ* that governed *logos* above. It would seem then that Melito insists on the instrumental function of Christ, as *logos*, just as the representatives of *Logoschristologie* do. In this case, the fragment transmitted by the *Chronicon Paschale* could be authentic:

Οὐκ ἐσμὲν λίθων οὐδεμίαν αἴσθησιν ἔχόντων θεραπευταί, ἀλλὰ μόνου θεοῦ τοῦ πρὸ πάντων καὶ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ ὄντος θεοῦ λόγου πρὸ αἰώνων ἐσμὲν θρησκευταί.⁹²

We are not worshippers of stones devoid of sensation, but we are worshippers of one God, the one who is before all and above all, and of his Christ, who is God *Logos* before the ages.

It is in this framework that one should read the passage of Melito’s fragment 13, in which Hübner wants to see an allusion to the “antitheses” of Noetus.⁹³ First, it is necessary to emphasize that the text of the fragment itself is problematic. Although its authenticity is not recognized by all,⁹⁴ the Syriac florilegium that transmits it attributes it to “Melito, bishop of Sardis, from the discourse on the soul and the body.”⁹⁵ Unfortunately, such a discourse is not preserved in direct tradition. Instead, there is a homily in Syriac, transmitted under the name of Alexander of Alexandria, another in Coptic, under the name of Athanasius, and yet another in Georgian, related to each other and to fragment 13 and the lost discourse, in a way that is difficult to

⁹⁰ MELITO, *Pasch.* 82-85 (ed. Alistair C. Stewart) p. 76, l. 595-624.

⁹¹ MELITO, *Pasch.* 104 (ed. Alistair C. Stewart) p. 83, l. 791: δι’ οὗ ἐποίησεν ὁ πατήρ τὰ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς μέχρι αἰώνων.

⁹² MELITO, frag. 2 (ed. Stuart G. Hall, Oxford 1979) p. 64, l. 3-6.

⁹³ See for example R. M. HÜBNER, *Der paradox Eine*, 15-19.

⁹⁴ A.C. Stewart excludes fragment 13 from his edition. S. G. HALL, *Melito of Sardis. On Pascha and fragments* (Oxford 1979) p. xxxvi, mentions Pierre Nautin, Wilhelm Schneemelcher and Otto Perler as opposing its authenticity.

⁹⁵ *Florilegium Edessenum anonymum* (ed. Ignaz Rucker, Munich 1933) 13.

clarify.⁹⁶ Several Greek fragments allowed Marcel Richard to propose a reconstitution of the original Greek text of fragment 13,⁹⁷ on which Hübner relies for his demonstration.

Τί ἄρα εἶη τοῦτο τὸ καινὸν μυστήριον;
 ὁ κριτῆς κρίνεται καὶ σιωπᾷ.
 ὁ ἀόρατος ὀραῖται καὶ οὐκ ἐπαισχύνεται.
 ὁ ἀκράτητος κρατεῖται καὶ οὐκ ἀγανακτεῖ.
 ὁ ἀμέτρητος μετρεῖται καὶ οὐκ ἀντιτάσσεται.
 ὁ ἀπαθῆς πάσχει καὶ οὐκ ἀνταποδίδωσιν.
 ὁ ἀθάνατος θνήσκει καὶ καρτερεῖ.
 ὁ ἐν οὐρανοῖς θάπτεται καὶ ὑπομένει.
 Τί τοῦτο τὸ καινὸν μυστήριον;⁹⁸
 What could this new mystery be?
 The judge is judged and remains silent.
 The invisible one is seen and has no shame.
 The indomitable one is dominated and does not get angry.
 The immeasurable is measured and does not oppose.
 The impassible one suffers and does not reply.
 The immortal one dies and endures.
 He who is in the heavens is buried and endures.
 What is this new mystery?

Melito's fondness for paradox is evident.⁹⁹ This fondness is not limited to what Hübner considers as inspired by the "Antitheses" of Noetus, since it also permeates the whole discourse *On Easter*. More

⁹⁶ Gregor WURST's reconstitution in his dissertation, *Die Homilie De anima et corpore, ein Werk des Meliton von Sardes? Einleitung. Synoptische Edition. Übersetzung. Kommentar* (diss., Freiburg [CH] 2000), II, p. 220-230, includes the content of the fragment to be discussed in its reconstitution of a Greek source text (*Vorlage*), possibly composed by Melito, in lines 574-582. It is undeniable that this text has similarities in style, form and content with Melito's speech *On the Passover*.

⁹⁷ M. RICHARD, "Témoins grecs des fragments XIII et XIV de Méliton de Sardes," *Le Muséon* 85 (1972) 309-317 (316, l. 6-14).

⁹⁸ R. M. HÜBNER, *Der paradox Eine*, 16.

⁹⁹ H.-J. VOGT, "Monarchianismus im 2. Jahrhundert," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 197 (1999) 237-259 (245): "Melitons Rhetorik insgesamt durch eine Vorliebe für gegensätzliche Aussagen geprägt ist." The discourse "on the soul and the body," in the version reconstituted by Wurst, offers several passages constructed with antitheses, for example, lines 361-373, opposing Christ insofar as he is God and insofar as he became man; or lines 450-464, similar to *Pasch.* 96; and the antitheses analysed by Hübner are partially anticipated in lines 467-474.

deeply, one can recognize the idea, detected above in Irenaeus¹⁰⁰ and in the treatise *Against Noetus*, of the passage of the *Logos* from invisibility to visibility, replicated with other divine properties. More precisely, in Melito, there is no *passage* but *co-existence* between the divine property and its opposite, thanks to a disjunctive Christology which affirms that Christ is “by nature God and human being,”¹⁰¹ and distinguishes, therefore, between “the one who suffers” and “the one who co-suffers with the one who suffers.”¹⁰²

In this framework, it is not a question of identifying God with Christ, as in the doctrine of Noetus, but of attributing to Christ himself two opposite predicates.¹⁰³ This is probably the meaning of another controversial passage of Melito, which Hübner alleges in favor of his hypothesis:¹⁰⁴

Ὅς ἐστὶν τὰ πάντα·
καθ' ὃ κρίνει νόμος,
καθ' ὃ διδάσκει λόγος,
καθ' ὃ σῶζει χάρις,
καθ' ὃ γεννᾷ πατήρ,
καθ' ὃ γεννᾶται υἱός,
καθ' ὃ πάσχει πρόβατον,
καθ' ὃ θάπτεται ἄνθρωπος,
καθ' ὃ ἀνίσταται θεός,
οὗτός ἐστιν Ἰησοῦς ὁ Χριστός,
ὃ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας. Ἀμήν.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Within the framework of his own hypothesis, R. M. HÜBNER, *Der paradox Eine*, 102, supposes that Irenaeus, like Melito, depends directly or indirectly on Noetus.

¹⁰¹ MELITO, *Pasch.* 8, p. 52, l. 53: φύσει θεὸς ὦν καὶ ἄνθρωπος. Note the absence of article before θεός, to be compared with ὁ θεός in *Pasch.* 47, p. 64, l. 311 or in *Pasch.* 76, p. 73, l. 537, where “God” is opposed to “thy Son.”

¹⁰² The author of *Against Noetus* has a similar disjunctive Christology when he speaks of “the flesh [...] by which the *Logos* of God, impassible, submitted to the passion” (*Noet.* 15, 3 [ed. Simonetti] p. 180: τὴν σάρκα [...] δι' ἧς καὶ ὑπὸ πάθος ἦλθεν ὁ ἀπαθὴς τοῦ θεοῦ λόγος).

¹⁰³ In the words of Manlio SIMONETTI, one of the opponents of Hübner's hypothesis: the passage is not “monarchiano patripassiano” but “semplicemente cristologico” (“Tra Noeto, Ippolito e Melitone”, *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 31 [1995] 393-414, here p. 409).

¹⁰⁴ For example, in R. M. HÜBNER, *Der paradox Eine*, 19-22.

¹⁰⁵ MELITO, *Pasch.* 9-10, p. 52, l. 54 - p. 53, l. 64.

The one who is everything:
 insofar as it judges, law,
 insofar as it teaches, word,
 as soon as it saves, grace,
 as soon as it generates, father,
 as soon as it is generated, son,
 as soon as it suffers, sheep,
 as soon as it is buried, a human being,
 as soon as he is resurrected, God,
 he is Jesus, Christ,
 to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Here, again, Melito attributes to the one subject Christ several almost paradoxical predicates. Thus, when Christ himself is “father” and “son,” it is not a matter of defining the relation between Christ and the Father as a relation of identity, as Noetus does, but of defining the relation between Christ and human beings as a paradoxical relation. As God, Christ is the father of human beings; as a human being, he is the son “born of Mary.”¹⁰⁶

Beyond the use of paradoxical formulas, the great difference between Melito—or Ignatius of Antioch, or even Irenaeus of Lyons—and Noetus, is the absence, in the former, of what motivates the antitheses of the latter, if they are authentic—“the explicit identification of the Father and the Son and the concomitant denial of any distinction between them,” as noted by the most recent critic of Hübner’s hypothesis.¹⁰⁷ On the contrary, Melito clearly distinguishes between “the one who comes from the heavens on earth”¹⁰⁸ and “is seated at the

¹⁰⁶ MELITO, *Pasch.* 71, p. 71, l. 496. This interpretation is already that of H.-J. VOGT, “Monarchianismus im 2. Jahrhundert,” 248, who quotes G. RACLE, “À propos du Christ-Père dans l’homélie pascale de Méliton de Sardes,” *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 50 (1962) 400-408. M. SIMONETTI adopts the same interpretation (“Tra Noeto, Ippolito e Melitone”, 409). More recently, A. SÁEZ GUTIÉRREZ, “Cristo y la filiación en la *Homilía pascual* de Melitón de Sardes”, in P. DE NAVASCUÉS BENLLOCH, M. CRESPO LOSADA and A. SÁEZ GUTIÉRREZ (ed.), *Filiación. Cultura pagana, religión de Israel, orígenes del cristianismo*, vol. V (Madrid 2013) 335-363 (359-362).

¹⁰⁷ S. E. WAERS, *Monarchianism and Origen’s Early Trinitarian Theology*, 128.

¹⁰⁸ MELITO, *Pasch.*, 66, p. 69, l. 451: Οὗτος ἀφικόμενος ἐξ οὐρανῶν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν.

right hand of the Father,”¹⁰⁹ whom Christ promises to “show” to “human families”:

Ἐγὼ ὑμᾶς ἀνάγω εἰς τὰ ὑψηλὰ τῶν οὐρανῶν.

Ἐγὼ ὑμῖν δεῖξω τὸν ἀπ’ αἰώνων πατέρα.¹¹⁰

I will take you to the heights of heaven.

I will show you the eternal Father.

CONCLUSION: TRINITARIAN FUNCTIONAL MODALISM

To the analyses of texts by Justin, Irenaeus, Melito and the authors of *Against Noetus* and the *Refutation*, we could add those of texts by other distinguished representatives of the *Logoschristology*, such as Ignatius of Antioch, Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch or Novatian, not to mention Tertullian and Origen. The same formula is adapted to the various polemical contexts—anti-Jewish, anti-Gnostic, anti-monarchian—to express, at the same time, the divine unicity and its articulation in a diversity, whether binitarian or trinitarian.

I conclude with two more examples. Tertullian, in his refutation of the doctrine of the mysterious Praxeas, related to that of Noetus, expressly presents the Son as the mediator of the manifestation of the Father:

*uicarium se patris ostenderat, per quem pater et uideretur in factis et audiretur in uerbis et cognosceretur in filio facta et uerba patris administrante, quia inuisibilis pater.*¹¹¹

He had shown himself to be the Father’s substitute, the one through whom the Father was seen in actions, heard in words, and known in the Son, the intermediary operating the actions and words of the Father, since the Father is invisible.

With the last example, I refer to the analysis I proposed of the “trifunctional formula,” in which the Father, the Son and the Spirit occupy three grammatical positions in the same proposition, which expresses the distribution of a single action in three functions. This is

¹⁰⁹ MELITO, *Pasch.* 105, p. 83, l. 801.

¹¹⁰ MELITO, *Pasch.* 103, p. 82, l. 779-780.

¹¹¹ TERTULLIAN, *Prax.* 24, 6 (ed. Scarpat) p. 216, l. 29-31.

how Moses and the prophets as well as the believers of the New Testament

χαίρουσιν ἑνὸς τέλους ἀπὸ ἑνὸς θεοῦ διὰ ἑνὸς Χριστοῦ ἐν ἑνὶ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι ἀμφοτέροις ἀποκειμένου.¹¹²

enjoy the same end reserved to both by the one God, through the one Christ, in the one Holy Spirit.

These analyses demonstrate that only a Trinitarian theology can be modalistic—and indeed, it is the proponents of traditional Trinitarian theology, against the unitarianism propagated by the Socinians in the seventeenth century, who invoked the concept of *modes of subsistence* and were branded “modalists” by their opponents.¹¹³

Therefore, the theologians of the patristic period who came closest to a description of three “modes of manifestation” of the one God are not Noetus, Sabellius or Praxeas, but their adversaries and the other representatives of *Logoschristologie*. Now, in the framework of *Logoschristologie*, the use of the concept—by default of the term—of modes of manifestation seeks to point not to a single subject receiving these modes, but to a single “economy,” performed in various phases and by various agents performing different functions. In short, the modalism of the *Logoschristologie* is not an ontological modalism, but an *economic* or *functional* modalism.

¹¹² ORIGEN, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, XIII, xlix, 321 (GCS 10) p. 276, l. 16-17. See the presentation of the “trifunctional formula” in X. MORALES, “Las operaciones personales en la teología trinitaria de Orígenes,” 447-471.

¹¹³ X. MORALES, “‘Modalism’ - A Critical Assessment of a Modern Interpretative Paradigm”, 240-241.