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# The Person of Jesus Christ and His Salvific Action in Theodoret of Cyrus' dispute with St. Cyril of Alexandria

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## Abstract

In the dispute between Theodoret of Cyrus and St. Cyril of Alexandria, one can see the way in which a theology remaining within the static and old categories of the Nestorian thought particularly focusing on *prosopon*, is unable to understand until 449 a dynamic and insightful theology that is based on Scripture and the Holy Tradition focused on the reality of the hypostasis or of the person of the Son of God Incarnate, represented by St. Cyril. The latter understands the union between the Son of God and humanity in a single hypostasis as union by hypostasis, an approach that will provide to the subsequent theological thinking a deep, authentic Christological basis.

## Keywords

hypostasis, prosopon, nature, assuming, unity, identity, property

## I. Introduction

In St. Cyril of Alexandria's disagreement with Nestorius and Theodoret of Cyrus, one can see several reasons which complicated rather than simplified its progress. One of these reasons is well argued by A. D'Alès:

“Between Cyril and his Nestorian interlocutors, there is this huge difference, that is his Nestorian interlocutors, without exception, display no ability to understand his thinking; whenever they start translating it, they alter it; undoubtedly not due to negative intentions, to spare injury on such allegations, but due to the congenital lack of theological training. This may be noticed several times, even in the most intelligent of them, such as Theodoret. On the contrary, Cyril understands the strong and the weak parts of the concept he opposes”<sup>1</sup>.

In Theodoret, this lack is seen both in Christology and in pneumatology, the latter reflected in the dispute with Saint Cyril. At the beginning of the fasting in 431, Theodoret rises against St. Cyril’s *anathematism*s, expressing his attitude in a letter in which he accuses St. Cyril of apolinarism:

“From this root, «a nature of body and divinity» and «the assimilation of suffering by divinity of the Begotten One» and everything else that became object of contention for the people and the priests have grown»<sup>2</sup>.

Theodoret accuses Cyril of being the one who coined the formula: “union by hypostasis” (ἔνωσις καθ’ ὑπόστασιν), arguing that neither the Scripture, nor the Fathers could have used such wording<sup>3</sup>. He regards both notions, ὑπόστασις and φύσις as synonymous and assigns to them the meaning “nature” or “substance”. From his perspective, we must speak of a “union by nature or substance” as a mixture (κρασις) of natures, which does not differ, however, from monophysitism<sup>4</sup>.

Some modern Western theologians, such as A. Grillmeier, revealed only this tendency in Theodoret and tried to belittle the two hypostases in Christ that Theodoret speaks of: “In his criticism of the third *anathematism*, in reality, he speaks as if he wanted to defend and receive this mode of speech”<sup>5</sup>. Others, however, more careful, noted that Theodoret protested against Andrew of Samosata in order to maintain one and the same Jesus

<sup>1</sup> Adhemar D’ALÈS, *Le dogme d’Éphèse*, G. Beauchesne, Paris, 1931, p. 276.

<sup>2</sup> THEODORET, *Historia ecclesiastica* V, 3, PG 82, 1199 D.

<sup>3</sup> SAINT CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Apologia contra Teodoret*, PG 76, 400 A.

<sup>4</sup> A. GRILLMEIER, *Jesus Christus im Glauben der Kirche, Band 1*, 3. Verb. u. erg. Aufl. Freiburg im Breisgau, 1990, p. 694.

<sup>5</sup> A. GRILLMEIER, *Jesus Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, p. 694.

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Christ, God and man in one and “sees no difficulty ... in dividing Christ into «another and another into one»”<sup>6</sup>.

To underline this aspect, H. Diepen makes reference to a text from Theodoret:

“If it is true that God the Word did not incarnate, but assumed a living and rational body, the one who is naturally born of the Virgin, conceived, molded, shaped in her womb and receiving from her a beginning of existence, is not the same with the one that existed before time, who is God, who is close to God, who is with the Father and who is discovered and adored in one with the Father. But because He built for his own self a temple in the Virgin's womb, he was next to the one that was modeled, conceived, shaped and born. For this reason we the Holy Virgin the Mother of God. Not because she would have naturally given birth to God, but because she gave birth to a man united with God who shaped him ... But because this shape of servant was not without shape from God, but a temple whose inhabitant was God according to Paul, He wanted that the whole fullness of deity should bodily dwell in Him (Colossians 2, 9), for this reason we call the Virgin not only the Mother of man, but the Mother of God, assigning the first name to the conception, shaping, conception, the second, on the contrary, to the union”<sup>7</sup>.

## **II. The hypostatic union in Christ affirmed by Saint Cyril and denied by Theodoret centered on the prosopon's problem**

This negative attitude of Theodoret to the Mother of God reminds us of the epistle to the monks of the East, where he had transcribed the first part of the dogmatic judgment of Ephesus, where one and the same Jesus Christ, perfect God, consubstantial with the Father and perfect man, consubstantial with us is confessed. The dogmatic definition of Ephesus clearly names the Virgin Mary - Mother of God, and this is not to Theodoret's liking<sup>8</sup>. In the

<sup>6</sup> H. DIEPEN, “L' Assumptus Homo à Chalcedoine”, in: *Revue Thomiste*, LI (1951) 3, p. 600.

<sup>7</sup> THEODORET, *Contra anatematisma*, PG 77, 393.

<sup>8</sup> H. DIEPEN, “L' Assumptus Homo à Chalcedoine”, p. 601.

statement of his faith, not only does he omit it, but he also allows a glimpse of regret that he signed a text whose editor he was. In this exposition we also find the explanation of Nestorius' friends in regard to the unity of the subject: one and the same Jesus Christ, Son and Lord. However, He is "another and someone else".

Both the above text as well as the one of the letter 151<sup>9</sup> are about the Nestorians' classical doctrine on the Theotokos. Their thinking on this subject is of extreme subtleness, contradictory even to those who did not notice what they meant by Christ's "personal" unity<sup>10</sup>. They admitted that one and the same Christ, Son and Lord, is at the same time, the word of God and this man born of Virgin Mary<sup>11</sup>.

"But they deny that the Word is this man ... They explain that the Word and this man are «another and someone else» (...) To them Jesus Christ is not divine hypostasis made man, but prosopon of union, enclosing both God and man. In their understanding, *Immanuel* is not «God is with us» God made one of us to dialogue with us"<sup>12</sup>.

For them, if *Immanuel* is "God is with us" is due to the conglomerate between God and an assumed human being, representing humanity, as can be seen in the excerpt from Theodoret's *Pentalogos* against St. Cyril:

"Since ancient times and long before his birth, the Virgin's child was called *Immanuel*. But, *Immanuel* expresses the two natures, that of the one who assumes and of the one that is assumed. For this name means «God with us», i.e. God in our nature, God in man, God and man, God made man, revealing Himself to the human nature without being limited to it, God in a human temple, God with us because of his union with the one he took of our multitude. *Emmanuel*, meaning «God with us» is therefore not only God, but also man. It is He who was named Christ and Jesus and Savior"<sup>13</sup>.

Christ thus understood is no longer God revealed to us, but the sum of God and a human being "the artificial unit of the prosopon of union"<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> THEODORET, *Epistola 151*, PG 83, 1429-1432.

<sup>10</sup> H. DIEPEN, "L' Assumptus Homo à Chalcedoine", p. 602.

<sup>11</sup> H. DIEPEN, "L' Assumptus Homo à Chalcedoine", p. 602.

<sup>12</sup> H. DIEPEN, "L' Assumptus Homo à Chalcedoine", p. 603.

<sup>13</sup> THEODORET, *Pentalogos*, PG 76, 393.

<sup>14</sup> H. DIEPEN, "L' Assumptus Homo à Chalcedoine", p. 603.

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Despite the subtleties they invented, not only did Nestorius' friends diminished the hypostatic union, according to H. Diepen,<sup>15</sup> but they also denied it. Thus, an undefeatable rejection of the communication of the traits can be noticed. Theodoret's language is the most striking example of this style and this mentality<sup>16</sup>.

Theodoret accepted quite slowly the communication of the traits. In 432, the teaching on the Theotokos seemed to him still springing from apolinarism. When, after a year, he acknowledged the orthodoxy of the Third Ecumenical Synod of Ephesus and, together with it, the teaching on Theotokos, he would always refuse to condemn Nestorius' doctrine. In addition, his teaching about assuming the human side in Christ's prosopon was the denial of "a precise point defined by the Synod of Ephesus as a dogma of faith, *unus et idem*"<sup>17</sup>.

### III. The apories of the prosopon in Christ affirmed by Theodoret

Grillmeier asserts that in order to represent unity in Christ, Theodoret did not have available any other term than the one preferred by the *Antiochians*, πρόσωπον<sup>18</sup>. The term hypostasis, that for St. Cyril was the foundation of his Christology, to Theodoret "was not actually a part of his Christological lexicon"<sup>19</sup>. Prosopon is for the first time used with Christological significance in his work on the Trinity and Incarnation<sup>20</sup>. In this work, Theodoret speaks of the difference of natures and the unity of the prosopon.

"Later he would strongly emphasize a prosopon in Christ: if behind the terminology that sounds completely Chalcedonian, we search the Christological idea, we also find some shortcomings. In any case it would be wrong to look in his work for «a notion of person» with ontological content. Prosopon still has for him much of its original significance, «face»".<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> H. DIEPEN, "L' Assumptus Homo à Chalcedoine", p. 604.

<sup>16</sup> H. DIEPEN, "L' Assumptus Homo à Chalcedoine", p. 604.

<sup>17</sup> H. DIEPEN, "L' Assumptus Homo à Chalcedoine", p. 606.

<sup>18</sup> A. GRILLMEIER, *Jesus Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, p. 696.

<sup>19</sup> M. RICHARD, *Opera minora II*, Turnhout/Leuven, 1977, p. 253.

<sup>20</sup> By SAINT CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Apologia contra Teodoret*, PG 76, 401-404.

<sup>21</sup> A. GRILLMEIER, *Jesus Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, p. 696.

His view results from the explanations regarding the place in Ezekiel 11, 22-23. The prophet sees how God's glory leaves the realm of Jerusalem and descends on the Mount of Olives. Theodoret interprets this vision in connection to the Lord's Ascension:

“He sat on the Mount of Olives, before Jerusalem. This mountain is the Mount of Olives where the Lord's bodily Ascension to heaven was to take place. Justly He went then when He appeared in the image of man and showed both natures in a prosopon - through fire hinting at divinity, through bright gold expressing humanity (...) on this mountain and from this place He led His ascension to heaven”<sup>22</sup>.

The comment was written before the year 436. The same type of discourse “the revelation of one prosopon” is to be found in the Epistle 38 to Dioscoros, written in 448. The above quote can be seen in connection with the introduction of the prophet in Chapter I, 27, 28, where Theodoret sees in Christ a face of light “that allows foreseeing as appearance the human and the divine”<sup>23</sup>. Theodoret starts from the fundamental significance of “face” and by prosopon he means the visible-plastic representation of the divine-human union in Christ<sup>24</sup>. Therefore he speaks of a “ghost”.

To understand this idea, one should consider, according to A. Grillmeier, the dwelling scheme, which “certainly is a fundamental idea of his conception of Christ. Christ's unity and being are fulfilled through the fact that the deity the One Begotten dwells in its fullness in the humanity of Jesus”<sup>25</sup>.

In interpreting Colossians 2, 9<sup>26</sup> and Isaiah 11, 2-3, Theodoret opposes the bodily dwelling of deity fullness in Christ to the partial grace (μερικὴ χάρις), characteristic to other people and to the prophets. However, Theodoret names Christ “God-bearing man” (θεοφόρος ἄνθρωπος). Since the dwelling scheme “means however a weakening of the union of God - man”,<sup>27</sup> Theodoret tries to compensate for this by recurring and striking emphasis on the assertion that the deity and humanity unite in Christ in one whole appearance. The deity of Christ can be seen in His

<sup>22</sup> THEODORET, *In Ezekiel 11, 22, 23*, PG 81, 901 C D.

<sup>23</sup> A. GRILLMEIER, *Jesus Christ im Glauben der Kirche*, p. 697.

<sup>24</sup> A. GRILLMEIER, *Jesus Christ im Glauben der Kirche*, p. 697.

<sup>25</sup> A. GRILLMEIER, *Jesus Christ im Glauben der Kirche*, p. 697.

<sup>26</sup> THEODORET, *In Col. 2, 9*, PG 82, 608 C D.

<sup>27</sup> A. GRILLMEIER, *Jesus Christ im Glauben der Kirche*, p. 697.

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humanity, “solely one face” of Christ thus shining. In the interpretation of 2 Corinthians 4, 6, he means his phrase, “solely one face” of the Lord: “the phrase (our note) «on the face of Christ» (ἐν προσώπῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) has this significance: because the divine nature cannot be seen, it becomes visible in the inner being through the assumed humanity, because this is bathed in light and it sends out glints”<sup>28</sup>.

“This is the image of Christ, of a Theology who does not work so much with metaphysical notions, but rather wishes to explain the unity in Christ through comparisons and supporting images”<sup>29</sup>. Before him, Eustathios laid the foundation of such understanding and Theodoret of Mopsuestia further developed it. After Theodoret, the transfigured Christ is the One in which he sees divinity and humanity as “a face”<sup>30</sup>. The *Antiochians* such as Theodoret could not reach a comprehension of the unity of Christ as the Alexandrians understood it. In Theodoret, however, one can notice the effort to understand the image of Christ.

“Of course right here a decisive weakness in his Christology is revealed. His notion of *prosopon* does not aim to highlight the hypostasis of the Word as the sole and proper one, although he intends to affirm the unity of the person”<sup>31</sup>.

On the contrary, St. Cyril's theology is centered on the hypostasis of the Incarnate Word. “Despite any emphasis on the priority of the deity, the image of Christ in Theodoret is built too symmetrical and it is not oriented enough towards the hypostasis of the Word”<sup>32</sup>. The common topic of his assertions is for him is Christ, as union of the two natures. But he does not want to turn the Word the common topic of the divine and human affirmations<sup>33</sup>. Grillmeier sees the reason for this refusal in Theodoret's inability to distinguish between the two modes of affirmation; one that is assigned to the Word as possessor and bearer; another one that affirms about the Word as existing nature, “The Word suffered” means to him: “the Word suffered according to its divine nature”<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> THEODORET, *In 2 Cor. 4, 6*, PG 82, 401 B.

<sup>29</sup> A. GRILLMEIER, *Jesus Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, p. 697

<sup>30</sup> THEODORET, *In Ez. 1, 27*, PG 82, 401 C.

<sup>31</sup> A. GRILLMEIER, *Jesus Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, p. 698.

<sup>32</sup> A. GRILLMEIER, *Jesus Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, p. 698.

<sup>33</sup> A. GRILLMEIER, *Jesus Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, p. 698.

<sup>34</sup> THEODORET, *Epistola ad monach, orient.*, PG 83, 1429 B-D.

This concept underlies his refusal until 449 to acknowledge the Virgin Mary as “Mother of God”<sup>35</sup>. Mary is the Mother of God “by union” and mother of man “by nature”. Theodore did not want to come to the distinction between “hypostatic union” and “union by nature” and to highlight the hypostasis of the Word as carrier of human nature. Christ’s words in John 2, 19: “Destroy this temple” mean for Theodore that Christ did not say; “destroy Me down, when clearly teaching that it was the temple to be brought down, not God”<sup>36</sup>. Christ could have said: “destroy me” if He were made according to the Apollinarian Word-body diagram. Therefore, until 448/449, he finds it difficult to acknowledge Virgin Mary as “Mother of God”<sup>37</sup>.

“The incomplete, symmetrical presentation of Christ”, says Grillmeier, “where the hypostasis of Christ is not fully employed seems not to have been the last in Theodoret’s development”<sup>38</sup>. In two letters from 449, Theodoret presents his own interpretation of the concept of prosopon:

“Thus is the Lord’s body in fact a body, but incapable of suffering, permanent and immortal. (...) For he is not separated from divinity and proper to no one else than the Lord’s Son, the One Begotten. And He does not show us any other prosopon than the Only-Begotten, dressed in our nature”<sup>39</sup>.

M. Richard analyzed all the phrases used by Theodoret to show the human nature assumed by the Word, such as “man assumed”, “visible man”, “the man from the seed of David”, noting that the Fathers of the Church, before and after the Third Ecumenical Synod of Ephesus “were not afraid to say that becoming incarnate the Word assumed a human being”<sup>40</sup>. Richard’s attribution of Nestorian thinking - embraced by Theodoret in the dispute with St. Cyril – to all the Holy Fathers of the Church is, however, unjust. This is apparent in the dispute between Theodoret and St. Cyril.

<sup>35</sup> THEODORET, *De unitate Christi*, PG 83, 1437 C.

<sup>36</sup> THEODORET, *Epistola 151 ad monach, orient.*, PG 83, 1420 B.

<sup>37</sup> THEODORET, *De trinitate et incarn.*, 18, PG 75, 1452 AB.

<sup>38</sup> A. GRILLMEIER, *Jesus Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, p. 699..

<sup>39</sup> THEODORET, *Epistola 146*, P. G. 83, 1393 B

<sup>40</sup> M. RICHARD, *Opera minora II*, p. 460

#### IV. Saint Cyril's fundamental contribution to affirming and defending the teaching of the Church about hypostatic union

In the 8<sup>th</sup> anathemas, St. Cyril rises against the Nestorian way of expressing the mystery of Christ's Incarnation. Theodoret expresses his antithetical position as follows:

“If within the man that is one, we distinguish the natures and we call what is mortal - body and what is immortal – soul, we shall rightly acknowledge. if we are logical, the properties of the natures of God who assumed and of the man who was assumed”<sup>41</sup>.

And in rejecting the 10<sup>th</sup> anathemas, Theodoret reaffirms his Nestorian thinking:

“None of those who are faithful would not say that this creature (referred to in Hebrew 3, 1-2) is uncreated (...) but who is born from the seed of David, who is free of all sins was our High Priest and our victim. He is the same that offered Himself to God for us, containing within himself and joined in an inseparable way to God the Word of God”<sup>42</sup>.

St. Cyril responds that this mode of expression upsets him:

“They say that a man was taken from God the Word in the way that the prophet said: «I *was* an herdsman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit / And the Lord took me as I followed the flock» (Amos 7, 14,15)”<sup>43</sup>.

To prove that this Nestorian way of thinking is not proper to the Church, St. Cyril appeals to the tradition of the Holy Fathers:

“This view that a man was assumed by God is foreign to the Holy Fathers. They have never conceived that. They rather say that the very Word of God the Father was made into man joining a body endowed with a spiritual soul”<sup>44</sup>.

In his criticism of the first anathema of St. Cyril, which was based on the exegesis of Philipians 2, 6-7 to indicate the natures of Christ,

<sup>41</sup> THEODORET, *Adv. Anath. III*, PG 76, 404 C.

<sup>42</sup> THEODORET, *Adv. Anath. X*, PG 76, 404 CD

<sup>43</sup> SAINT CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Apologeticus contra Theodoretum pro XII capitibus*, PG 76, 440 AB.

<sup>44</sup> SAINT CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Apologeticus contra Theodoretum pro XII capitibus*, PG 76, 449 A

Theodoret used the phrases θεου μορφῆ and δούλου μορφῆ. For St. Cyril this way of understanding the text leads to Docetism:

“Since he says that the form of a servant was assumed by God’s form, he continues to teach us that this is without realities, that both forms in themselves were united one with the other. But I think that, starting from this, he also rejects this error. These are both simply similarities and forms (ἀνυπόστατοι) who joined one another after the oikonomic union (οἰκονομικήν), but the union of things themselves took place”<sup>45</sup>.

Gradually, Theodoret began to abandon this way of talking after the reconciliation with St Cyril. After the final reconciliation in 436, Theodoret made sure he did not destroy this peace and avoided his writings anything that could prejudice St. Cyril’s assertions. He did this due to acknowledging the ambiguity of his phrases, as M. Richard notices:

“It must be acknowledged that, at one point, the bishop of Tyre understood the ambiguity of these phrases and this undoubtedly occurred while reading St. Cyril’s writings. This recalls the loyalty with which he knew, only a few months after the Synod of Ephesus, to acknowledge the orthodoxy of his opponent, given the good reception of St. Cyril’s epistle to Acacius of Berea”<sup>46</sup>.

M. Richard also notes that in the treaties drawn up after the Fourth Ecumenical Synod of Chalcedon, such as *Haereticarum fabularum compendium* and *Aporii*, Theodoret never mentions either the teaching on the unique hypostasis of Christ<sup>47</sup> or the one on the hypostasis by the union which is closely related to the former. This is of course due to the difficulty in understanding a theology as deep as that of St. Cyril.

## V. Saint Cyril’s formula “uniting after hypostasis” and its profound implications in Christological dogma

On the contrary, St. Cyril deepens the Christology of the Church when using the phrase “union by hypostasis” (ἔνωσις καθ’ ὑπόστασιν)<sup>48</sup> in Epistole III to Nestorius.

“In the fight against his ( Nestorius’ ) teachings we were forced

<sup>45</sup> Saint CYRIL of ALEXANDRIA, *Contra Nestorius*, II, 8, in: *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* (ACO), Tomus primus. Volumen 1/6: Concilium Universale Ephesenum, ed. De E. Schwartz, Berlin, 1929, pp. 112, 12-16.

<sup>46</sup> M. RICHARD, *Opera Minora II*, p. 475.

<sup>47</sup> M. RICHARD, *Opera Minora II*, p. 421

<sup>48</sup> Saint CYRIL of ALEXANDRIA, *Epistola secunda adversus Nestorium*, in: ACO, 1/1, 28,7

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to say that the union by hypostasis (καθ' ὑπόστασιν) is accomplished. The addition «by hypostasis» asserts only that the nature or hypostasis of the Word, that the Word Itself, is understood as one Christ and He is indeed so, One and the Same is God and man, because He joined in reality a human nature without changing or mixing<sup>49</sup>.

M. Richard researched the origin of this phrase<sup>50</sup>. The text belongs to a so-called Pseudo-Athanasius, who combats the Apollinarians. According to Richard, the text is not very clear, the date and its origin are uncertain. Wanting to use, starting from it, the phrase “union by hypostasis”, explaining it to St. Cyril may only imply, according to Richard, understanding a mystery through another. In the above-mentioned apocryphal treatise, there is no other mention of this “union by hypostasis”. On the other hand, M. Richard assumes that the formula was already well known because it was used as an argument: “We do not believe that such a condition was fulfilled before the year 430”<sup>51</sup>.

Since even St. Mark the Ascetic, whose work, *Contra Nestorianos*, includes the phrase “union by hypostasis”<sup>52</sup>, is rather dependent on St. Cyril according to Richard, the phrase “union by hypostasis” is attributed by Richard to St. Cyril. A. Grillmeier however asserts that in St. Mark the Ascetic this phrase is used with an antiorigenist meaning. It asserts

“the union (of the body) not in the soul of Christ, but in the hypostasis of the Word. In this way, an «end point» of the union is assigned, not the way and mode of this union. This is not Cyril. What is the ultimate is the novelty that Cyril assigns to this: the union of the Word with the body is so deep in Christ that without any interference one must speak of a hypostasis”<sup>53</sup>.

Grillmeier's interpretation on the union by hypostasis in Christ in St. Mark the Ascetic, however, is incomplete because such union involves the issue of the identity of Christ's person with His humanity, teaching that we will see below present and developed by St. Cyril.

Relying on St. Cyril's Epistles, his Christological arguments can be

<sup>49</sup> Saint CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Epistola secunda adversus Nestorium*, in: ACO, 1/1, 6, p. 115, 12-16.

<sup>50</sup> M. RICHARD, *Opera Minora II*, p. 247

<sup>51</sup> M. RICHARD, *Opera Minora II*, p. 251.

<sup>52</sup> J. KUNZE, *Marcus Eremita. Ein neuer Zeuge für das altkirchliche Taufbekenntnis*, Leipzig, 1895, p. 13.

<sup>53</sup> A. GRILLMEIER, *Jesus Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, p. 685, note 35.

rendered in the following points:

- There is a union between the hypostasis of the Son of God with humanity in a single hypostasis of Jesus Christ. This union leaves no room for separation, not being a union of dignity<sup>54</sup>.
- This union took place through the Word that united hypostatically with the body that has a rational soul<sup>55</sup>.
- This union took place in Virgin Mary's womb which does not imply that the Word would originate in Mary or that a second birth would have been necessary<sup>56</sup>. As a chosen vessel of the Incarnation, Virgin Mary is rightly called the Mother of God<sup>57</sup>.
- One cannot speak of a decrease in the quality of the Word, for after the union, the Word remained what it was before, thus preserving the quality of the Only Begotten of the Father (St. Cyril of Alexandria 1929: 28)<sup>58</sup> and the immortality of the divinity.

In his many writings Christologically centered, St. Cyril expressed what the Third Ecumenical Synod of Ephesus professed, relying on its teaching, but taking over and preserving the teaching of the previous Ecumenical Synods:

“He, who is «the image of the invisible God» (Colossians 1, 15) (...) took the form of a servant (Philippians 2, 7), not because he would have taken the form of man as (the Nestorians) say, but because that He has given to Himself this face, i.e. in the way that He Himself (in the image of the servant) preserved his likeness to God the father”<sup>59</sup>.

Relying on the Scripture and Church tradition, St. Cyril Church thus professes that the Son of God was Incarnate. This means that He is the Son of God in His incarnation too. St. Cyril often returns to this truth. When referring to the Second Epistle to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 4, 6), where Saint Apostle Paul says that God's glory shines on the face

<sup>54</sup> St. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Epistula 17, 5 (the third to Nestorius)*, in: ACO, I, 1/1, 36, 13-15.

<sup>55</sup> St. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Epistula 4, 3 (the second to Nestorius)*, in: ACO I, 1/1, 26, 27.

<sup>56</sup> St. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Epistula 4,4*, in: ACO I, 1/1, 27, 7-8.

<sup>57</sup> St. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Epistula 4,7*, in: ACO I, 1/1, 28, 18-21.

<sup>58</sup> St. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Epistula 4,7*, in: ACO I, 1/1, 28, 16.

<sup>59</sup> St. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Quod Christus sit unus*, in: coll. *Sources chrétiennes*, Paris, 1964, p. 450-451.

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of Christ, St. Cyril says the following: “for the Begotten Son shows the Father’s glory as the Incarnate one (...) for in the face of a man we cannot see God, but the Word, who became man and like us in which He remained the true ‘natural’ Son”<sup>60</sup>.

We see the glory of the Father in the incarnate Son of God. Thus believing in Jesus of Nazareth means believing in the person of the incarnate Son of God. To show this, St. Cyril refers to the episode of the man who was born blind. Jesus asked the blind man: “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” The blind man responds with another question: “Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?” Jesus said to him: “Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee” (John, 9, 35-37). According to St. Cyril this “both seen him” shows that “humanity of Jesus is not a way of vesting, an outfit of the Logos, but that He Himself is this humanity of His”<sup>61</sup>.

## **VI. Saint Cyril’s teaching of Incarnation as way by which the Son of God makes own the human nature assumed by Him**

St. Cyril always stressed that the body is to some extent Word, leading to a real identity<sup>62</sup>. It is the decisive step he took in understanding the person. “Incarnation means that the Word, the Son, is the same with the body, with human nature so that He makes humanity His”<sup>63</sup>. Therefore Cyril always talks about “making it His own” (ἰδιοποιεσθαι). This statement proves fruitful in the future development of the concept of the person when to the classic definition of the person as the condition in itself with unmistakable properties, the relationship element is added, the relationship of a person with another person, the identification capability in understanding the person, realities that Eastern theology had stated before St. Cyril.

St. Cyril always emphasizes that the Incarnation of the Son of God is the eternal Son made human nature His own to such an extent that much that He became man:

“Word became man, how could this be true if not that He-Himself became flesh, that is man, because He made His own the human

<sup>60</sup> St. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Quod Christus sit unus*, p. 450-453.

<sup>61</sup> C. SCHÖNBORN, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, Paderborn, 2002, p. 135.

<sup>62</sup> C. SCHÖNBORN, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, p. 135.

<sup>63</sup> C. SCHÖNBORN, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, p. 135.

body in an indissoluble unity, so that it (the body) is known to be His own and not as belonging to anyone else”<sup>64</sup>.

This “to make one’s own” means that the Son Himself is the subject of the human life of Jesus<sup>65</sup>. St. Cyril emphasizes that the Word does not use the humanity as a tool, as God spoke through the prophets, but this is in reality His human nature. “The Word made His own everything that belongs to this human nature”<sup>66</sup>. St. Cyril shows that, as the Son makes His own the human nature, so it is like the human nature to be the Son’s<sup>67</sup>. In Christ, being the Son “becomes proper to this human nature, the property of the humanity”<sup>68</sup>.

In Christology Cyril goes even further, talking about communicating the characteristics. When the Son of God is made man, an interchange between the divine hypostasis and its humanity. This has consequences on the hypostatic union of the Son of God with human nature. In this connection it is not the merging of the divine with the human, but a personal reality to the highest degree. Christ’s humanity does not differ at all from that of other people, except for being His own, His most personal own, for being the humanity of the Son, from sinless and moreover deified “subsidiary” root. “For Cyril human nature becomes a property of the Word, and vice versa, the nature of the Son (becomes, our note) a property of Christ’s humanity”<sup>69</sup>. To understand this, the soteriological implications need to be considered, which St. Cyril interprets as communicating the traits:

“«For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily», said Paul (Colossians 2, 9). The theologian (John the Evangelist) reveals the great mystery that «the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us» (John 1, 14). For we are all in Christ and all the humanity is brought to new life. (...) The Word dwelt among us all into One, so that from the One true Son of God, the lineage should pass to all people through the Spirit of holiness”<sup>70</sup>.

St. Cyril, and with him, the whole Christology of the Fathers adopted the same line of thought as St. Paul, given the newly began and renewed

<sup>64</sup> St. CYRIL of ALEXANDRIA, *Quod Christus sit unus*, p. 336-337.

<sup>65</sup> C. SCHÖNBORN, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, p. 136.

<sup>66</sup> C. SCHÖNBORN, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, p. 136.

<sup>67</sup> C. SCHÖNBORN, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, p. 136.

<sup>68</sup> St. CYRIL of ALEXANDRIA, *Quod Christus sit unus*, p. 256-257.

<sup>69</sup> C. SCHÖNBORN, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, p. 136-137.

<sup>70</sup> St. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Commentarium in Evangelium Joannis 1*, 14, PG 73, 161 C. See the Romanian translation: SFÂNTUL CHIRIL AL ALEXANDRIEI, *Comentar la Evanghelia Sfântului Ioan*, translation, introduction and notes by Fr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, Bucharest, 2000.

humanity in Christ. The Christological and soteriological- ecclesiological dimensions are inseparable:

“As in Christ the nature of the Son became the property of His human nature by the union with the Word, according to the plan of salvation of *oikonomia*, so this became the property of the Word, that of being surrounded by a multitude of brothers, for whom to become the first born in flesh”<sup>71</sup>.

To make one's own the human nature does not mean considering human nature in an abstract manner, but that the Son is identified with the history of humanity<sup>72</sup>. He is not ashamed to call people brethren (Hebrew 2, 11). He accepts the form of servant so that those that became servants due to sin would become free as he is completely free under the image of the servant<sup>73</sup>. St. Cyril and, with him, a great Christological tradition of the Synods and Holy Fathers understand this Incarnation as assuming a body, as the hymn from Philipians talks about assuming the image of the servant. When asked how to understand this fact, one should note that this is known as good news: God with us. Christ is Immanuel, as shown by St. Matthew.

This Christology was rightly named “Immanuel's Christology”. It is a “descending Christology”, in the sense that the initiative of salvation in Christ is truly God's and only God's. However, Immanuel means at the same time “God be with us”. Incarnation means assuming human nature and the ascending of the whole human reality towards God.<sup>74</sup> Our human reality became the Son's.

“This is not a presence similar to *Sekine*, similar to God's Spirit in the prophets, not a mere «dwelling» but assuming the humanity. This central concept addresses, on the one hand, the personal dimension of the event of Christ (only one person can assume) and, on the other hand, the soteriological meaning of this event of Christ is made clear, for due to the fact that the Son assumed the image of the servant, God made the people His sons. (...) About the person it is said here that being able

<sup>71</sup> ST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Commentarium in Evangelium Joannis I*, 14, PG 73, 161 C.

<sup>72</sup> C. SCHÖNBORN, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, p. 137.

<sup>73</sup> C. SCHÖNBORN, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, p. 137.

<sup>74</sup> C. SCHÖNBORN, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, p. 138.

to identify Himself through his Incarnation with the whole of humanity is proper to the person of Christ, the Son<sup>75</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> C. SCHÖNBORN, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, p. 138.