

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEA OF JESUS  
IN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM  
From 1<sup>ST</sup> TO 13<sup>TH</sup> Century

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## 1.1 Introduction

The existence of Jesus, the center of Christianity, is obviously a historical fact, as it is testified by both Christian and non-Christian sources. The former, identified here with the New Testament and other early Christian writings, not only affirm the existence of Jesus but also tell his life and works, upon which Christians build their faith.

Non-Christian sources, even though unreliable in certain respects, have their importance. Historians like Horace, Tacitus and Suetonius say a lot about Jesus and Christians. The letter of Pliny the Younger is the most important. We shall give an extract of it in order to bring out its value and its contribution. In fact during the time of persecution under the reign of Emperor Trajan, Pliny the Younger, who was his governor in Bithynia from 112 A.D, wrote a letter requesting for measures to be taken against Christians who persevered in their belief. He said: Those who denied they were, or had ever been Christians, who repeated after me an invocation to the gods, and offered adoration, with wine and frankincense, to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for that purpose, together with those of the gods, and finally cursed Christ none of which acts, it is said, those who are really Christians can be forced into performing these I thought it proper to discharge... They affirmed, however, the whole of their guilt or their error was that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ as to god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath...<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Colman J. (ed), *Readings in Church History* (Maryland: Christian Classics, 1985), p. 13.

Pliny the Younger asked the Emperor for the instructions to follow with regard to the attitude of this group of people who did not respect the religion of the time. He calls them Christians and gives the origin of this name when he asserts that they were dedicated to Christ. He goes further to say that Christ was considered as a god. Pliny is talking about Jesus Christ and consequently testifying to his existence.

Furthermore, the idea of Jesus could not have escaped a historian like Flavius Josephus (37-94). He reports two important facts. First, he relates the murder of John called Baptist, the precursor of Jesus. Secondly, he disapproves of the sentence pronounced by the high priest Ananus against James, brother of Jesus who was called Christ.<sup>2</sup> Josephus does not talk directly about Christ but gives very important facts that point out the existence of Jesus. He mentions both the precursor and the brother of Jesus. In fact the turning point of his account is implicitly Jesus, insofar the name Jesus appears in both elements. These insights are remotely historical facts from non-Christian writings; they verify the existence of Jesus, yet they are insufficient to tell the whole truth about Jesus because they deal only with history not with faith.

In other words, though the non-Christian writings testify to the historical existence of Jesus; they are not the main sources of the theological meaning of Jesus. Karl Baus comments:

The sources which tell us of that life and its significance for the Church are of a quite exceptional nature. Apart from a few references in Pagan and Jewish works, which are valuable because they place beyond discussion any attempt to deny the historical existence of Jesus, the main sources are the writings of the New Testament, especially the first three Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and some of the letters of St. Paul.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. J.J. Walsh, "Jesus Christ" *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 8 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910).

<sup>3</sup>Hubert Jedin and John Dolan, *Handbook of Church History* (Herder and Herder, 1964) p. 70.

Without neglecting pagan and Jewish writings, the New Testament provides more information about the history and the theological meaning of Jesus. In fact, the Apostles who wrote and transmitted those facts are witnesses of the first and second generation of Jesus. However, before being put into writing, the Gospel was preached by the Apostles and lived by Christians in their daily life. Both preaching and canonical writings relate the same truth which is original because it flows from the words and works of their master, Jesus. It is what they saw and heard that they reported. In other words, the Apostles preached that Jesus, born from the Virgin Mary, is the Son of God. They were bound to believe that Jesus is God. Their whole preaching contained dogmas that are essential to the understanding of Jesus' message.

Nevertheless, we should not lose sight of the fact that, historically speaking, the testimonies of the Apostles, even though sound, clear and multiple, can be questioned since they acted as believers; they believed and reported the fruit of their belief. We do not say that their reason was put aside, but their faith preceded reason. As we know, Christian faith is centered on Jesus and early Christians were prepared to suffer and die for Him; would the early Christians have been prepared to go through suffering and death in defense of falsehood and what they knew to be the product of their own imagination?<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, some scholars are still arguing that this fact is not quite convincing because the Evangelists were not neither concerned with any precise chronology nor interested in the description of Jesus' personal appearance.<sup>5</sup>

Anyway, if the Gospel is clear, it raised dogmatic questions that were obscure. Bernard Lonergan notes:

It is argued that the dogmas are obscure, whereas the Gospels are perfectly clear. In one sense this is true, but in another it is not.. And if the Gospels are not without obscurity, neither

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<sup>4</sup>S. Brown, *The origins of Christianity: A historical Introduction to the New testament, Revised Edition*, (Oxford University Press: P.R. Ackroyd & G.N. Stanton, 1993), pp. 14-36), quoted by S.O Abogurin in his inaugural lecture presented at the University of Ibadan, 1998.

<sup>5</sup>Robert Morgan with John Barton, cited by Professor S.O. Abogunrin, *ibid.*

are the dogmas entirely lacking in clarity.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Bernard Lonergan, *The way to Nicea. The dialectical development of Trinitarian theology* (London: Darton, 1976) p. 4.

The fact is that the Apostles preached a Gospel that was loaded with dogma. But some individuals or groups of people refused to take them as true because they did not grasp them in their entirety, or they emphasized or neglected one aspect or another. We have for instance the Judeo-Christians, the Gnostics, the Adoptionists and Subordinationists, the Monophysitists, the Arians and Nestorians.

Thus we consider the development of the idea of Jesus as a tree which grows and continues to grow until the end of time. It is a tree, indeed, whose trunk symbolizes the orthodox teaching of the Church that Saint Thomas Aquinas synthesized in his time, and the branches stand for the doctrines that deviated from orthodoxy or from the teachings of the Church.

### 1.2 The unarticulated orthodox view

The orthodox view of Jesus is what the Apostles preached and the Gospels and Epistles proclaim. This view can be summarized in this statement: Jesus-Christ is the Word of God who took flesh and became man. He was born from the Virgin Mary, died on the cross, but rose from the dead in order to save the human race.<sup>7</sup> Many implications can be drawn from this statement but four attract our attention, namely, (1) that Jesus is God, (2) He is the Word of God, (3) He became man, (4) He died and rose. We need to comment on them briefly.

To begin with, the first element which goes along with the second, especially in Saint John's prologue, testifies that Jesus is the Word of God and He is God. Saint John says:

In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things came into being, not one thing came into being except through Him. What has come into being in Him was life, life that was the light of men; and light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it. (Jn 1:1-5)

Saint John believed like other Apostles that Jesus is God and the Word of God even though this belief is expressed in different ways as we can see it in Saint Paul:

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<sup>7</sup>Cf. J.J. Walsh "Jesus Christ" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 8 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910).

Make your own the mind of Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God did not count equality with God something to be grasped. (Ph. 2:5-6)

In his letter to the Romans, Saint Paul continued:

To them belong the fathers and out of them, so far as physical descent is concerned, came Christ who is above all, God blessed for ever. (Rm. 9:5)

These few verses affirm the divinity of Christ without any compromise. As said above, the Apostles preached what they believed and confessed. They witnessed to his authority, they saw the miracles that He performed, they received the grace of faith and they believed.

The second element is that Jesus Christ is God who became man for a noble purpose: to save mankind enslaved by sin. Saint Paul confesses:

But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like a human being, he was humble yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. (Ph. 2:7-8).

Besides, the Gospels present the account of how Jesus was born (Mt 1:18-22; Lk 2:1-20). The whole New Testament, moreover, generally tells us of his works, his death and his resurrection. Now with these elements, we can understand that the Apostles confessed and preached Jesus who is God and man. Saint Paul says that Jesus had the form of God; in other words, He is God but He became man. The two natures of Jesus are put forth.

The third element stipulates that Jesus is the Son of God. Many times and on many occasions Jesus called God "Father" (Jn 14:28; Mt 26:36; Jn 11:37 Jn 2:4). In relation to this, Jesus is the Son of God. We know that this was one of the strong reasons that weakened Jesus' relationship with the Jews. According to the Jews, it was a blasphemy for Jesus to call God "Father" as it is stated in the Gospel of John: "Yet to someone whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world you say you are blaspheming because I said I am Son of God (11:36). Unlike the Jews, the apostles believed in the words of Jesus who called God Father. So they preached and wrote that He is the Son of God who came down from Heaven. Indeed He is the Son of God. Moreover Jesus advised his followers to call God Father as He

taught them how to pray in the Gospel (Mt 7:9-13).

Two very familiar illustrations should not be forgotten due to the intervention of God Himself calling Jesus His Son. In the episodes mentioned above, Jesus calls himself Son of God or some writers draw that implication because He calls God his Father. In Matthew's account of Jesus' Baptism and Transfiguration, it is God testifying the sonship of Jesus in these terms: "This is my Son". Talking especially about the Transfiguration, the Evangelist Matthew says that the disciples who were with Jesus, heard that declaration and fell on their faces, overcome with fear (Mt 17:6-7). The disciples could not have done otherwise than to report what they heard and saw.

Finally the message of Jesus is validated and actualized through his death and resurrection from the dead. The Apostles proclaimed Jesus who suffered, died and resurrected. The four Gospels are unanimous in relating the facts in almost the same words. Matthew for instance says: "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said he would (Mt 28:6-7). These verses come after the long episode of his suffering death and burial (Mt 26-27). In addition, The Acts of the Apostles summarizes everything in a concise way:

God sent his Word to the people of Israel and it was to them that the Good News of peace was brought by Jesus Christ. He is the Lord of all. You know what happened all over Judea, how Jesus of Nazareth began in Galilee, after John had been preaching baptism... Jesus went about doing good... Now we are witnesses to everything he did... And they killed him by hanging him on a tree, yet on the third day God raised him to life and allowed him to be seen. (Acts 10:36-41)

In this section we present the orthodox view of Jesus. We believe that there are many elements that could have been considered, but these are presented as the sensitive elements because from their misunderstanding emerged many heresies. They constitute the trunk of the tree of the development of the idea of Jesus in relation to the branches (heresies) that deviated from them. These branches over-emphasize or neglect some elements of the confession of the Apostles. People who received the faith of the Apostles, received it with a

different dispositions. We agree with Bernard Lonergan when he says:

Whatever is received is received after manner of the receiver. For the human mind is not equally open to all ideas, like some public square where all may come and go as they please.<sup>8</sup>

After receiving the preaching of the Apostles and of their immediate successors, various individuals or groups of people in the Church professed new but wrong ideas. They did so because they thought their understanding was better. We all know that it is human to struggle for the understanding of ideas and things. It is unfortunate, in this case, that some understandings gave rise to heterodox opinions and explanations.

The following people are those who received the truth of the Apostles but, in different ways, misunderstood it and gave different expressions to it. We endeavor here to dwell not on their history but on their doctrines.

### 1.3 The Judeo-Christian position

The expression "Judeo-Christian" looks familiar because, considering the two words, someone will quickly think that a Judeo-Christian is a person who mixes Judaism and Christianity. In one way or the other, that is true but it necessitates an ample explanation. In his work on Judeo-Christianity, Jean Daniélou observes three possible ways in which the term Jewish-Christianity can be used:

First, as designating those Jews who acknowledge Christ as a prophet or a Messiah, but not as the Son of God and thus form a separate class, half way between Jews and Christians. The Ebionites are the best known of this group. The second possible reference for the term Jewish-Christianity is to the Christian community at Jerusalem under the leadership of James and those who were influenced by him. This community dominated the Church, so many have held, until after 70 A.D. And, thirdly, Jewish Christianity can stand for a type of Christian thought expressing itself in terms borrowed from Judaism.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Bernard Lonergan, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup>W. D. Davies, "Paul and Jewish Christianity according to Cardinal Daniélou: a suggestion," in *Judeo-Christianisme* (Paris: Recherches de science Religieuse, 1972), p. 69.



These were not the only forms of Jewish Christianity; there were many others. So we will agree with Bernard Lonergan when he says:

Judeo-Christianity means different things to different people: some conceive it narrowly, as a complex of heresies arising out of Judaism; others think of it rather as a cultural form proper to what is called later Judaism, shared by orthodox Jewish Christians no less than the heretics, and finding expression also in the writings of non-Jewish authors of that period.<sup>10</sup>

The two quotations are not contradictory because they explain the same reality; the first is descriptive, while the second is analytical. Both present Judaeo-Christianity, as described in the case of the Ebionites, as a blend of Judaism and Christianity.

Judaeo-Christianity is heterodox on two counts. The first, which portrays a negative aspect, is the declaration that Jesus is not Son of God. Recall the experience that Jesus had with the Jews (cf. Jn 11:36). Jesus was accused of blaspheming because He called God his Father. The Judeo-Christians rejected this claim. They believed and confessed that Jesus is a Prophet and the Messiah, but his Messianism did not imply divinity; He is no more than a man who had a special call from God.<sup>11</sup>

The second count is affirmative. It is the declaration that Jesus is a creature, on the order of an angel. In fact this second statement is implied in the first because, being only a man (the first statement), he could not but be a creature (the second statement). As a creature he is sometimes identified with an angel. Bernard Lonergan reports:

In Origen and Ireneus, in *Hermas* and the *Ascension of Isaiah*, we have found the term angel applied to both Christ and the Holy spirit. J.Barbel illustrated this usage abundantly; the inference drawn by M. Werner was that the Judeo-Christians considered Christ a creature.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Bernard Lonergan, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>11</sup>Robert A. Kraft, *In search of Jewish Christianity and its theology in Judeo-Christianisme* (Paris: Recherches De Science Religieuse, 1972), p. 87.

<sup>12</sup>Bernard Lonergan, *The way to Nicea. The dialectic development of Trinitarian Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982), p. 22.

With this, what is the meaning and value of the Incarnation of Jesus? And is the resurrection of Jesus still necessary? R.A Kraft answers:

By definition, this would be orthodox theology as over against approaches to Christianity in which incarnation and resurrection are not focal. Now it is clear enough to say that Judeo-Christianity shaped the truth of the Apostles in a different manner. It deviated from the trunk because its development is a ramification.<sup>13</sup>

We can imagine that Judeo-Christianity is a variation from a common way of thinking. By denying the Sonship of Jesus with the Father, Judeo-Christians affirmed consequently only his human nature even though some say that he is an angel. The main doctrine is that Jesus is a creature but, as Prophet and Messiah, he is entitled to have some privileges and advantages.

#### I.4 The Gnostic contribution

Gnosticism has a long and interesting history that one must know before conducting any investigation of it. But, we will confine ourselves to its doctrine about Jesus.

Usually Gnosticism is considered a religious philosophy which is characterized by the doctrine that salvation is achieved through knowledge.<sup>14</sup> When we talk about salvation, we are dealing with a soteriological view which differs from orthodoxy. Gnosticism is a religion of redemption, but redemption is taken in a different angle. K. Schubert asserts:

Its most distinguishing feature is that salvation is accomplished, not by the power of God nor by human faith nor by cooperation with the will of God, but the assimilation of esoteric knowledge. The various Gnostic systems gave central place to the figure of a redeemer whose essential task was to come among men and communicate or reveal to them the saving knowledge. The Gnostic savior is scarcely recognizable from the New Testament point of view. He is a semidivine personage, a messenger from God Himself. But Christ does not become man...<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>R.A. Kraft, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. G.W. MacRae "Gnosticism" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 6 (London: Mc Graw-Hill Book Company, 1966).

<sup>15</sup>*ibid.*

It is here that the Gnostic originality comes in. The redeemer of the Gnostics is Jesus who provides saving knowledge but he is neither man nor God; he is a semidivine personage, whereas the orthodoxy of the Church says that Jesus is fully God and man. Bernard Lonergan puts it in his own way:

The Gnostic writings contain very clear evidence of this archaic theology. For what is visible in Jesus is called wisdom and the Church of the higher seeds... What is invisible, however is the name, which is the only-begotten Son. And so in a discussion of Matthew 22: 20, it is said that he has a superscription through Christ the name of God, and the spirit as an image. And in the recently discovered *Gospel of truth* we read: Now the name of the Father is the Son.<sup>16</sup>

There is a tendency of identifying The Father with the Son in Gnosticism; there is no distinction between the Father and the Son. In addition, the Only-Begotten Son is not Jesus as God and man but Jesus in his invisible nature. On the basis of the Gnostic cardinal principle, which is a radical dualism between God and the world,<sup>17</sup> Jesus, who is the revealer of the saving knowledge, could not have been a man. In the same vein, knowing that God is the transcendent God who is unknown in the world and cannot be discovered,<sup>18</sup> Jesus who is visible is not God or cannot be God. Therefore he does not liberate; he is not the saviour because, according to the Gnostics,

what liberates is the knowledge of who we were, what we became; where we were, whereinto we have been thrown; whereto we speed, wherefrom we are redeemed; what birth is, and what rebirth.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Bernard Lonergan, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>17</sup>Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), p. 42.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 45.

The emphasis on esoteric knowledge as the source and means of salvation puts aside the salvific role of Jesus as it is confessed in the Church. In other words, Jesus does not save. Rather, the knowledge that He brought and that anybody may acquire gives salvation. Gnostics do not attribute the work of salvation to Jesus but he is the one, in his invisible nature, who reveals the knowledge that saves. Moreover Jesus is the Only-Begotten Son only in his invisible nature. As described above, because of the dualist conception that Gnostics had about God and man, the Son of God did not incarnate, did not take flesh. God is God and man is man; they live in two separated worlds. Therefore God cannot become man. As indicated in a preceding context, Gnostics denied the divinity of the historical Jesus.

## 1.5 Arianism and the council of Nicea

### 1.5.1 Arianism

"Jesus is not God " is the summary of the doctrine formulated by the Alexandrian priest Arius. Arianism is the heretical doctrine called after his name. It came from his theology of the Godhead and the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This theology was a rejection of Origen's theology. Origen wrote:

First we must know this, that in Christ there is one nature, his deity, because he is the Only-Begotten Son of the Father, and another human nature, which in very recent times he took upon him to fulfil the divine purpose. Our first task therefore is to see what the Only-begotten Son of God is, seeing he is called by many different names according to the circumstances and beliefs of the different writers. He is called Wisdom, as Solomon said, speaking in the person of Wisdom... Before he made anything, before the ages he established me. In the beginning before he made the earth, before the springs of waters came forth, before the mountains were settled, before all the hills he begets me. He is also called Firstborn, as the Apostle Paul says: who is the Firstborn of all creation. The Firstborn is not, however, by nature a different being from Wisdom, but is one and the same. Finally, the apostle Paul says, Christ, the Power of God and the Wisdom of God.<sup>20</sup>

Origen's opinion was that Jesus is an Eternal creation; he has neither beginning nor end. He is God with the same essence with the Father because he is the Only-begotten Son. Origen

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<sup>20</sup> *Origen on first principles* (London: Gloucester Mass, 1973), p. 15.

continues:

And can anyone who has learned to regard God with feelings of reverence suppose or believe that God the Father ever existed, even for a single moment, without begetting this Wisdom? For he would either say that God could not have begotten Wisdom before he did beget her, so that he brought Wisdom into being when she had not existed before, or else that he could have begotten her and what it is profanity even to say about God that he was unwilling to do so; each of which alternatives, as everyone can see, is absurd and impious, that is, either that God should advance from being unable to being able, or that, while being able, he should act as if he were not and should delay to beget Wisdom.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16.

The theologian Origen, in his creative manner, demonstrates his dynamism in explaining the term "Only-begotten". He arrives at the conclusion that Jesus is eternal with God the Father.

In the contrary, Arius found this theological explanation wrong. In reaction, he gives the fruit of his investigation in a letter he addressed to Alexander:

This, blessed Father, is the faith that we received from our elders, and also learned from you. We acknowledge one God, who alone is unbegotten, who alone is eternal, who alone is without beginning, who alone is true, who alone is immortal... He is the God of the law and of the prophets and of the New Covenant... This one God, before all time, begot his Only-begotten Son, through whom he made the ages and the universe. He begot him not just in appearance, but in fact; by his own will he made his Son to subsist and he made him unchangeable and unalterable. God's perfect creature, he is unlike any other creature; begotten, yes, but unique in the manner of his begetting... The Son, born of the Father before all time, created and constituted in being before all ages, did not exist before he was begotten.<sup>22</sup>

The position of Arius comes from his theological background. His theology is based on the fact that only God is unbegotten, uncreated. So as far as the Son is begotten, he must have been created as he clarifies it here:

He is not eternal, co-eternal with the Father, nor is he as the Father is, unbegotten; neither, as some say of things that are related to each other, does he have being simultaneously with the Father.<sup>23</sup>

Arius denied the divinity of Christ because he could not justify the reason why Jesus is only-begotten son and yet not created. Origen, according to Arius, says that Jesus is the begotten Son of the Father but he refuses to admit that he is created. How can a being be begotten but not created? If the Father begot Jesus, the Father is obviously his Creator, even though Jesus has some privileges that nobody has ever had.

I think that there is a communication gap between Arius and Origen, because, while begotten is

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<sup>22</sup>Bernard Lonergan. *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 71.

taken as eternal in Origen's letter, it is considered as temporal in Arius' explanation. For Arius, the Father begot Jesus in time; therefore there was a time that he was not.

Furthermore Arius can be considered as versatile, for he said earlier in his letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia that Jesus is immutable and fully God whereas in his letter to Alexander of Alexandria, he asserts that Jesus is mutable.<sup>24</sup> These contradictory statements are understandable if we realize that Arius went through a process of investigation which ended by adopting the second. In fact the mutability of Jesus is one of the consequences of his general view of Jesus. Jesus is created; he is a man, not God. While Origen affirmed the eternal generation of Jesus, Arius affirmed his beginning.

Yet we find some obscure expressions in Origen's theology, such as "He established me", "He begets me" and "Firstborn of all creation". These expressions might have led Arius to proclaim what he understood thinking that he was not denying any dogma.

#### 1.5.2 The council of Nicea (325)

During the second decade of the 4th Century A.D., Arius' conception was considered as a heresy because it preached a contrary opinion to the orthodoxy of the Church. This heresy was so popular and strong that it broke the peace in the whole province of Alexandria. It was the duty of the Church to call Arius back but all attempts failed; Arius refused all of them. First, in a Council of the Egyptian episcopate, Arius was condemned and excommunicated. Secondly, the Council of the Orient in Antioch condemned him again. Thirdly, in the same year at the Council of Nicaea, particularly at Ancyra in Galatia, Arius refused to submit to Church teaching. Meanwhile the dispute caused by Arius divided the entire Eastern Church into two groups: the Arians and the Orthodox.

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<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

After those repeated refusals, the Emperor Constantine, who had conquered the East, called for an other Council which was held in Nicea in 325. Arius' heresy was not the only problem but it was the most important. A.E. Burn mentions:

The first ecumenical Council of the Church was summoned by the Emperor Constantine to restore peace to the great diocese and province of Alexandria, rent by the Arian heresy and the Meletian schism. The appeal made by Arius to his friends in Asia Minor and Palestine had greatly increased the area of disturbance. There were other practical considerations in view, such as the proposed agreement on the calculation of the date of the festival of Easter. But the settlement of the Arian controversy came first, and we are concerned to discover why the Imperial policy brought not peace but the sword.<sup>25</sup>

The story is long and interesting as well as the events leading up to the Council. Here, we give the Creed of the Council and see briefly how it defended the orthodoxy of the Church in one way and condemned Arianism in another. The Creed is as follows:

We believe in One God, the Father Almighty, the Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, God from God, Light from Light, Life from Life, Son only-begotten, first-born of every creature, before all the ages, begotten from the Father, by Whom also all things were made, Who for our salvation was made flesh, and lived among men, and suffered, and rose again the third day, and ascended to the Father, and will come again in glory to judge the quick and dead. And we believe also in One Holy God.<sup>26</sup>

This Creed focuses on Jesus and the key term is *homoousios*. *Homoousios* was used by Eusebius of Caesarea and Athanasius of Alexandria, both Church Fathers who, through it, defined the divinity of Jesus and *ipso facto* condemned Arianism. Jesus is God from God, begotten not made, he is consubstantial with the Father. Non-biblical, the word *homoousios*

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<sup>25</sup>A.E. Burn, *The Council of Nicea* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1925), p. 1.

<sup>26</sup>A. E. Burn, *The Council of Nicaea* (London: Society for promoting Christian knowledge, 1925), p. 32. Cf. Ortiz De Urbina, *Nicée et Constantinople*, (Paris: Editions de l'Orante), 1963, p. 70. He gives the same Creed in a French translation.



became the decisive word of Nicene creed, so much so that, as Ortiz de Urbina states, "to defend *homoousious* meant, in the 4th century, confessing the orthodoxy of Nicea".<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 70.

In this Council of Nicea, Arius and Arianism were condemned, but this condemnation did not stop his followers from professing their faith. An anti-Nicene reaction led to a later revival and gave rise to other heresies. For instance, Subordinationism, which is one of the implications of Arian ideas, taught that since God the Father is the only true God and that Jesus is a man, Jesus can be called God only in an improper sense. Jesus was used by God as an instrument for creation; he is subordinate, inferior to God. Subordinationism (4th century A.D.) was precisely a misunderstanding of the unity of God. By affirming a strict monotheism, the Subordinationists arrived at the conclusion that Jesus is God, but God in a lower degree. That was not all, because Macedonism too has a close connection with Arianism:

Arius had treated explicitly only the Son, but his teaching was extended to the Holy Ghost by, it is said, Macedonius, the semi-Arian bishop of Constantinople. The Holy Ghost was declared not to proceed from the Father, but to be a creature made by the Son, by whom all things were made.<sup>28</sup>

The author speaks in terms of extension; it could be accepted as an offshoot of the teaching of Arius. Arius emphasized the creation of Jesus by God. Macedonius dealt with the person of the Holy Spirit. According to him, the Holy Spirit was created by the Son. In this perspective the Holy Spirit is not God but a creature. This too goes against the teaching of the Church. This situation necessitated calling a Council in order to recall and affirm the orthodoxy of the Church concerning the person of the Holy Spirit. In 381, that Council was held in Constantinople. The extract below summarizes its Creed:

We believe... and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.<sup>29</sup>

As a matter of fact, the Symbol of Constantinople which affirms the teaching of the Church on the Holy Spirit, condemned Macedonius and his heresy. After this Council the Church enjoyed peace for a time, but other heresies soon came.

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<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. Ortiz de Urbina, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-183.

## 1.6 Reprobation of Nestorianism: the council of Ephesus (431)

The Church sought for peace which came neither with the Council of Nicea nor with the Council of Constantinople. The Church continued to struggle with some of its members especially among the clergy. In this case, it was Nestorius who, when he became the bishop of Constantinople in 428, preached that the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, should not be called Mother of God. Following the *sensus fidei* of the members of the Church, Nestorius was labeled a heretic.

Without undervaluing the history of the events, I wish to focus attention on the theology behind the dispute. The turning point was the word θεότοκος (*Theotokos*) which means Mother of God as applied to Virgin Mary. Before Nicea, the Virgin Mary was honored as the Mother of God and the word *Theotokos* was used by many Fathers of the Church when they explained the Incarnation.<sup>30</sup> Athanasius, for instance, preached that in the Incarnation, "man did not become God, but God became man in order to make us godlike".<sup>31</sup> Camelot says it in other words: "Si quelqu'un pense que Sainte Marie n'est pas Mère de Dieu, il est en dehors de la divinité".<sup>32</sup> The two natures of Jesus are emphasized. Jesus is both God and man. So in the Incarnation which took place in time in the Virgin Mary's womb, Jesus who was born from her is God and man. The implication is that the Virgin Mary is the mother of God and man. For this reason, she is called *Theotokos*.

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<sup>30</sup>P.Th. Camelot, *Ephèse et Constantinople*. (Paris: Editions de l'Orante, 1961), p. 14.

<sup>31</sup>Hurbert Jedin and John Dolan (ed), *History of the Church* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1990), p. 100.

<sup>32</sup>P.Th. Camelot, *op. cit.*, p. 14. To say that Virgin Mary is not the mother of God is to deny the divinity of Jesus.

As time went on, those who denied the divinity of Jesus (e.g. Arius) called Mary *Anthropotokos* because, they said, Mary gave birth only to the man Jesus. In the process of the discussion, Nestorius arose. Using his theological investigations as antecedents, Nestorius rejected both terms (*Theotokos* and *Anthropotokos*) and took a middle view which, he taught, was appropriate. By doing so, he contradicted the theology of the Incarnation, as he preached:

Let those people pay attention to these words who, blinded with regard to the dispensation of Lord's Incarnation, do not understand either the words they employ or the things they are talking about. I mean those who, as we have now learned, are always inquiring among us now this way and now that: is Mary *Theotokos*, they say (that is, the bearer or Mother of God), or is she on the contrary *Anthropotokos* (that is, the bearer or Mother of human being)? Does God have a mother? A Greek without reproach introducing mothers for the gods! Is Paul then a liar when he says of the deity of Christ, without Father, without Mother, without genealogy. Mary, my friend, did not give birth to the Godhead. A creature did not produce him who is uncreateable...<sup>33</sup>

Richard Norris explains the implications:

Attend to what is said here. That which was formed in the womb is not in itself God. That which was buried in the tomb was not in itself God.<sup>34</sup>

According to Nestorius, to say that the divine nature was born, suffered and died, is to fall into Arianism. Nestorius fought Arianism with his last energy. Unfortunately by fighting an old heresy, he promoted another one. Faithful to his doctrine, Nestorius suggested that Mary should be called the Mother of Christ (*Christokos*). In other words, Mary gave birth to Jesus who is a human being intimately and completely indwelt by the Logos.<sup>35</sup> Jesus is neither God nor man.

According to Nestorius, the Jesus that Mary gave birth is human; he is not God. Nestorius

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<sup>33</sup>Richard Norris (ed), *The Christological controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 123.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, p. 26.

entered into conflict with Cyril of Alexandria who tried in vain to call him back to the orthodoxy and faith of the Apostles. As a point of fact, this situation called for a Council in order to make a dogmatic definition about the issue at hand. That was the Council of Ephesus in 431.

Unlike the Council of Nicea, which defined the doctrine of the Church in a Symbol of Faith and a number of canons, the Council of Ephesus did not repeat the previous Councils, because it thought they were sufficient to identify and condemn any error. It was clear enough that the doctrine of Nestorius was an error; so it was condemned. In fact the letters of Cyril of Alexandria had already pointed out what was in Nestorius' theology that led him to act the way he did. Nestorius denied the divinity of Christ before, during and after the Incarnation.

Even though it did not provide a particular Creed, the Council of Ephesus stated some elements that go along with Nicea. Camelot summarizes its resolutions:

La nature (physis) du Verbe n'a subi aucun changement pour devenir chair. Le Verbe s'est uni selon l'hypostase une chair animée d'une âme raisonnable. Il s'est appelé fils de l'homme, non par volonté ou complaisance, ou par l'assomption d'un *prosopon*. Les natures différentes se sont rencontrées en une unité véritable, et des deux (il s'est fait) un seul Christ et un seul fils. La différence des natures n'est pas supprimée par l'union mais la rencontre ineffable de la divinité et de l'humanité réalise pour nous un seul Christ. Le Verbe lui-même est né de la Vierge, puisqu'il s'est approprié la nature de sa propre chair. Ce n'est pas la nature du Verbe qui a souffert, mais puisque son propre corps a souffert, on peut dire qu'il a souffert et est mort pour nous. Nous disons un seul Christ et Seigneur, non pas que nous adorons un homme avec le Verbe, mais nous adorons un seul même Christ. Refuser l'union selon l'hypostase, cela revient à dire deux fils. L'Écriture ne dit pas que le Logos s'est uni le *prosopon* d'un homme, mais qu'il s'est fait chair. Ainsi les pères appellent-ils Marie Mère de Dieu *Theotokos*.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>P.Th. Camelot, *op. cit.*, p. 14. We do not say that the nature (physis) was changed and became flesh. Rather, the Word having united to Himself in his own Hypostasis in ineffable and inconceivable manner, flesh animated with a rational soul, became man. He was called Son of man, not being united merely as a result of will or good pleasure, nor yet by his assumption of a single person; and that while the natures which were brought together

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*into this genuine unity were different, yet of them both in the one Christ and Son. The difference of the natures was not abolished by the union, but rather the Godhead and the manhood, by their ineffable and unspeakable concilience into unity, perfected for us the one Lord and Christ and Son. The Word Himself was born through the Virgin, for he is spoken of as begotten also after the flesh from a woman. It is not the nature of the Word that suffered, but when that which was made his own body suffered, He Himself is said to suffer and die for us. Thus we acknowledge one Christ and Lord; not worshipping a man along with the Word, but one and the same Lord. But if we reject this Hypostatic union, we fall into saying two sons. For the Scripture had not declared that the Word united to Himself a man's person, but he had become flesh. Accordingly the Church's Fathers called the Holy Virgin Mother of God *Theotokos*.*

This text is taken as a résumé of what went on in the Council of Ephesus. It at once condemned Nestorius and confirmed the teaching of the Church that Jesus is both God and Man. He is one person with distinct but not confused natures (divine and human).

### 1.7 Monophysitism and its condemnation

Seventeen years after the Council of Ephesus, while the Creed of Nicea and Ephesus was still fresh in the mind of the Church, Eutyches (the Constantinopolitan Archimadrite)<sup>37</sup> preached a doctrine which exaggerated the divine nature of Jesus Christ. The heresy is called Monophysitism; sometimes it is named Euthychianism in reference to his proper name.

If we move from words to meaning, Monophysitism, like many other *isms*, is an exaggeration, an extreme. In this context Monophysitism is a doctrine according to which Jesus Christ has only one nature and not two as was stipulated in the teaching of the Apostles and the previous Councils. We remember that various manifestations of Monophysitism were condemned in the past. For instance, when Arius denied the divinity of Christ, he fell into a type of Monophysitism; Nestorius, too, by not accepting the *Theotokos*, fell into another type of Monophysitism. All these were condemned, but the condemnation did not stop those who were convinced that it was the orthodox doctrine.

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<sup>37</sup>Cf. F.X. Murphy, "Monophysitism" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 9. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910).

The time of Euthyches came when he was persuaded of the orthodoxy of his position. He said: "I confess that before the union, our Lord consisted of two natures, but after the union I confess one nature"<sup>38</sup>. According to Euthyches, the historical Jesus has only one divine nature. Euthyches was unable to justify the two natures of Jesus after his union. He believed that whoever accepts two natures in Christ, rejects his unity. He forgot the mystery of the Incarnation which is one of the major dogmas of the Church, as Camelot points out:

Pour l'archimandrite, parler de deux natures, c'est nier le dogme de l'unité du Christ, c'est être Nestorien; il est incapable de comprendre que ces mots ont un sens parfaitement orthodoxe, et que la réalité des deux natures est aussi le fondement de notre foi et de notre Salut.<sup>39</sup>

Euthyches belonged to Alexandrian school of Christology where the divinisation of man by Christ's divinity was the centre of their Christological investigations,<sup>40</sup> but Euthyches did not have a well-founded theological knowledge. As a result of that, he gave an upside down explanation of the person of Jesus. Euthyches seems to have been a loyal, dogmatic but ill-instructed defender of the Alexandrian tradition.<sup>41</sup> In fact shortly before Euthyches' claim, Theodoret of Cyrrhus confessed:

In Christ, divinity and humanity constitute only one nature, since the divine nature has assumed the human into itself, as the sea absorbs a drop of water.<sup>42</sup>

Theodoret of Cyrrhus held a Monophysite opinion because, as he said, if the human nature is assumed, in other words absorbed like a drop of water in a mighty water, the two natures cease

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<sup>38</sup>Hubert Jedin and John Dolan (ed), *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>39</sup>P.Th. Camelot, *op. cit.*, p. 91. To confess two natures in Christ, is to deny the dogma of the unity of Christ; it is to become Nestorian. Euthyches was unable to comprehend that these words have an orthodox meaning, and that the reality of the two natures constitutes the foundation of our faith and of our redemption.

<sup>40</sup>Cf. F.X. Murphy, *op. cit.*

<sup>41</sup>Richard A. Norris, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>42</sup>Hubert Jedin and John Dolan, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-112.



to be distinct and are mixed. It was indeed surprising to note that Euthyches attacked Theodoret of Cyrrihus for holding this opinion about the natures of Christ. We do not know on which ground he did so because Eutyches himself continued to believe in Jesus Christ with one nature after the union. While, on the one side, the Church continued to preach that Christ has two natures, divine and human, not mixed or confused but distinct, on the other side Euthyches persisted in defending an opposite faith. This clash created the need for another Council, the Council of Chalcedon.

The final statement about Euthyches' condemnation was made during the ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451. Before going into that, let us recall two great events which show how the Church struggled to stop the enemy of Church's orthodoxy.

The first was the Tome of Pope Leo the Great to Flavian, Bishop of Constantinople in June of 449. Leo the Great observed the great danger of Christological heresies which had disturbed the Church for almost five centuries and he acted by writing a letter (Tome) that history will never forget. The major themes of the letter were the ignorance of Euthyches, the affirmation of the theology of two natures in Christ and, of course, a condemnation of Euthyches.<sup>43</sup> The language of Tertullian (one person but two natures) was the background of his theology. The Tome of Leo was not only a theological investigation, but also a dogmatic definition.

The second event was a council which history calls *Robber Council of Ephesus* (in August of the same year), in which Euthyches succeeded to rally his followers and impose his view by force.

The Council of Chalcedon, called to confront Euthyches' false doctrine, referred to Nicea, Constantinophe and Ephesus, and confessed a Creed that *ipso facto* condemned Euthyches

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<sup>43</sup>Cf. P.Th. Camelot, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-100.

and all kinds of Monophysitism. Its decisive statement reads:

Hence we follow the holy Fathers and unanimously teach that the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, is one and the same. The one and the same is perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity, true God and true Man, consisting of a rational soul and body. The one and same is equal in substance to the Father in his divinity and equal in substance to us in his humanity; he became like us in all things, except sin. He was begotten of the Father before all time in his divinity; in the latest epoch, however, the same was born for us and for our salvation of Mary the Virgin and Mother of God in his humanity. We confess one and the same Christ, the Son and Lord, the Only-begotten, who exists in two natures, without admixture, without change, without division, without separation. The difference of natures, was never annulled through the union; rather the special property of each nature is preserved as the two come together into one person or hypostasis. We confess, not one separated and mutilated into two persons but one and the same Only-begotten Son, the divine Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>44</sup>

This text is clear enough that it exempts us from making any comment. Against Euthyches' conception, the Council presents Jesus with two distinct natures without separation or admixture in one person. Referring to the Council of Nicea, Chalcedon affirms again that Jesus is true God and true man because he is equal in substance to the Father in his divine nature; he is also equal to us in his human nature. As man, he shares with us everything except sin. With this, Monophysitism was condemned in order to let orthodoxy blossom and peace be established. Unfortunately false ideas continued to disturb the people of God.

In the above survey, we focused our attention on the long journey that Christology made during the first five centuries and how it was manifested in the orthodoxy of the Church and in heretical ideas. The latter are like branches that deviate from the tree while the former symbolize the orthodoxy of the Church. It is noteworthy that all the major heresies mentioned flourished in areas where the Church was strongly implanted. On the contrary, a phenomenon *sui generis* arose in Arabia in the 7th century. From 610 till the year of his death (632), Muammad the proclaimer of Islam claimed to receive revelations from Allâh. The name Jesus is an element of those revelations; so we shall now see how the idea of Jesus took shape and how it

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<sup>44</sup>Hubert Jedin and John Dolan (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 120.

developed in the sacred book of Islam.

### 1.8 The Qur'anic synthesis

Even though Jesus does not hold a high place in Muslims' daily life, he is held to have been a prophet just as Muammad, and his name, life and works are mentioned in many sūras. In his work *Major Themes of the Qur'ân*, Fazlur Rahman thoroughly studies themes in the Qur'ân that he considered as major due to their importance. He brings out what the Qur'ân has to say about God, man in society, nature, prophethood and revelation, eschatology, Satan and evil, emergence of the Muslim community.<sup>45</sup> Prophethood he presents as one of the major themes of the Qur'ân. There is need to know the development of the Qur'ânic teaching on prophethood in relation to its Christology.

Qur'ânic Christology is neither the orthodoxy of the Church nor a branch, but a synthesis of branches. Three branches are prominent, namely Judeo-Christianity, Nestorianism and Monophysitism. The Qur'ânic view about Jesus summarizes them and shapes them according to the revelation that Muammad claimed to receive. Concerning Judeo-Christianity, Joseph Kenny said:

The importance of Judeo-Christianity is that it was the form of Christianity most closely known by the Arabs at the time of Muammad.<sup>46</sup>

Joseph Kenny gives many elements that show the influence of Judeo-Christianity in Islam. We give here the one that refers to Christology.

Evidence for this can be found in many parallels between Judeo-Christianity and the form of Christianity adopted by the Qur'ân... As for the nature of Jesus, Judeo-Christianity did not say

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<sup>45</sup>Cf. Fazlur Rahman, *Major themes of the Qur'ân* (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), pp. 80-105.

<sup>46</sup>Joseph Kenny, *Early Islam* (Ibadan: Dominican Publication, 1997), pp. 4-5.

he was divine, but some admitted that he preexisted as an angelic creature and had the titles "the great king" and "Son of God". Irenaeus says they denied Jesus' virgin birth from Mary, but later Jerome says they admitted this; Origen says they were divided on this question. According to Pseudo-Clementines, they held he was son of God by adoption at his baptism, that he was the prophet foretold by Moses who fulfilled and reformed the law, eliminating sacrifice altogether, not even proposing the atoning sacrifice of his own death. Similarly the Qur'ân says that Jesus is not divine, was born of the virgin Mary, was not a saviour and did not die on the cross, and that he reformed the Mosaic law.<sup>47</sup>

We agree with Muammad 'Abdul and Rashîd Riâ that Islam sees the person of Jesus in a different perspective as they note:

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

The person of Jesus plays a significant role, both in Christianity and Islam. However, both faiths see Him from different perspectives and consider Him from the standpoint of their respective dogmatic creed. The figure of Jesus has always been a powerful motif of convergence and divergence, for Christianity and Islam have produced the proofs of their scripture and tradition to defend who Jesus is and what place does He take within the Islamic or Christian doctrine.<sup>48</sup>

Although Rashîd Riâ talks about Christianity and Islam, we are concerned in this section with the Islamic view, in so far as it is a synthesis of the branches of Christology studied above.

The origin and presence of Christianity in Arabia before the fourth century is obscure, but the work of some scholars has thrown light on the subsequent centuries. They agree that Christianity came into Arabia through the Byzantine and Persian Empires and Ethiopia whose influence extended to Arabia. The two empires were, indeed, the two world super-powers just before the rise of Islam.<sup>49</sup> These two super-powers had two Arabian tribes as their vassals: the Ghassânid and the Lakhmid. The presence of Christianity in Arabia before the rise of Islam and the type of Christianity that was there is attested by many historians like Robert Caspar.<sup>50</sup> The Christians who went to Arabia in the early time were both Monophysites and Nestorians. Spencer Trimingham discusses it lengthily:

The fifth-century controversies concerning the nature of Christ mark, though they do not explain the division of Syrian Christians into opposing communions, of which the most defined were the Melkite (Chalcedonian), the West Syrian (Monophysite), and the East Syrian (Nestorian). In consequence of these divisions, those northern Arab Christians, nomadic and sedentary alike, who fell within the spheres of Byzantium and Persian also became distinguished ecclesiastically as Monophysites or Nestorians.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Yusuf Seferta, "The idea of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashîd Rîdha concerning Jesus." *Encounter*, no. 124 (Rome: P.I.S.A.I., 1986), p. 1.

<sup>49</sup>Cf. Joseph Kenny, *op. cit.* pp. 1-10.

<sup>50</sup>Robert Caspar, *Traité de théologie Musulmane. (T1), Histoire de la pensée religieuse Musulmane* (Rome: P.I.S.A.I., 1987), pp. 5-6.

<sup>51</sup>J. Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in pre-Islamic times* (London: Librairie du Liban, 1979), p. 159.

Since we cannot give what we do not have, the heretics who were running from persecution did not do otherwise than present what they knew as Christianity; and the Arabs could not but receive those doctrines as such because they did not have any orthodoxy to refer to. In fact, a great historian like Eusebius of Caesarea uses the strong expression *Arabia haeresium ferax* (Arabia, wild land of heresies) in order to display the importance of heresies in Arabia of that time.

Without exaggeration, the Qur'ân, which is not cut off from the daily life of Arabia of that time, contains those doctrines, with perhaps some development or modification. The Qur'ân, says Jacques Jomier, presents Jesus under a twofold aspect:

On the one hand, the Qur'ân speaks of Jesus with great respect; several statements suggest his holiness very clearly. But on the other hand, the Qur'ân mentions Jesus in an apologetic context to show that He is a mere creature.<sup>52</sup>

Jomier's statement summarizes the Qur'ânic view of Jesus. He is a creature, a man, but a man with great prestige, so that a Muslim does not pronounce his name in any language without saying *`Îsâ alay-hi s-salâm* (Jesus, peace be upon Him). In these two aspects we can see Nestorian and Monophysite doctrines.

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<sup>52</sup>Jacques Jomier, *The Bible and the Qur'ân* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964), p. 79.

To start with Nestorianism, the Qur'ân affirms that Jesus is the Son of Mary; therefore Mary is her Mother (2:253; 3:45, 4:157, 5:46). In addition, the Qur'ân exalts Mary because, as it is said, she was chosen, made pure and exalted above all women. (3:42). Yet she is nowhere called the Mother of God because her child is not God; he is a creature (3:47; 3:59). Moreover Jesus himself is glorified; the Qur'ân says that He is held in honour in this world and in the hereafter and is among those nearest to Allâh (3:45). Yet his divinity is nowhere accepted. In fact, the Qur'ân strongly denies his divinity. So Mary cannot be called Mother of God. This is almost what Nestorius believed because he said that, since Jesus was born and died, he cannot be God. Nestorius said that Jesus had both natures both the two are not united in one person. So Mary did not give birth the divine nature of Jesus because, according to him, his divinity came after his birth. The conclusion is that Mary herself cannot be called *Theotokos*.

With modification, the Qur'ân professes the same ideas and shaped them into a synthesis. While Nestorius believed in two persons referring to Jesus, the Qur'ân calls Jesus Son of Mary but not Son of God (33:4). The emphasis on the name Son of Mary shows that Jesus is only a human being. The Qur'ân stipulates that Jesus is one person during and after his birth even though He receives God's names (Word of God, Spirit of God...).

Furthermore, in the same line, the Qur'ân does not accept the two natures in Jesus. He has only one nature which is human; Jesus is fully human. The Qur'ân declares this plainly unlike Euthyches who talked about a mixture of natures where one swallowed the other. They have in common the conception of one nature in Jesus even though some divine attributes are given to Him. Jesus is a created human being with particular privileges. We shall present those advantages in the following chapters.

When all is said and done, the Qur'ân took those doctrines, synthesized them and shaped them according to Arabian style and standards. Nestorianism and Monophysitism might not have been the only views that the Qur'ân summarizes but these are the most influential because

their views appear in the suras and were the most present in Arabia shortly before and during the time of Muhammad. Apart from Nestorianism and Monophysitism, we may think of Docetism and Judeo-Christianity.

### 1.9 The orthodox view articulated in the *Summa theologiae*

In the language of the XIIth century, the word *Summa* means a brief, synthetic and complete collection of the Christian doctrine. With some modifications, however, the word *Summa* designates in the 13th century a work undertaken with a threefold purpose: to expound the whole of a given scientific field of knowledge in a concise manner, to organize the objects of this field of knowledge in a synthetic way and to realize this aim so that the product be adapted for teaching students.<sup>53</sup> This 13th century view of the word *Summa* applies to the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas, whose Christology will be analyzed.

The *Summa theologiae* was written for beginners in theology but later on became an authoritative reference book that summarizes the whole of Christian doctrine about God and his relation with created beings.<sup>54</sup> As we know, what is said for a whole can be said too for a part; so the *Summa* contains a synthesis of orthodox Christology up to the time of Saint Thomas.

The *Summa theologiae* is not an apologetic work, but a presentation of Christian doctrine. Right from the first part, the *Summa theologiae* presents how Jesus, the Word of God, proceeds from the Father (q. 27, art. 1), how he relates with God the Father and the Holy Spirit (q. 28, art. 1-2), and how he is one of the three Persons in God (q. 31, art. 1-2 and q. 34, art. 1,2,3). The *Summa* explains how the second person of the Trinity, Jesus, is the eternal Word of God. His procession from God is by way of generation because it is by way of similitude in

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<sup>53</sup>Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Toward understanding Saint Thomas* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964), pp. 298-299.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 305.



the same specific nature not in a physical way but through an intelligible action which is a vital operation.<sup>55</sup>

The Christology of the first part of the *Summa* is limited to the context of the Trinity, whereas the third part (qq. 1 to 57) is devoted to Jesus alone. This is where Saint Thomas expounds his stand about Jesus: Jesus is God; he took flesh and became man in order to save man from sin (q. 1, art. 1 to 6); He is one Person with two natures, divine and human (q. 2, art. 1 to 5). Saint Thomas continues by saying:

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<sup>55</sup>Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 27, art. 2.

It cannot properly be said that the Son assumed a man, granted that in Christ there is but one *suppositum* and one hypostasis.<sup>56</sup>

The two natures of Jesus are distinct; neither absorbs the other; that is why He is God and man (q. 16, art. 1-2). It is clear enough, now to say that Jesus is not a creature (q. 16, art. 8); he is God-Man. In this quality, Jesus is the Mediator between God and man (q. 26, art. 1-2)

Another element of the Orthodoxy of the Church which is related to Jesus is whether the Virgin Mary is the Mother of God or not. The *Summa theologiae* answers that if Jesus is God, the Mother who gave birth to him, is properly called Mother of God (q. 28, art. 1-4). In fact the expression "Mother of God" testifies to the divinity of Christ, for the Virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus who is God and Man.

For this, it was fitting for her to be a virgin before and after Jesus' birth. Saint Thomas Aquinas said:

Without any doubt whatever we must assert that the mother of Christ was a Virgin even in his birth: for the prophet says not only: Behold a Virgin shall conceive, but adds: and shall bear a Son. This indeed was befitting for three reasons. First, because this was in keeping with a property of Him whose birth is in question, for He is the Word of God. For the Word is not only conceived in the mind without corruption, but also proceeds from the mind without corruption. Wherefore in order to show that body to be the body of the very Word of God, it was fitting that it should be born of a Virgin incorrupt.<sup>57</sup>

Saint Thomas continued:

Without any hesitation we must abhor the error of Helvidius, who dared to assert that Christ's Mother, after his birth was carnally known by Joseph, and bore other children. For, in the first place this derogatory to Christ's perfection: for as He is in His Godhead the Only-Begotten of the Father, being thus His Son in every respect perfect, so it was becoming that He should be the Only-Begotten Son of His Mother, as being her perfect offspring.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>*S.T.*, III, Q. 4, art. 3.

<sup>57</sup>*S.T.*, III, q. 28, art. 2.

<sup>58</sup>*S.T.*, III, q. 28 art. 3.

Finally, Jesus, the Son of Mary and Son of God had a noble mission: to save the universe. Considering this noble mission, Jesus chose the way of going through pains ( q. 46, art. 1-12) and dying on the cross (q. 50, art. 1-6). He died in order to save mankind but, as Scripture says, he rose from the dead on the third day (q. 53, art. 1-4).

We can note that the questions of the *Summa* dealing with Christology fit within the mainstream of Orthodox theology which started with the Bible and the preaching of the Apostles, and continued in Synods and Councils until it was summarized in this masterpiece of Christian theology. This work explains and clarifies the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, the Church Fathers and Councils, so that a marvelous synthesis of the doctrine of the Church is set forth. In the *Summa Theologiae* Thomas Aquinas confesses that Jesus is God and man; he has two distinct natures (divine and human); he suffered, died and rose from the dead in order to save the universe.

#### 1.10 Summary

Throughout this essay, we traced the main lines of the development of Christology from the beginning, showing how it reached its highest point in the thirteenth century in the great work of Thomas Aquinas. The area covered is vast, but we tried to provide what we could in four parts.

First, we gave some historical facts, both pagan and Christian, of the existence of Jesus in time and space. Second, we looked at how the idea of Jesus was conceived by his immediate disciples and how they confessed and preached the name Jesus. The answer is that they preached the orthodox doctrine which is likened to the trunk of a the tree of Christology. Third, we presented some Christological errors that were made along the line. These are considered heresies or branches because they deviated from the orthodoxy of the Church. Fourth, we presented for consideration two very important books; the first is the Qur'ân which is a synthesis of some heresies analyzed in the third part while the other is the *Summa Theologiae* which summarizes the essential elements of the Christian doctrine and

Christology in particular. We shall now turn to a detailed study of the Qur'ân and of the *Summa Theologiae* in order to bring out their importance.