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## **PREFACE**

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## INTRODUCTION

At the heart of the Christian Faith is the belief in the Holy Trinity, that is, belief in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Focus in this paper will be around the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. The central question of discussion concerns the doctrine of his divinity. History shows that belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ was not so crystal clear from the beginning of the Christian faith. It was only after centuries of intensive reflections, debates, arguments, and even controversies, where even a number of heresies were committed in the process, and attempts made to correct such errors, that such a definitive teaching was comprehensively reached at. On a positive side, these debates helped to refine and fine-tune the teaching concerning divine mysteries like the Trinity and Christological dogmas. However, when errors persisted and the wrong party was not ready to give up his or their position, anathemas were issued and thereby, parameters drawn which were not be crossed. This was the case with the Arian controversy which took place in the fourth century concerning the second person of the holy Trinity, Jesus Christ.

Theologians laboured with the question, “what is the Son's precise status and his relationship with the Father”? How should Jesus be perceived especially after the event of the incarnation? Is Jesus really divine or is he a creature, albeit the most perfect creature of God? How is the understanding of his nature of importance to the Christian faith? One of the persons at the centre of the most controversial debates in the history of Christianity over the nature of Jesus Christ was a presbyter and an exegete called Arius of Alexandria. He stirred a controversy when he questioned the divinity of the son. To that effect, the controversy even got named after him as the Arian Controversy or as “Arianism.” This controversy sparked debates which lasted for a number of years, beginning firstly at a local council in 318 AD in Egypt which brought together theologians in Egypt, but its effects, having spilled over the boundaries of Egypt to the east, it called for church-wide resolution, prompting the summoning of the council of Nicea in 325 AD by emperor Constantine and thereby, the entire Roman Empire was caught up in the debate. Though the Council of Nicea came up with the profession of faith, teachings and effects of Arianism remained strong and alive (did not die completely) and even went beyond the fourth century and the Mediterranean world and have persisted even up to today in some ecclesial communities and sects like the Jehovah's witnesses (Watch Towers). Gwatkin even looks beyond the boundaries of Christianity and tries to even remotely link the present bitterness between Christianity and

Islam to the persistence of the council of Nicea on Christ's divinity with Athanasius as its strong proponent.<sup>1</sup> This work endeavours to reconstruct this Controversy driven by Arius, by investigating its beginnings and its progression until it culminated into a great controversy that it became. We want to examine especially the bone of contentions of Arianism in order to appreciate the different positions that were there in their right context of the fourth century and show how that led to the formation of the definition of Faith by the Council of Nicea.

It is a well-known fact that this controversy did equally leave behind many wounds within the church. As evidence for that fact, Groups emerged like the Anomoeans, a radical Arians group that said the son is not of the same nature with the father. Then the homoiousians who found a problem with the expression that Jesus is of the same nature as the Father. They instead preferred an expression that '*the son is similar in essence to the father*', and then we have the Homoeans, a group that held on to the Nicene term of homoousios, who said that the son is of the same substance with the father.<sup>2</sup> But on a positive note, one fruit was born from it, i.e. the Nicene Creed was formulated and defined as a *symbolum* of faith or according to Gwatikin as "*a test creed*"<sup>3</sup>, a priceless gift to the church which stands out as a measure of orthodoxy teaching to this day.

To handle adequately the theme of this work entitled "The Arian controversy vis-à-vis the council of Nicea and the inculturation of the faith," we have divided this paper into three chapters. In the first chapter, we will look at the biography of Arius and at his intellectual background, i.e. the philosophical and theological streams of influence over his thoughts. This is in order to provide a glimpse into the environment in which he grew up. The cosmological scheme of the middle Platonists is found to have, to a large extent strongly influenced his thoughts. We are going to try to investigate how this middle Platonism shaped his theology. The teachings of the third-century theologians like Origen and Gregory Thaumaturgus cannot be left aside either, for they too had in one way or the other shaped or influenced the thoughts of Arius on the theological front in order for him to come out the way he did. On one hand, it was, a reaction against some earlier theological thoughts, for example, the *expositio Fidei* of Gregory Thaumaturgus among others, who said that the son is divine and equal to the father and on another hand, confirming only those theological thoughts

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Melvill GWATKIN, *The Arian Controversy, sixth impression*, (London: Longmans, Green and CO. 1908), 34.

<sup>2</sup> Jan-Heiner TÜCK, *The Father without the Son would not be Father*, in: *Communio: International Catholic Review*, "Our Father who art in Heaven", Vol. XLII, No. 1. Spring 2015, 23.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Mervill GWATKIN, *The Arian controversy*, 30.



which he agreed with like the *subordination theory* of Origen and later developing them further, or accepting part of the thoughts that he agreed with and rejecting the other part that he did not agree with. He agreed for example with Origen that the son is subordinate to the father but disagreed with him on the point that he is eternal like the Father and that he belonged to the Godhead.

Then in the second part of chapter one, the focus will be on the *Thaleia* of Arius, i.e. his controversial teaching concerning the nature of Christ. His thoughts and opinions about the person of Jesus are expressed clearly in his letters to Alexander the Bishop of Alexandria, to his Friend Bishop Eusebius and in some extracts from the *Thaleia*. His teaching, which can be termed as his creed is going to be analysed. Predominantly, Arius like Origen argues around the concept of the *subordination* of the logos (the son) to the father, and in advancing this subordination concept, he goes to an extreme extent whereby he reached a conclusion that the son is a creature and not divine.

In the second chapter we will look at the Council of Nicea, the circumstances under which the Council was organized or convened and by who, the political interests at stake, its objectives and finally at the product of the Ecumenical Council - the *Symbolum Niceanum* which was given as a response to the claims of Arius. We will look especially at how the council progressed in reaching a conclusion about the dogma of the divinity of Christ by way of including the four anti-Arian interpolations in the creed in which the Christological definitions are concentrated.

In the third and final Chapter, we will look at the Hellenisation of the faith in the fourth century as a model of inculturating the Christian Faith today. Attention will be paid to what can be learned from the Hellenisation of the faith, its positives and negatives and then proceed from there to look at how Inculturation can be done today in an African context and to what extent. While pursuing the course of inculturation, a question arises, whether inculturation is part of the solution to firmly rooting Christianity in Africa? Magisterial teachings on inculturation from Benedict XVI and Pope Francis will be brought into the discussion in trying to respond to the above question. Finally, in the same line, African Christological paradigms from selected theologians will be presented and scrutinized.

## CHAPTER ONE

### ARIUS

#### 1. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Arius, the man at the centre of Arianism, was born about 256 AD and according to others about 260 AD in Libya and died in 336 AD in Alexandria.<sup>4</sup> Arius himself gives us the name of his father in his letter to Eusebius as Ammonius.<sup>5</sup> He did his studies for the priesthood under Lucian of Antioch and joined the Alexandrian Clergy.<sup>6</sup> While still a minor Cleric, that is, as a seminarian, he joined and took part in the Meletian Schism against his bishop, Bishop Peter of Alexandria. He however later reconciled with his Bishop and was accepted to the order of diaconate and ordained by Bishop Peter himself.<sup>7</sup> Bishop Ancillas ordained him to the Priesthood.<sup>8</sup> The probable year of his ordination to the priesthood is 311 AD shortly after the death of Bishop Peter.<sup>9</sup> Ancillas' successor, Bishop Alexander, who reigned as Bishop of Alexandria from 313 – 328 AD,<sup>10</sup> appointed him as Parish priest in Charge of the Baucalis, a very important parish in the Diocese of Alexandria. This was on account of his learning, grave manners, and ascetical life<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition, volume one, from the apostolic age to Chalcedon, second revised edition*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 219.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. John Henry NEWMAN, *The Arians of the fourth Century*, (London: High Holborn, 1854), 121.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. V.C. DE CLERCQ, 'Arius', in: *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, second edition, (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2003), 685.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Rowan WILLIAMS, *ARIUS: Heresy and Tradition, Revised edition*, (Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2002), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Rowan WILLIAMS, *ARIUS: Heresy and Tradition, Revised edition*, 30.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Rowan WILLIAMS, *ARIUS: Heresy and Tradition*, 283.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Rowan WILLIAMS, *ARIUS: Heresy and Tradition*, 224.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. V.C. DE CLERCQ, 'Arius', in; *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 685

During his time as Parish Priest, Arius proved to be a powerful preacher and exegete,<sup>12</sup> a crowd puller who attracted many people to his homilies. According to the description of Grillmeier, “he was one of those people who were able to produce both vigorous supporters and vigorous opponents among their audience.”<sup>13</sup> However, his unorthodox views on the divinity of Jesus Christ came under attack about the year 318 AD, and about the year 323 AD, the conflict with Alexander bishop of Alexandria, broke into the open.<sup>14</sup> The first effort to correct his teaching was in form of a local synod called for the whole of Egypt. When he was asked by this synod to recant his unorthodox teaching, he refused to submit, and as a consequence, he was excommunicated from the church.

After his excommunication, Arius went to Palestine and Bithynia. There he found sympathy with Eusebius of Nicomedia, who supported his views and sent out many letters to fellow bishops and convened synods in his defence.<sup>15</sup> Other bishops, however, among them Macarius of Jerusalem and Marcellus of Ancyra opposed the teaching of Arius on account of their unorthodox, and as a result, the church in the east was divided on that account.<sup>16</sup> This made Emperor Constantine decide to intervene in the matter. He first sent Bishop Hosius of Cordoba with a letter to both Alexander and Arius, urging them to cease fighting over what he called “a trifling and foolish verbal difference.”<sup>17</sup> The mediation by Hosius to bring the two parties together proved futile. The emperor had at first somehow underestimated the controversy but after the unsuccessful mediation attempt by Hosius, then realised Constantine how serious the matter was. He (Emperor Constantine), who was mainly concerned with the unity of the empire, was then prompted, upon the recommendation of his ecclesiastical confidant, Bishop Hosius of Cordoba, to call for a general council of the Church in 325 AD. At this first ecumenical council of the church held in Nicea, the writings of Arius were read and rejected as blasphemous by a majority of Bishops. And consequently, Arius was for a second time excommunicated from the church on charges of blasphemy. After the Nicene council, Arius was banished to Illyricum.<sup>18</sup> In 333 AD, the emperor Constantine further ordered that all the writings of Arius be destroyed.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Jan-Heiner TÜCK, *Der Vater wäre ohne den Sohn nicht Vater*, in: *Communio*, January-February 2015. 23

<sup>13</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 221.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. V.C.DE CLERCQ, *Arius*, in: *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 685

<sup>15</sup> Cf. V.C.DE CLERCQ, *Arius*, in: *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 685

<sup>16</sup> Cf. V.C.DE CLERCQ, *Arius*, in: *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 685

<sup>17</sup> V.C.DE CLERCQ, *Arius*, in: *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 685.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. V.C.DE CLERCQ, *Arius*, in: *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 685.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Karl-Heinz MENKE, *Jesus ist Gott der Sohn*, (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2011) 226.

There was however later a decision by the assembly of Jerusalem in 335 AD to readmit him into the Church after it was thought that he had repented. Prior to the planned re-admittance, “Arius had an interview with Constantine and submitted a creed which the emperor judged to be orthodox”<sup>20</sup>. Emperor Constantine therefore accordingly ordered that a solemn reinstatement ceremony should be held in Constantinople, but he (Arius) died on the eve of the appointed day in 336.<sup>21</sup> Athanasius, one of his known greatest opponents commented later that his death was God’s judgment against him and compared his death to that of Judas Iscariot, the traitor.<sup>22</sup>

## **1.1. HISTORICAL AND INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND**

Although the expression "Arianism" or “Arian controversy” suggests that Arius was the instigator of the teaching that bears his name, the questions that he raised and the debate over the Son's status and his precise relationship to the Father did not begin with him. This subject had quite long been discussed before he came on the scene, as we shall see by Origen and Gregory Thaumaturgus among others. It remains indisputable, however, that Arius intensified the controversy by pushing some earlier assertions especially on subordination as held by Origen, which were milder, to the extreme and carried it to a Church-wide audience. He audaciously said that which no one before him had the courage to say. He outrightly denied the divinity of the son and assigned him to the sphere of creatures. He thereby earned for himself the name of ‘heresiarch.’<sup>23</sup> The conflict between Arius and the anti-Arianism Theologians brought the issue to the theological forefront. The doctrine he proclaimed is therefore rightly labelled as his and is often referred to as Arianism.

We want in this part of the paper to examine this debate by looking closely at a few selected people that had made a theological contribution positively or negatively or who played a part in the early stages of this debate before Arius, whose positions shaped or influenced the line of thought for Arius either directly or indirectly. We will look at the thought patterns of his time and at the period before him.

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<sup>20</sup> William BARRY, “Arius,” in: The Catholic Encyclopedia Vol. 1. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907), 29. Dec. 2016. [www.newadvent.org/cathen/01718a](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01718a)

<sup>21</sup> Cf. V.C.DE CLERCQ, *Arius*, in: The New Catholic Encyclopedia, 685

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Karl-Heinz MENKE, *Jesus ist Gott der Sohn*, (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2012) 226.

<sup>23</sup> John Henry NEWMAN, *The Arians of the fourth century*, 116.

According to Aloys Grillmeier, the roots of the influence over Arius' thoughts can be traced back not just to the Theological discourses of his century or the third century but even remotely beyond to the Philosophical thoughts of Middle Platonism.<sup>24</sup> We want therefore to start by taking a look in particular at middle Platonism, and then on the Theological front, we shall look at the thoughts of Origen and of Gregory Thaumaturgus.

### 1.1.1. Philosophical influence - middle Platonism

Middle Platonism was part of the cultural background that had a remarkable influence on Arius. According to Leo Catana, a philosophy Professor at the University of Copenhagen, Middle Platonism spanned from about “ca. 88 BCE to ca. 220 CE,”<sup>25</sup> lasting for about three hundred years. Arius was born about forty years later in 260 AD as the age of Neo-Platonism (ca. 200 to ca. 550 CE)<sup>26</sup> was coming on the stage. He, therefore, grew up in this atmosphere. The Influence of Middle Platonism and neo-Platonism on Arius were enormous. What did middle Platonism stand for? As the name suggests, Middle Platonism, is connected to the person of Plato himself or to be more precise, to his philosophical teaching. Long after Plato had died, the Middle Platonists embarked on a project to revive some of his ideas. Of these Platonic renaissance concepts, there are particularly two concepts or doctrines that most probably deeply influenced the thinking of Arius to which we shall pay much attention to. The first Concept is *the Doctrine of the three principles* and the second one is *the concept of the Platonic Deity, the Monad*.

### 1.1.2. Doctrine of the Three Principles

The one idea among other ideas that the Middle Platonist carried forward to revive Platonism was the so-called “*doctrine of the three principles*.”<sup>27</sup> It is a doctrine that was inferred from the dialogues of Plato in the *Timaeus*. This doctrine of the three principles answers the question, “What in Plato's view, are primal grounds, the basic principles (*achai*) of the world?”<sup>28</sup> His answer was not a straight forward one, but one given in a coded statement: “ὁὐ, ἐξ οὐ, πρὸς ὅ” – *from whom, from which, for which*.”<sup>29</sup> His followers needed to do the

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 222.

<sup>25</sup> Leo CATANA, *The origin of the Division between Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism*, in: *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and science*, 2013, vol.46 (2), 167.

<sup>26</sup> Leo CATANA, *The origin of the Division between Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism*, 167.

<sup>27</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 222.

<sup>28</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 223.

<sup>29</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 223.

thinking and find fitting answers for themselves. These questions were demanding for the source or the author of the elements that make up the world, or indeed the author of the world itself. The question ‘*from whom,*’ was searching for the ultimate author or the source of the elements that make up the world. To this question, the Middle Platonists answered, God is the author or the source. The second question ‘*from which*’ was searching for the medium or substance which was used to come up with the elements that form the world. The Platonists answered, from the Logos. And to the last question, *for which*, what is being looked for is the goal or the purpose of the elements. The Platonists said that the goal was to come up with matter.

Deductively then, the middle Platonists came up with the following as answers to these questions with: “*God –logos (Idea) – matter.*”<sup>30</sup> Though the question that Plato was responding to was about the basic principles or *achai* of the world, his response, given in form of another set of questions diverted from the question and went beyond just looking at the first principles or elements, to the source of the elements or *achai*, the medium used and the goal or purpose of those elements. The answers that have been provided by the middle Platonists do not respond strictly to the question about the principles. They had however supposed that they responded to the question accordingly. This attempt by middle Platonists according to Grillmeier is said to be “didactically admirable but false in content.”<sup>31</sup> It is debatable whether Plato would have really put it so, that God – idea and matter are the three principles of the world. The first philosophers from Miletus, for example, had debated around the substances of air, fire, and water as the principle elements of the world. The middle Platonists, however, deduced it so, that God – Logos and Matter were the basic principles and it was readily accepted and successfully spread as valid knowledge.

According to Aloys Grillmeier, It is highly probable that Arius was influenced by this middle Platonic line of thought as well, as can be seen in the Linguistic similarities of this thought pattern in a verse from the Thaleia:

Θεου Θελει ο υιος ηλικος και οσος εστιν  
 εξ οτε αφ ου και απο τοτε εκ Θεου υπεστη.  
 The son has age and magnitude from the will of God,  
 his origin from God has a ‘from when’, a ‘from which’ and a ‘from  
 then’.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Aloys GRIELMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 223.

<sup>31</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 223.

<sup>32</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 223.

Though the questions in the Thaleia are different from those of Plato, the pattern is similar. It is this similarity which betrays Arius as having borrowed his thoughts from middle Platonism. Whereas the questions of Plato were concerned with the source of the world or its basic principles, Arius was concerned mainly with the source of Jesus and the objective or goal of his creation. This line of thought from the three principles of the world was unconditionally adopted by Arius. It is reflected in his teaching more sharply when he discusses the relation of Jesus to the father. In the above quotation, Arius makes Jesus the subject of the three questions to justify the subordination of the son to the Father. Using the concept of Middle Platonism, Arius took God to be Him who conceived an idea (the logos) at a particular time, and Jesus is taken to be that idea (logos) that was conceived in the mind of God, from the will of God.

A direct parallel of this doctrine would later find its way in the theology of Arius, where God is taken to be the Father, the Logos (Nous) as Jesus Christ and Matter as the world. Arius tried to understand and incorporate the biblical Christian notion of creation with these middle Platonic philosophical concepts. He was trying to be a creative preacher and exegete by applying Philosophical middle platonic cosmological scheme concepts into the Jewish-Christian creation doctrines. He was trying to be modern, to move with the times. He sought to situate the Jewish-Christian concept of God, especially the question of creation in a cultural set up of the Greek world. It was an attempt to inculturate the faith into the Greek culture from an overzealous preacher.

### 1.1.3. Concept of the Platonic Deity

The concept of the Platonic deity belonged to the second phase of the Plato renaissance or revamping of Platonism and it was more significant for Christian theology than the first phase, but very much related to the first phase. It was also referred to as the doctrine of the monad. It focused its attention on the Platonic deity. Two new vocabulary words are introduced to us by this phase, i.e. “Monad and dyad”<sup>33</sup>. *Monad* from the Greek word *μονος*<sup>34</sup> simply means *one, alone or single* and *dyad* from the Greek word *δυάς*<sup>35</sup> literally, means *two or duality*. Monad thus stands for the singleness, aloneness, and oneness of the Platonic God.

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<sup>33</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 225.

<sup>34</sup> Rudolf KASSUEHLKE, *Kleines Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament griechisch-deutsch*, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997), 124.

<sup>35</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 225.

The Monad, the One is also called "the ἀμέθεχτον (imparticipable)"<sup>36</sup>. This means he is an absolutely supreme Monad and allows no kind of differentiation. And the dyad stands for the second God or the demiurge.<sup>37</sup> G.C. Stead explains more on the dyad in the following sentence:

δυάς does not mean "two" i.e., Father and son, as τριάς means the 'Trinity'. Δυάς means 'the number two', implying both 'the second' and 'the twofold'... In Platonic circles, duality implies imperfection, matter, the world of senses, the left hand, and the female principle.<sup>38</sup>

Eudorus, who is one of the middle Platonists, in his discussion with the Pythagoreans, drew up the conclusion that "the two summit positions of the table of opposites, the one, and the Two, should be crowned by a higher one. His conclusion was that even the Platonic deity was to be conceived of in gradated form."<sup>39</sup> There are two Implications for this quotation. The first implication is that the monad stands contrasted against the dyad on the table of opposites. The Monad is perfect, on the other side stands the imperfect dyad, the material against the immaterial, the world of senses against the world of forms. The demiurge or dyad is taken to be at the apex of the material world and the monad at the apex of the immaterial world. The two are on opposite sides on this table of opposites.

Eudorus then leaves the table of opposites aside and says in the next line of his conclusion that *'the platonic God must be in himself conceived of in graded form'*. The second implication is that this deity in himself must be a hierarchy. This implies that the Godhead of the platonic God should have two substances in itself which have to be graded, i.e. the monad and the dyad. So on this gradation scale of Eudorus, the Monad occupies the summit position and is contrasted against the dyad who occupies the second position but within the godhead. We can see some kind of inconsistency there in Platonism about the Godhead. At one time or stage it is like God (the monad) was being contrasted against someone outside of himself (i.e. outside the Godhead) and at another stage, he was contrasted against someone from within the Godhead. However, whatever the picture painted, one thing is clear in both portrayals, the monad was always contrasted against the dyad and the dyad always took the inferior or second place in relation to the monad who took the first position always.

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<sup>36</sup> FERWERDA, R., Review of *On Proclus and His Influence in Medieval Philosophy*, in: *Mnemosyne*, (1993), 46(4), 555–557. Retrieved from : [jstor.org/stable/4432303](http://jstor.org/stable/4432303)

<sup>37</sup> FERWERDA, R., Review of *On Proclus and His Influence in Medieval Philosophy*, 555-557.

<sup>38</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 225.

<sup>39</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 224.



According to the Middle Platonists, therefore, the Monad is that which is supremely transcendent and is without duality but pure and had no contact directly with the material world. The Dyad on the other hand, who is also referred to as the second God or the demiurge, is not pure i.e. not composed of a single substance but twofold as expressed by Numenius; “the second God, being in himself twofold, himself forms of himself the idea and the world, as he is the Demiurge.”<sup>40</sup> Creation power of the material world is now exclusively consigned to the demiurge, who becomes the creator of the material world in an autonomous way. So the demiurge is the craftsman, the maker, the creator of the physical world. The monad, however, has nothing to do with the world directly.

While the Monad has no contact with the material world, the dyad has both contacts with the Monad and with the material world, hence being twofold. The Dyad is some kind of a bridge or a mediator between the Monad and the world. The contrast between the monad and the dyad is, therefore, a contrast between the perfection and the imperfection. Imperfection here is not synonymous to being evil as the Gnostics would regard matter but simply means being inferior in relation to the Superior being, in the case of the Middle Platonists – the Monad. The Monad is totally superior to the dyad.

To sum up the Platonic Doctrine of the three Principles and doctrine of the Monad, it can be seen that, the Middle platonic Cosmological scheme has three gradations or layers, which is also known as a Cosmological hierarchy. It can be summed up as follows according to Prof. Jan-Heiner Tück: *1) The divine one which is radically transcendent; (2) the agent of creation or demiurge, from which all that exists proceeds; and (3) the multiplicity of material beings.*<sup>41</sup>

This Middle Platonic view had likely so much fascinated the thoughts of Arius to such an extent that it found its way into his Theology as seen here in a statement where he said; “He (the son) was created for our sake, so that God might create us through him as through an instrument, and he would not exist if God had not wanted to create us.”<sup>42</sup> Arius does hereby make a parallel identification of the Monad to the Father of the Jewish – Christian God and the Demiurge with the Christian concept of Jesus Christ. He makes Jesus subordinate to God the father from this Platonic background. Further on, Arius even transports the Greek words *monad* and *dyad* into his theological explanations about the relation between the Father and

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<sup>40</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 225.

<sup>41</sup> Jan-Heiner TÜCK, *The Father without the son would not be Father*, in: *Communio*: “Our Father who art in Heaven”, vol. XLII, No. 1. Spring 2015, 9.

<sup>42</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 231.

the son when he says that “the monad was, but the dyad was not before it came into being.”<sup>43</sup> The usage of these words is a further confirmation of the Platonic influence on Arius.

It has been shown above how the doctrine of the three principles and the doctrine of the Monad exerted an influence on the subsequent course of Arius ideas and theology. Before we look at the actual teaching of Arius himself, we first take a look at the Theological thinking that also influenced him theologically.

## 1.2. THEOLOGICAL INFLUENCE

On the Theological front, there are many theologians who gave their opinions on the relation of the father to the son. Here, however, we have only chosen to look at two theologians; Origen and Gregory Thaumaturgus. Origen is seen as sharing similar opinions with Arius regarding the subordination of the son to the father. It is probable that Arius bought many of his ideas on the subject. Gregory Thaumaturgus, on the other hand, is seen as being on the other side (opposite side) for holding a view that the son is not subordinate but equal to the father. Arius would later refute many ideas from other theologians including Gregory Thaumaturgus' that did not suit his taste. Let us now take a close look at Origen and later on at his Student Gregory Thaumaturgus who form part of a pre-history for Arianism.

### 1.2.1. Origen (182 – 254 AD)

Origen, who according to Aloys Grillmeier can be considered to be “the first Christian Systematic Theologian,”<sup>44</sup> is one of the persons that tackled the question of the Son's relationship to the Father. As both a Theologian and a Philosopher, Origen had most likely read the teachings of middle Platonism and naturally made use of some Platonic concepts often when talking about God.

He professes and acknowledges above all that God is a Trinity when he says "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three Persons."<sup>45</sup> Then, he goes on to speak about each person of the trinity in details. When speaking about the Father, he speaks of Him as one who is “altogether monad, and indeed, if I may express it, Henad.”<sup>46</sup> Henad is also a Greek word which means unity.<sup>47</sup> It is synonymous with monad and Origen used it here interchangeably.

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<sup>43</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 224.

<sup>44</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 142.

<sup>45</sup> J.N.D. KELLY, *Early Christian Doctrines*, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1958), 129.

<sup>46</sup> J.N.D. KELLY, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 129.

<sup>47</sup> FERWERDA, R. (1993). *Review of On Proclus and His Influence in Medieval*

By the double usage of the words Monad or Henad, Origen wants to emphasize the oneness of God and to express the absolute transcendence of the Father and his imparticipable nature. To qualify this opinion further, Origen says; “He alone is God in the strict sense (αὐτοῦ Θεός), being alone ingenerate (αγεννητός)”.<sup>48</sup> This statement can be subject to different interpretations. One of the interpretations may be that Jesus and the Holy Spirit may not, after all, be divine, but should they be divine, then they are only so in a non-strict sense. He takes as the basis for his assertion a passage from John 17:3 “*And eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*” The father, here referred to as “the only true God” is distinguished from Jesus. The divinity of the son is therefore implicitly questioned. He (Origen), however, brings up a very important point that is very important in the Christological debate. He makes a point clear that the father is a distinct figure from the son, that the Father has a distinct hypostasis and the son also his own independent hypostasis. But the question of the son’s status still remains unanswered. How are these now two distinct hypostases related to one another? Who is the son in relation to the father? Origen explains this relationship in the following way:

The Father "being perfect goodness and power, He must always have had objects on which to exercise them; hence He brought into existence a world of spiritual beings, or souls, coeternal with Himself. To mediate, however, between His absolute unity and their multiplicity, He has his son, His express image, the meeting place of plurality of aspects which explains his twofold relation to the Father and the world"<sup>49</sup>.

We are able to see here the middle Platonic Concept of the doctrine of the three principles finding its way into Origen’s thinking. Thus, on a relational level, Origen says the Son has a relationship to the Father and the plurality. This view is not different from that of Middle Platonism picture of the demiurge. Therefore, Jesus' existence, like that of the demiurge, is for a specific function which is to mediate between the Father and the plurality. (In the word Plurality, both the eternal spirits and the world are implied.) His mediation is for eternity for he is the mediator between the eternal God and eternal souls.

Since Origen asserts that the spiritual beings, the souls are eternal, it follows that the medium, through which they were brought into existence, pre-exists them (the souls) and must also be eternal, for only that which is eternal can also mediate between the two eternal parties.

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*Philosophy*, in: *Mnemosyne*, 46(4), 555–557. Retrieved from: [jstor.org/stable/4432303](http://jstor.org/stable/4432303)

<sup>48</sup> J.N.D. KELLY, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 128

<sup>49</sup> J.N.D. KELLY, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 128.

Eternity is therefore also to be ascribed to the son. Origen says yes, the son is also eternal. “Being outside the category of time, the father begets the son by an eternal act (αἰὲν γεννᾷ αὐτον) so that it cannot be said that there was a time when he was not.”<sup>50</sup> Though both son and the souls are eternal, he uses the word *beget* in reference to the son only and *brought forth* to refer to the being of the souls. That spells some difference already between the souls and the son but not yet so crystal clear. How then is the son related to the father? Is he on the same level with the souls?

To differentiate the eternal son from the souls which are also eternal and also to assign the son his rightful place, Origen says “the son is God, though His deity is derivative and he is thus a secondary God (δευτερος Θεος).”<sup>51</sup> This is now a decisive distinction between the son and the souls, he is God and they are not, for eternity, in this case, is not synonymous with divinity but divinity also entails eternity. However, the term ‘*secondary God*’ used by Origen in relation to the son does not only sound middle-platonic but is demeaning too. It is like reducing the son to the status of a demi-god. That is, however, a milder and better position than his earlier premise of ‘*only the Father is God in a strict sense*’. Though demeaned, the son is not excluded from the Godhead. Origen hereby compensates and puts to rest the fears of the orthodox position when he classifies Jesus to the realm of the Godhead. It is not good enough but it can be tolerated.

To sum up Origen’s position, therefore, it can be said that Jesus is an independent distinct hypostasis from the Father, eternal like the father, subordinate to the father, and a mediator between the Father and the world but nonetheless belongs to the realm of the Godhead. Origen becomes at the same time a proponent of the doctrine of Subordination of Jesus to the Father. He does not alarm the situation very much for he still asserts the divinity of Jesus though he was not far from crossing the line of orthodox. His Subordination position is mild and tolerable.

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<sup>50</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 128.

<sup>51</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 128.

### 1.2.2. Gregory Thaumaturgus (213 -270 AD)

Gregory Thaumaturgus was a student of Origen. As would be expected, he tried to speak and write in Origenistic style. Like his master, he asserts that God is a Trinity. He takes trouble to carefully define in a detailed way the relationships between the three hypostases of the trinity in what can be said to be his creed. According to Grillmeier, the word '*monad*' does not occur in his writings but '*triad*' does, with more stress being put on unity and equality.<sup>52</sup> By the preference of the word *triad* to *monad*, Gregory shows us that subordination is not an issue for him. Though he lived in the era of Middle and Neo-Platonism, he seems not to subscribe to the Middle Platonistic cosmological scheme. It is not that he did not have interest in the subordination discussion, but that he seemed to have already overcome it and so does not bring it up in his discourses. He thereby tries to move Jesus from the peripheries where Origen had placed him as a 'secondary God' and restores him back to the centre where he belongs. He thus differs from his master who had put so much stress on Subordination.

Gregory gave a clear and detailed definition of the relationships in the Trinity in his "*expositio fidei*."<sup>53</sup> According to Grillmeier, "before the Nicene Creed, there are no documents so opposed to each other in their picture of God as the *expositio fidei* of Gregory Thaumaturgus and the Thaleia of Arius."<sup>54</sup> The reasons for such an opposition to each other could be found in their areas of stress or emphasis. Gregory Thaumaturgus stressed more on unity and equality in the Godhead. Arius however like Origen put so much stress on the differences and inequality in the Godhead.

The Expositio Fidei can be classified into four articles, one article for each person of the trinity and the last one about the unity of the Trinity.

There is one God, the Father of the living Word ... perfect Begetter of the perfect Begotten, Father of the only-begotten Son.

There is one Lord, Only of the Only, God of God, Image and Likeness of Deity, Efficient Word, wisdom comprehensive of the constitution of all things, and Power formative of the whole creation, true Son of true Father, Invisible of Invisible, and Incorruptible of Incorruptible, and Immortal of Immortal and Eternal of Eternal.

And there is One Holy Spirit, having his subsistence from God, and being made manifest by the Son... Perfect Image of the Perfect; Life, the Cause of the living... in whom is manifested God the Father ... and God the Son...

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 233.

<sup>53</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 233.

<sup>54</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 233.

There is a perfect Trinity, in glory and eternity and sovereignty, neither divided nor estranged. Therefore there is nothing either created or in servitude in neither the Trinity; nor anything superinduced as if at some former period it was non-existent, and at some later period, it was introduced. And thus neither was the Son ever wanting to the Father, nor the Spirit to the Son; but without variation and without change, the same Trinity abides ever.<sup>55</sup>

Clearly noticeable from the above quotation is the frequent occurrence of the word ‘perfect’. The father, son and Holy Spirit are described as a perfect trinity, the father as perfect Begetter of the perfect Begotten, and the Holy Spirit as Perfect Image of the Perfect. The word perfect was purposely chosen to counter earlier portrayals of the son as imperfect. He implicitly rejects the Platonic view of the logos’ imperfection and Origen’s, who considered the son as not being God in the strict sense or only being so in an imperfect sense. He also rejects the idea of being created for any of the persons in the trinity nor is there servitude. He also ascribes equality to each of the three persons in the Trinity when he says ‘God of God’, incorruptible of incorruptible. He disagrees with his master who called the son ‘a secondary God and only so by derivation’. He instead calls Jesus as perfect God from the perfect God. Gregory does agree with his master on the eternal generation of the son but differs with him on every other point regarding the relationships in the Godhead.

To sum up the *expositio fidei*, it can be said that, the God whom Gregory professes is a strictly Trinitarian God as contrasted to the strict Monad of Origen and of the Platonists. The word monad is seen as an exclusive term which excludes the son and Holy Spirit from the Godhead while *Triad* is an inclusive term. His usage only of the word *Triad* makes him in this case different in opinion from his master. Arius will later argue vehemently against the triad in favour of the monad. Let us now look at the teachings of Arius.

### **1.3.0. THE TEACHING OF ARIUS (256 – 336 AD)**

We do not have the original writings of Arius as many scholars attest, because the emperor, as mentioned earlier under the biographical information above, had ordered in 333 AD for the destruction of all his writings considering them not only to be a danger to the Faith of the Church but also a big threat to the unity of the empire. Only fragments of very few scripts which were not in public custody survived. What we do have as sources of the teaching he propagated are only fragments of his Thaleia and some letters written by him to Bishops

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<sup>55</sup> J.N.D. KELLY, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 133.

Eusebius of Nicomedia and Alexander of Alexandria and the Letter of accusation against him from Alexander. These letters and an extract of the Thalia make up part of the few extracts of the original documents of the controversy.<sup>56</sup>

Let us now look closely at the teaching of Arius. In his letter to Bishop Alexander of Alexandria, Arius expounds his teaching more extensively and comprehensively in what can also be said to be his creed as follows:

We know only one God, who alone is uncreated (αγεννητον) who alone is eternal, who alone is without origin, who alone is true, who alone possesses immortality, who alone is wise, who alone is good; the sole ruler, the judge of all, the ordainer and governor, unchanging and immutable, righteous and good, the God of the law and the prophets of the New covenant, who brought forth the only begotten son before eternal times(γεννησαντα), by whom he created(πεποικε) the aeons and all things;

he did not bring him forth (γεννησαντα) in appearance only, but in truth, as being in his own will, as unchanging and immutable, as God's perfect creature, but not as one of the creatures; brought forth (γέννημα), but not as others are brought forth...nor do we know the son as one existing in an earlier mode of existence and later begotten or created as son...

But we say, created (κτιθέντα) by the will of God before the times and aeons, who received life and being from the father and (the designations of ) honour, so that the father exists together with him...and God the father is the cause of all, quite alone without origin, but the son was brought forth (γεννηθεις) timelessly [i.e. before there was time] by the father and created and founded before the aeons, and was not before he was brought forth timelessly before all things, and he alone received his existence from the father.<sup>57</sup>

The first statement 'we know only one God' is already an expression of a confrontational stance and a strong critique against the divinity of the son implicitly. It already prepares our minds of what to expect as his profession of faith progresses. Then comes the most recurring phrase '*who alone*' which is appearing seven times in the first three lines. If we add its synonyms like *only one*, *sole*, we get it recurring, even more, times. By putting more emphasis on the word '*alone*' as seen by it's appearing so many times, is already an indication of the direction of Arius' thoughts. It is part of our basic knowledge that it is referring to the Monad who alone is uncreated, alone eternal, alone without origin, and who alone is true. More emphasis is placed on the transcendence, unity and dissimilarity of the monad to other persons of the trinity. Arius is hereby driving home a point that God the father

<sup>56</sup> John Henry NEWMAN, *The Arians of the fourth Century*, (London: High Holborn, 1854), 121.

<sup>57</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 226.

is totally other in relation to the son. The God of Arius is strictly a *monad* and not a *trinity*, a great contrast with Gregory Thaumaturgus but showing a close resemblance to Origen.

We can also see the Platonic doctrine of the monad as a background to this formulation. It is also a confirmation and an adaptation of the formulation of Origen who said '*He alone is God in the strict sense*'. It is already a statement that places the father (Monad) up against and above the son and the Holy Spirit. He differs with Gregory Thaumaturgus who said the son is equal with the Father for he is God from God. From the above creed, we can single out three central statements by which Arius tries to highlight and stress that Jesus is subordinate to the father.

### 1.3.1. Jesus as a creature

After asserting the Father as alone God, alone eternal, alone uncreated, Arius then introduces the son in relationship to the Father "who brought forth the only begotten son before eternal time (γεννησαντα) by whom he created the aeons and all things... as God's perfect creature, but not as one of the creatures...not as others are brought forth."<sup>58</sup> He counters the position of Gregory who said "*there is nothing created in the trinity.*" Jesus is here introduced as a creature. There is an addition of an adjective *Perfect* creature, but that does not change matters. The son is demoted to the status of a creature. He does not only emphasize that the son is a creature but also his humanity when he says that, "*he did not bring him forth (γεννησαντα) in appearance only, but in truth*". Arius in this respect differs with both Gregory and Origen who both hold the view that he is God.

It follows, that if he (the son) is a creature, then he must have been created. Arius says, yes He is created or using other words he says; "He is the one production of the one Father."<sup>59</sup> He is the only created creature from God. Being the only creature directly created by God, the son was created perfect. (This implies other creatures are imperfectly created.) That is what makes him distinct from other creatures but is nonetheless still a creature. He is the firstborn of all creation. He is, therefore, the most unique and perfect creation of God such that God gave him the unique honour among other creatures. The unlikeliness with other creatures lies in that, he (the son) was created before time. All other creatures are created in time and created through him as through an instrument.

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<sup>58</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 226.

<sup>59</sup> John Henry NEWMAN, *The Arians of the Fourth Century*, 123.



Arius then in his discourse tries to come up with the reason as to why the son was created at all. He draws his answer to this question not from scripture but from middle Platonism when he says: “He (the son) was created for our sake, so that God might create us through him as through an instrument, and he would not exist if God had not wanted to create us.”<sup>60</sup> This means, “the son does not exist of necessity, but only in dependence on a decision by the father.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, the son was created because of us. We see here a struggle in Arius who wants at the same time to preserve the oneness of the one God as portrayed in the Old Testament and at the same time, find the right place for the son. He feared that any too close a proximity of the son to the father may compromise the monotheism and lead the Jewish – Christian monotheistic faith into polytheism. The safest position for him was to simply classify him (the son) as a creature.

However, as if demoting the son to the sphere of creatures alone was not enough, Arius wants to even make the difference between the father and the son even more radical by stating that; “the gulf between the creation and the transcendent God is unbridgeable, because the son too is the other side of the gulf and therefore cannot know the father as he is in himself, but only in the way in which he has the right (ὡς θεμις ἐστιν).<sup>62</sup> Such a view will undermine the expression in the book of Hebrews where Jesus is said to have come as the full revelation of the father. Arius here makes the subordination of the son to be radical and the father as totally transcendent.

The perception of Arius in this his teaching is purely cosmological. The son was for Arius chiefly a mediator between God and the world and nothing else.

### **1.3.2. Created before time**

If created as claimed by Arius, then there must be a time when the son was created. One of the famous and controversial statements of Arius as expressed in his letter to Eusebius is the statement; “before his generation, or creation or appointment or constitution...He was not.”<sup>63</sup> The son is not eternal for he has a beginning. There was a time when he was not. So then when according to Arius did he begin to be or when was he created? To this question, he says the son was "created and founded before the aeons, and was not before he was brought forth

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<sup>60</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 231.

<sup>61</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 230.

<sup>62</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 228-229

<sup>63</sup> John Henry NEWMAN, *The Arians of the fourth Century*, 122.

timelessly before all things.”<sup>64</sup> In other words, he says Jesus was created outside time, that is, before time was created. He differs here with Origen who holds the view that the son was begotten eternally.

With the denial of his eternity, Arius denies at the same time the son’s divinity for divinity also entails eternity. “He is not eternal or co-eternal or co-unbegotten with the father.”<sup>65</sup>

He makes the son be important only in his role as mediator between the monad and the rest of creation. A purely Platonic influence in manifestation here!

### 1.3.3. Jesus as alien to the father

Being in the creaturely sphere and separated from God by an unbridgeable abyss, Arius goes further to draw another difference between the father and the son. He draws the difference in the substance of the father and the son. In his letter to Eusebius, Arius puts it even more sharply to show that the father is totally transcendent and that the son is alien to him when he said: “that he(the son) is of a substance that once was not in as much as he is not part of God nor of any previously existing substance.”<sup>66</sup> In other words, the son was created *ex nihilo*. He wants to remove any conception also that the son is an emancipation from the father hence the emphasis that he is not part of the substance of God. “He is, therefore, alien (ἄλλοτριος) to the father and dissimilar from him (ἀνόμοιος).”<sup>67</sup> From this difference and alien character, it follows that the father himself cannot be known by the son.

## 1.4 Conclusion

Arius in speaking about the son as a creature does not say; ‘the son was begotten by the father,’ but says ‘the father brought forth the only begotten son.’ The active verb being used is ‘*brought forth*’ and begotten is used only as an adjective, modifying the word ‘son’. Brought forth is used in the sense of ‘*created or made*’. There is a direct intention by Arius of avoiding that Biblical active verb of *begetting* in order to emphasise his being created. The other times when he does use begotten as an active verb, what is really meant is created. He was seeing it from the human biological point of view. This is because he was already bent on classifying him through and through as a creature.

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<sup>64</sup> John Henry NEWMAN, *The Arians of the fourth Century*, 122.

<sup>65</sup> John Henry NEWMAN, *The Arians of the fourth Century*, 123.

<sup>66</sup> John Henry NEWMAN, *The Arians of the fourth Century*, 122

<sup>67</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 228.

Arius in an effort to defend the strict monotheism of the Jewish-Christian God rejected the divinity of Jesus. He was bold enough to remove him from the godhead and placed him on the side of creatures. His flirtation with middle platonic philosophy made him come up with such a one-sided solution to answer only the cosmological question. The soteriological question is not taken into consideration at all.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2. THE FIRST ECUMENICAL COUNCIL OF NICEA (325 AD)

The first ecumenical council of Nicea was held at “Nicea in Bithynia during the summer of 325 AD,”<sup>68</sup> having been convoked by Emperor Constantine to resolve the Arian controversy. It is the first in the line of ecumenical councils of the church of which there are twenty-one ecumenical councils in total. As Karl-Heinz Menke puts it, the council of Nicea can be taken to be the second Pentecost feast of the church.<sup>69</sup> Just as the feast of Pentecost symbolized the birth and the unity of the early Church, where everyone heard the Gospel proclaimed in his own language, so was the council of Nicea a new beginning for the unity of the church that had been threatened with serious divisions. The church can now speak one language of doctrinal unity. The most important objective of this council was therefore to come up with doctrinal unity in the church especially surrounding the status of the son. This goal was achieved by this Holy council by defining the creed of Nicea, which still remains in use in the Catholic, Orthodoxy, and mainline churches today, and it thereby won for itself the name as “*Urtypus aller Konzilien der Katholischen Kirche*,”<sup>70</sup> meaning , the *prototype or the blueprint of all councils of the Catholic Church*.

But Emperor Constantine, the convener of the council of Nicea, was a political figure and not a theologian. One would wonder and probably ask how such a purely theological

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<sup>68</sup> Henry Melvill GWATKIN, *The Arian Controversy, sixth impression*, (London: Longmans, Green and CO., 1908) 29.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Karl-Heinz MENKE, *Jesus ist Gott der Sohn*, (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2012) 247.

<sup>70</sup> Karl-Heinz MENKE, *Jesus ist Gott der Sohn*, 247.

controversy aroused interest in a political figure of Emperor Constantine. What made him feel obliged to intervene in a purely theological matter? What were his vested interests? One thing is clear, he was not a Theologian, so his interest in the matter concerning Arianism was not to propose a theological opinion over the controversy, for he never had one, but he was rather driven in principal to have the council help him in putting an end to the heresy and bring about unanimity in the empire. It can, therefore, be said that his interests in the matter at hand were political, that is, all for the unity of the empire and peace in the church.<sup>71</sup> At the same council, in the name of unity, a uniform date for celebrating Easter was also discussed and set.

## 2.1. The imperial Church

We cannot talk about the Arian controversy and the council of Nicea without mentioning the name of Emperor Constantine and his influential role. As both secular and church history tell us, the Christian community, that is, the Church, suffered bitter persecutions under the Roman Empire right from the first century, worsened under Emperor Nero Caesar and lasted up to the reign of Diocletian. The edict of Milan, signed by Emperor Constantine in 312 AD<sup>72</sup> according to Gwatkin or in 313 AD<sup>73</sup> according to Newman among others, put an end to the great persecution. The polytheism and among them, the emperor cult worship were abolished and Christianity was embraced, recognized and made the legal and official religion of the empire, hence the term *imperial Church*. “He unified the empire and excluded particularism.”<sup>74</sup> Emperor Constantine can be said to have given the Christians a fresh breath of the air of freedom which they had never experienced since the inception of Christianity itself. For Emperor Constantine, the church was seen as a means of unifying the empire. The church, therefore, acquired the tag of ‘imperial church.’ Emperor Constantine, however, was not and never became the head of the church, but looking at the important role he played, he became some kind of a patron and protector of the church. His contributions to the Christendom and political successes based on the fact that he had Christians for his subjects, are summed up in what can be termed as a eulogisation by Phillip Schaff as follows:

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Henry Melvill GWATKIN, *The Arian Controversy, sixth impression*, (London: Longmans, Green and CO., 1908), 27.

<sup>72</sup> Henry Melvill GWATKIN, *The Arian Controversy, sixth impression*, 29.

<sup>73</sup> J.H. NEWMAN, *The Arians of the fourth Century*, (London: High Holborn, 1854), 140.

<sup>74</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 251.

Constantine, the first Christian Caesar, the founder of Constantinople and the Byzantine empire, and one of the most gifted, energetic and successful of the Roman emperors, was the first representative of the imposing idea of a Christian theocracy, or that system of policy which assumes all subjects to be Christians, connects civil and religious rights, and regards church and state as the two arms of one and the same divine government on earth.<sup>75</sup>

The hopes of Constantine were that the empire would now become more united as one people under one emperor and one religion. These hopes were to a large extent realized as the empire indeed got unified and reached great heights during his reign in comparison to that of his immediate predecessor, Emperor Diocletian. But there were also a number challenges and threats that he faced during his reign. Some of the serious challenges faced, that made Constantine even have sleepless nights, included divisions and quarrels among the Christian community.

These conflicts coming from within the church, not only disturbed the peace of the church but emperor Constantine too, who had hoped that the church would help him unify the empire. Divisions among Christians can only be described as a scandal of Christianity. The Donatist quarrel, which occurred in Egypt in the early years of his reign, had given Constantine enough problems. Phillip Schaff a church historian dates the Donatist quarrel to have taken place in 311 AD.<sup>76</sup> It did cause some deep divisions in the church of Egypt. And now about seven years later, in the year 318 AD, a new and bigger crisis, the Arian controversy comes up again from the same land of Egypt. Moreover, this conflict is even much bigger than the earlier one. With this background, the fears of Constantine were great. As Rowan Williams says, “Constantine showed signs of panic at the idea of a schism”<sup>77</sup> and did not, therefore, want to leave it to chance or ignore it or tolerate it like the Donatist quarrel; for he was aware of the possible worst consequences this might lead to. Gwatkin records that “He (Constantine) did not want a worse than the Donatist quarrel in Africa.”<sup>78</sup> Whatever affected the church did also affect the empire as a whole, for “there was an indissoluble bond between the well-being of the state and the unity of the church.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Philip SCHAFF, *History of the Christian Church Volume III: Nicene and Post – Nicene Christianity*. A.D. 311-600. Fifth edition, Revised, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.1997), 22.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Philip SCHAFF, *History of the Christian Church Volume III*, 439.

<sup>77</sup> Rowan WILLIAMS, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 30.

<sup>78</sup> Henry Melvill GWATKIN, *The Arian Controversy, sixth impression*, (London: Longmans, Green and CO., 1908), 30.

<sup>79</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 257.

### 2.1.1. The intervention of Constantine

The Arian controversy had to be contained sooner than later, for not only did it threaten the unity of the church in Egypt alone where it all started, but the church in the east as well, as well as the unity of the empire at large. This made Constantine panic even the more. He had to do something and do it quickly. He turned to his ecclesiastical confidant Hosius the Bishop of Cordoba<sup>80</sup> for help by asking him to mediate between Arius and Bishop Alexander of Alexandria, to make them come to a compromise and end the controversy. In his letter addressed to both Alexander and Arius and delivered in person by Hosius, the emperor did not hide his deep grief over the dispute. Part of the letter reads as follows:

Give me back my days of calm, my nights of security; that I may experience henceforth the comfort of clear light and the cheerfulness of tranquillity. Otherwise, I shall sigh and be dissolved in tears. So great is my grief that I put off my journey to the east on the news of your dissension...let me see you and other cities in happiness that I may offer due thanksgiving to God above for the unanimity and free intercourse which is seen among you.<sup>81</sup>

So earnest was his plea to the disputing parties, appealing for unanimity, but unfortunately, his plea went unheeded. Therefore, at the recommendation of Hosius, that a general council be called as a remedial measure, at which these disputes would be resolved and put to an end, once and for all, he did not hesitate to convoke one. He summoned the council to be held at his summer residence in Nicea.

The bishops, who could not easily forget the favours that he had bestowed on the church, readily responded to his invitation knowing the emperor had genuine intentions for the church, for they knew without a doubt how he loved, respected and protected the church. It was only right that they turned up in numbers, not only out of respect for him but also as a gesture of good will towards the one who gave Christianity the right to exist in the empire in total freedom after centuries of persecution. And above all, the bishops responded in order to be part of the solution that would bring about doctrinal unity among Christian communities as the main players, for it did directly affect their churches and made some bishops and priests to be at loggerheads with one another.

It is reported by many scholars, that Constantine was present throughout the deliberations. Since he was not a theologian and not yet baptized as well, for he was only baptized shortly

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. J.N.D. KELLY, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 231.

<sup>81</sup> John Henry NEWMAN, *The Arians of the fourth Century*, (London: High Holborn, 1854), 143.

before his death in 337,<sup>82</sup> he did not get involved in the debates but followed all proceedings of the debates with keen interest. He did not consider himself competent at least before the year 325 AD to handle the matter, for if he did, then it would have been proper for him to summon the two (i.e. Alexander and Arius) to himself and correct them personally like he is known to have done later. It shows that he was at this point not competent enough to resolve theological disputes hence summoning the bishops whose competence in the matters at hand was to a large extent certain.

There are indications however that after 325 AD, Constantine considered himself competent enough and played a major role in future disputes, having acquired some theological formation during the deliberations of the council of Nicea. As an example, a letter written by him to Arius shows his active role in calling back Arius to unity with the Church as seen in the letter below:

Come to me I say to the man of God. Be convinced that with my questions I shall search out the deepest corners of your heart. And if any folly still seems to be in them, I shall heal you wonderfully by an appeal to God's grace. But if you seem to be sound in your soul, I will recognize in you the light of truth and rejoice with you over your piety.<sup>83</sup>

He wrote this letter about the year 335 AD and the measuring stick which he appealed to for the discernment of Arius' thoughts was the creed of Nicea. It may be said, therefore, that just like "the anti-Arian struggles became a theological college for the fathers of the fourth century and beyond,"<sup>84</sup> so did it also become partly to Constantine. However, before the council of Nicea, he was a novice in theological matters and incapable of theologically influencing the deliberations.

According to Aloys Grillmeier, "Constantine was not in a position to achieve intellectual mastery of the problems which arose at Nicea."<sup>85</sup> He was thus mainly interested in knowing what the majority of Bishops would agree upon; so that he could, in turn, enforce that as emperor in the entire empire for unity purposes and secure the peace of the church. Had the majority of Bishops taken the side of Arius, he would have most probably date stamped that position. But as it were, the majority of the council fathers condemned the teaching of Arius. "The Emperor felt himself obliged to watch over the dogmatic and disciplinary decisions of

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<sup>82</sup> Phillip SCHAFF, *History of the Christian Church Volume III*, 24.

<sup>83</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 259

<sup>84</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 249.

<sup>85</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 261.



the council."<sup>86</sup> He did in this sense, therefore, not influence the proceedings per se but safeguarded and enforced the outcome of Nicea on his subjects in the entire empire. In this line, Newman says, "When the decision was once announced, his tone altered, and what has been a recommendation of caution at once became an injunction to conform."<sup>87</sup> He, therefore, gave the decisions of the council the force of law. This was possible because the same people who belonged to the church were also the citizens of the empire. According to Newman therefore, "the decisions were worked out by the bishops themselves, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in search of the will of God."<sup>88</sup>

## 2.2. Participants at the council of Nicea

There are differences in terms of figures given as to how many bishops were in attendance at the council of Nicea. Scholars and historians are however agreeable, that the majority of the participants came from the east where the controversy was much felt. Jan-Heiner Tück in his article over Arianism says; "The overwhelming majority of the participants in the council, whose number fluctuated between 200 and 318 bishops, were from the East; only very few of them came from the west."<sup>89</sup> Newman gives us the number as 300<sup>90</sup> while Gwatkins says 318 bishops, a symbolic number (like the number of Abraham's servants or like the mystic number which stands for the cross of Christ), were in attendance.<sup>91</sup> Among the notable figures present was Alexander the Bishop of Alexandria who earlier called Arius to order. He was accompanied by his young deacon Athanasius who later succeeded him.<sup>92</sup> Others were Hosius of Cordoba who probably was the president of the deliberations.<sup>93</sup> From the east other most notable figures were Eusebius of Nicomedia who studied under Lucian like Arius and was a defender of Arius, Eusebius of Caesarea, Marcarius of Jerusalem and Marcellus of Ancyra.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 258.

<sup>87</sup> John Henry NEWMAN, *The Arians of the fourth Century*, 145-146.

<sup>88</sup> John Henry NEWMAN, *The Arians of the fourth Century*, 260.

<sup>89</sup> Jan-Heiner TÜCK, *The Father without the son would not be Father*, in: *Communio*, Spring 2015, 13.

<sup>90</sup> John Henry NEWMAN, *The Arians of the fourth Century*, 143.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Henry Melvill GWATKIN, *The Arian Controversy*, 27.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Henry Melvill GWATKIN, *The Arian Controversy*, 32.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 265

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Henry Melvill GWATKIN, *The Arian Controversy*, 28.

### 2.3. The deliberations of Nicea

The most central business and pressing issue of the council of Nicea was to look closely at the teaching of Arius, for it was the most contentious issue of the moment. The creed of Arius was read out to the council and it was unanimously condemned and rejected by the synod as blasphemous for denying the divinity of the son. Newman gives us a little bit more of details and says that Arius was introduced before the Council in person and examined and confessed his impieties,<sup>95</sup> before the council condemned him and his teaching. This is also re-echoed by William Barry who says, “He appeared in 325 at Nicea, where the confession of faith which he presented was torn in pieces.”<sup>96</sup>

Having torn in pieces the creed of Arius, it was now the turn of the council to come up with a Creed of its own that will be a test and a measure of Orthodoxy Christological teaching, especially regarding the position and relation of the son to the Father. There was before this time no uniform creed in the churches. There are indications, however, that different Christian communities had their own creeds based on the baptismal formula but differently formulated from community to community. An example of such creeds is the *exposition fidei* of Gregory Thaumaturgus that we looked at in the first chapter. So the creed to be defined by the council of Nicea was to become a uniform profession of faith to be used in all Christian communities.

Eusebius of Caesarea, a sympathizer of Arius and “the historian, whose opinions, at any rate in their more moderate form, reflected the attitude of great numbers of eastern clergy,”<sup>97</sup> and who according to Gwatkin, held an “intermediate position regarding the Lord not as a creature but as a secondary god derived from the will of the father,”<sup>98</sup> lay before the council an old creed recited by his church in Caesarea. It read as follows:

We believe in one God, the father almighty, maker of all things, both visible and invisible; And in one lord Jesus Christ, the word of God. God from God, light from light, life from life. The only begotten son, the firstborn of all creation, begotten of the father before all ages, by whom all things were made, who for our salvation was made flesh and lived among men and suffered and rose again the third day, and

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<sup>95</sup> Cf. John Henry NEWMAN, *The Arians of the fourth Century*, 144.

<sup>96</sup> William BARRY, “Arius.” in: *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 1. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907. 29 Dec. 2016. [www.newadvent.org/cathen/01718a](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01718a).

<sup>97</sup> J.N.D. KELLY, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 224.

<sup>98</sup> Henry Melvill GWATKIN, *The Arian controversy*, 32-33.

ascended to the father, and shall come again in glory to judge quick and dead. And in the Holy Spirit.<sup>99</sup>

This Creed is largely believed to be the basis for the creed of Nicea, for it does bear a very close resemblance to the creed of Nicea among other reasons. The creed of Nicea looks like an expanded version of this Caesarean creed. Such a creed was among other things very neutral in its contents and at first sight very appealing, for it did not contain any of the complicated controversial clauses and statements like those of Arius, concerning the son's status as a creature. It even addresses Jesus as God from God. But it was also simply too simple, given the disputes at hand. Care has now to be taken to see through each word. Had the council only wanted to find a compromise between the two disputing parties to broker peace in the church, this should have been the document to adopt. But peace built on half backed premises would not last long. The Council fathers did not just want to achieve doctrinal compromise, but above all, doctrinal correctness. Quite well, this creed can be said to have contained no dogmatic errors.

But when one reads between the lines of this Caesarean creed, it was capable of being interpreted in an Arian way, a thing which the council was called to resolve and stump out. It is in this line that Rowan Williams reports that "it was rejected by the council as inadequate."<sup>100</sup> Meaning it could not be adopted as it is in its current form. Rejection here does not necessarily imply that it was thrown out like that of Arius for being heretical, for it did not contain heretical statements, but indicates that it lacked the required depth and cannot, therefore, be adopted as it is in its current form. It was indeed inadequate for it did not quite directly respond to or address the errors in the rejected creed of Arius that had fuelled the crisis. Something was missing in it. It did not directly address the matters for which the council was summoned. Gwatkin on the other hand however says, it was accepted,<sup>101</sup> but he, later on, adds that then "Athanasius and his friends proposed a few amendments to it."<sup>102</sup> So Rowan Williams and Gwatkin do not totally contradict each other. They have basically stated the same thing regarding its inadequacy but using different words to express the same point. The common denominator from the two above positions is that this creed, inadequate as it was, did provide some kind of foundation or material for the discussion. It was the starting point for the discussion in coming up with a new creed.

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<sup>99</sup> Henry Melvill GWATKIN, *The Arian controversy*, 33.

<sup>100</sup> Rowan WILLIAMS, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 70.

<sup>101</sup> Henry Melvill GWATKIN, *The Arian controversy*, 35.

<sup>102</sup> Henry Melvill GWATKIN, *The Arian controversy*, 35.

Denzinger in his *Enchiridion Symbolorum* agrees with this position and puts it even more plainly when he says that “this creed was used by the council of Nicea to come up with its own.”<sup>103</sup> Its close resemblance with the final draft is some kind of very strong indication that this document somehow was indeed used for the deliberations.

The bishops, according to the view presented by Gwatkin, had assented to this creed including the future bishop of Alexandria, the young deacon Athanasius. Athanasius then further proposed to make a few amendments to this good but not detailed enough creed, which did contain some observable ambiguous statements, capable of being misunderstood or being understood in an Arian sense. These ambiguous words included statements like; ‘*the firstborn of all creation*’. This could be interpreted as saying that Jesus is a creature, the first among creatures. It, therefore, called for more explanations and qualification. ‘*Begotten before all ages*’ is another statement that could just be as ambiguous, for Arius had used the word ‘begotten’ to imply created, as there existed no distinction yet between the word *begotten* and the word *created*. Another ambiguous statement is; ‘*was made flesh*’. This was also obvious; it risked being understood as saying that Jesus became flesh and not necessarily fully a human being but only a part of a human person.<sup>104</sup>

Looking at these loopholes pointed out by Athanasius, it made sense and was agreeable by the council fathers to make amends to the proposed creed so as to seal the named loopholes. The Creed of Eusebius of Caesarea, therefore, became like the working document, an ‘*instrumentum laboris*’ of the council.

Other scholars, however, among them Aloys Grillmeier and Menke, are of the view that this creed long believed to be the foundation of the Nicene creed is not the foundation, but a combination of the creeds from Jerusalem and Antioch were the foundations. Gwatkin is however of the view that, it was at that point of rearranging the ill-compacted clauses in the caesarean creed that the churches of Jerusalem and Antioch supplied in their contributions.<sup>105</sup> And so, these older churches of Jerusalem and Antioch, in this case, might share together with Caesarea the honour of giving a creed to the whole of Christendom.<sup>106</sup> But it remains contested that this creed was brought into discussion in the processes of coming up with the creed of Nicea. After deliberations on the proposed amendments, a

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<sup>103</sup> Heinrich DENZINGER, *The sources of Catholic Dogma*, Translated by Roy J. Deferrari from the thirteenth edition of the *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, (New Hampshire: Loreto Publications, 1995) p.8 #12.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Henry Melvill Gwatkin, *The Arian Controversy*, 35-36.

<sup>105</sup> Henry Melvill Gwatkin, *The Arian Controversy*, 35.

<sup>106</sup> Henry Melvill Gwatkin, *The Arian Controversy*, 35.

final draft which is commonly referred to as the Nicene Creed was produced. The Nicene Creed was then defined and promulgated as the orthodoxy creed and given the force of the law by the emperor. It became from now on the measuring stick of orthodoxy for the whole church.

## 2.4. The Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed according to its content can be said to be a direct and comprehensive response against Arianism. It responded to every claim or thesis of Arius so as to leave not stone unturned. This is what the final document as adopted by the council of Nicea looked like:

We believe in one God the Father almighty, creator of all things visible and invisible. And in our one Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, the only-begotten born of the Father, that is *of the substance of the Father*, God of God, light of light, *true God of true God, born, not made, of one substance with the Father (in Greek "homousion")*, by whom all things were made, which are in heaven and on earth, who for our salvation came down, and became incarnate and was made man, and suffered, and arose again on the third day, and ascended into heaven, and will come to judge the living and the dead. And in the Holy Spirit.

But those who say: "There was [a time] when he was not," and, "Before he was born, he was not," and "Because he was made from non-existing matter, he is either of another substance or essence," and those who call "God the Son of God changeable and mutable," these the Catholic Church anathematises.<sup>107</sup>

This creed, so detailed in every aspect than the caesarean creed, brought in the needed precision of words and responded directly and unambiguously to the unorthodoxy statements of Arius. It did not just condemn and anathematise Arius as expressed strongly in the last part of this creed, but also condemned and corrected directly his unorthodox statements.

The five major maxims of Arius are explicitly mentioned and rejected in the creed: that there was a time when he was not, the pre-existence of the Father over the son, that the substance of the father differs from that of the son: that the son is a creature and thus

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<sup>107</sup> Heinrich DENZINGER, *The sources of Catholic Dogma*; translated by Roy J. Deferrari from the thirteenth edition of *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, (New Hampshire: Loreto Publications, 1955) # 54.

capable of moral change, that is, capable of committing sin.<sup>108</sup> In the Christological articles of the creed, there are particularly four positive affirmations or statements which are specifically and carefully, with all precision added, to directly refute the Arian teaching. These four statements are referred to as “the four anti-Arian interpolations”<sup>109</sup> by Jan-Heiner Tück. These four interpolations are pregnant with meaning and give us so to say the Christological teaching of Nicea. Let us now take a detailed look at them.

## 2.5. The Christological article and its four interpolations

We take a look again at only the Christological articles and highlight these carefully included interpolations:

We believe... in one Lord Jesus Christ , the Son of God, begotten from the Father [the only-begotten; *that is, (1) from the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, (2) true God of true God, (3) begotten, not made, (4) being of one substance (homousion) with the Father*; by whom all things were made both in heaven and on earth; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man...<sup>110</sup>

### 2.5.1. The first interpolation: ‘from the substance of the father’

This interpolation translated also as *from the essence (ousia) of the father*, is a direct response against the Arian statement which says that ‘the son was created from the will of the father.’ According to this Arian perspective, the son derives his existence from the father by the pure act of will and not through begetting or separation or emanation. The reason for his holding such a view is because “coming forth as a result of the will guarantees the divine immutability and indivisibility.”<sup>111</sup> Arius could not conceive of the father being split into two substances. To safeguard the immutability of the father, he paid less attention to the ontological status of the son. This is however in contrast to the description of the son in the gospels as the only-begotten son of the Father (John 3:16). Begetting implies having a common nature between the begetter and the begotten. So the son, as begotten of the Father, is of the same substance with the father. C.S. Lewis would

<sup>108</sup> Uchenna A. EZEH, *Jesus Christ the Ancestor: An African Contextual Christology in the light of the major Dogmatic Christological Definitions of the Church from the Council of Nicea (325) to Chalcedon (451)*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 26. February 2003), 192.

<sup>109</sup> Jan Heiner TÜCK, *The father without the son would not be father*, in: *Communio*, Vol. XLII. No. 1. Spring 2015, 14.

<sup>110</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 267.

<sup>111</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 267.

say, "What God begets is God; just as what man begets is man."<sup>112</sup> Jesus, the only-begotten son of the Father, is therefore not just from any other substance but from the substance of the Father who begot him. What the council is trying to correct here is that the son is not coming out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) or from the substance that once was not, but of the eternal substance of the Father, born of the father in eternity. In order to rule out the begetting or generation of the son as the creation of a creature, the council interpolates that the son is originally consubstantial with the father.<sup>113</sup>

Consubstantiality here entails being of the same ontological nature with the father, the son shares thereby the same ontological dignity with the father. He is on the same ontological level with the father. In saying that the son is from the substance of the father, the council removes the son from the realm of the creatures to the ontological realm. The council makes thereby a distinction between Jesus and the rest of creation. It reverses the demotion of the son by Arius who had made him subordinate. He is not subordinate but equal to the father.

### 2.5.2. Second interpolation – ‘true God from true God’

Preceding this interpolation is a statement ‘God from God’. This statement does affirm quite well that Jesus is God, but it is not sufficient enough to describe the status of the son, given the debates which prevailed before this council, for even Origen the protagonist of subordination had regarded Jesus as a secondary God or a demiurge who received his being from God. Origen had plainly stated that only the Father is God in the strict sense. By that he meant that only the father is truly God, and the opposite of true is false. He thereby implied, if we stretch his point further, that the son was a false God (demiurge).

Arius did as well repeat this thought under the seven statements of ‘*who alone*’ phrases in his creed in the following statement; “we acknowledge one God... who alone is true.”<sup>114</sup> The word ‘*true*’ is here tied to the word ‘*alone*’, and the word alone for Arius in his creed almost always pointed to the Monad. Arius had also regarded Jesus as a demiurge when he made a direct parallel identification of the demiurge from the middle platonic cosmological scheme with Jesus. And this demiurge of Arius belonged to the realm of creatures and is radically subordinate to the father. This demi-god together with all other beings, have God

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<sup>112</sup> C.S. LEWIS, *Mere Christianity*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2012) 134.

<sup>113</sup> Jan Heiner TÜCK, *The father without the son would not be father*, 14.

<sup>114</sup> J.N.D. KELLY, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 227.

as their source. Therefore, to remove all ambiguity from the statement of *God from God*, it was necessary that the council fathers carefully and with precision added the phrase that he is not a false God but rather ‘*true God from true God*.’ By so declaring, the council fathers’ single intention was unmistakably made known, which was to emphasize that the son is God in an unequivocal sense. They thus locked or closed this statement from being open to any other interpretation. There is no more room for speculation and ambiguity. They thereby rescued Jesus from the realm of creatures and from the radical subordination to the father as Arius had portrayed him and they placed him on the same level with the Father.

### 2.5.3. Third interpolation – ‘Begotten not made’

The Greek words for *begetting* and *creating* before the Nicene Creed were used interchangeably. This means, one used the word begetting to mean creating and used creating where the word begetting was meant. Arius often used these words in this sense. The close proximity of the two words in Greek vocabulary could have caused this mixing up. The two terms in Greek are; “γεννητος” (from γενναο = begetting or generating) and ‘γενετος’ (from γινωμαι = to become.)”<sup>115</sup> Only a single letter ‘n’ brings in the difference of meaning and spelling in the two words. The opposite of the two terms are “αγεννητος (unbegotten) and αγενετος (uncreated).”<sup>116</sup> If the words agennetos (unbegotten) and agenetos (uncreated) are applied to the Father, no problem would arise for he is indeed both unbegotten and uncreated. But if the same two words are applied to Jesus, the word agenetos (uncreated) does fit in perfectly well for he is not created, but the word agennetos (unbegotten) does not, for Jesus was indeed begotten and the fact of his being begotten is undisputable. In this case, the council had to use the words gennetos (begotten) to strictly express the fact of his being begotten in eternity and the negative adjective agenetos (uncreated) as fitting words for describing the real eternal status of Jesus. Emphasis is therefore laid on the fact that though begotten, he is uncreated.

In the previous interpolation of ‘true God from true God’, the council fathers did emphasize the point that Jesus is truly God and not a creature, hence selecting the word agenetos (uncreated) here, as the fitting word, describing the real divine status of the son. An impression is however given by Aloys Grillmeier that one word *agennetos* can mean both

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<sup>115</sup> Jan-Heiner TÜCK, *The father without the son would not be father*, in: communion, spring 2015, 16.

<sup>116</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 267.



‘uncreated’ and ‘unbegotten’ when applied to the father.<sup>117</sup> But this was only the case in the pre-Nicene period. Arius had also used these words interchangeably and they had meant one and the same thing. But “from now on, it is impossible to translate γεννητος, when applied to the son as ‘created’ and to use it in this sense.”<sup>118</sup> This ambiguity has now been resolved by the addition of this interpolation in the creed. Gennetos now becomes strictly limited to meaning begotten and genetos to strictly mean created. Thus the distinction in the creed, *begotten not made*.

One of the greatest scores of the council of Nicea, which made great strides in terms of precision of words, was its drawing of a line between these two terms, distinguishing them from one another, ‘begotten’ not ‘made’, ‘gennetos’ not ‘genetos’. This cleared the confusion of understanding the two terms and did thereby refute Arius' position that the son was created. This distinction, therefore, drove home a point that Jesus, as begotten of the father, is distinguished from the rest of the creatures which came into being by creation. Karl-Heinz Menke explains this distinction further when he says; “*Der Terminus Zeugung drückt aus, dass der son anders aus dem Vater hervorgeht als die kontingenten Geshöpfe durch den Akt der schöpfung*.”<sup>119</sup> Hence the Biblical expression of Jesus as the only begotten son of the father, while a human being is referred to as a creature, implying that the latter came into being by way of creation. This distinction between begotten and created is even more sharply expressed by C.S. Lewis in the statement; “What God begets is God; just as what man begets is man. What God creates is not God; just as what man makes is not man.”<sup>120</sup> What is made does not bear the same nature as its maker, but what is begotten has the same nature as its begetter. Like the above interpolations, this interpolation does emphasize further the divine status of the son.

#### **2.5.4. The fourth interpolation – ‘of one substance with the father’ (homoousios)**

This interpolation with its Greek word of ὁμοουσιος is the most famous part of the fides Nicea. Anton Svoboda in his Diplomarbeit says, in this interpolation of homoousios, the

<sup>117</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 267.

<sup>118</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 276.

<sup>119</sup> Karl-Heinz MENKE, *Jesus is Gott der Sohn*, (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2011), 248. : “The term begotten expresses that the son differently proceeds from the father as are other creatures through creation.” Translation is mine.

<sup>120</sup> C.S. LEWIS, *Mere Christianity*, (Newyork: HarperCollins, 2012), 134-135.

anti-Arian impetus reached its climax point.<sup>121</sup> This term turned out to be a controversial one as it was not well understood and accepted by all. To help in understanding the term of *homoousios* better, it would be good to look at its hermeneutics a bit. The prefix *homo* simply means *same*. Some of the common word combinations where this word exists in Greek include the words *homotoichos* standing for *two houses* which share a wall, just like two birds which have exactly same feathers are called *homopteros*.<sup>122</sup> And now coming back to *homoousios*, it is a compound word formed from two words ‘*homo*’ which means *same* and ‘*ousios*’ from ‘*ousia*’, which means substance and when put together means *same substance*.

Like the first interpolation, this fourth interpolation of consubstantiality with the father (ὁμοουσιον τοι πατρι) emphasizes the unity of the father and the son. The phrase ‘*homoousion toi patri*’ therefore translates as *same substance with the father*. The son is not the father but is of the same substance with the father. The father and the son are one in substance. Being of one substance here entails having the same dignity, the same ontological status, and unity. By this interpolation, the Christological subordination is warded off and at the same time, the threefold middle Platonic cosmology is corrected along the lines of the biblical faith.<sup>123</sup> That means this council rejected the position of the cosmological medium between God and creation to which Arius under the middle Platonic influence had consigned Jesus. Jesus is here consigned to the realm of the Godhead and not to the realm of creatures. The council did hereby strongly reaffirm the direct creation of the world by God as held from time in memorial by the biblical creation narratives. This is as clearly contained in the very first article of the Nicene Creed, where the father is said to be ‘*creator of all things, visible and invisible*.’ The Jewish-Christian cosmological scheme only has two layers; i.e. God the creator and on the other side, creation.

By using this term *homoousios*, the council is furthermore reacting directly against the teaching of Arius which says that ‘the son is alien to the father.’ By this interpolation, the council states on the contrary that Jesus belongs inside the Godhead and is not alien to the Father. *Homoousios*, though not a biblical term, expressed the scriptural description of who the son is. The council Fathers wanted to express a purely biblical presentation of the son

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<sup>121</sup> Cf. Anton SVOBODA, *Nicaea unter Hellenisierungsverdacht zur Frage nach einer Entfremdung des Evangelium in vierten Jahrhundert unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Studien von Alois Grillmeier*, Diplomarbeit, Universität Wien, März 2014, 58.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Anton Svoboda, *Nicaea unter Hellenisierungsverdacht*, 59.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Jan Heiner TÜCK, *The Father without the son would not be the father*, 16-17.

using the language of the present time, and they found the word *homoousios* as a befitting expression that was faithful to scripture. “I and the father are one.”(John 10:30).

## 2.6. Debate surrounding the term “*homoousios*”

The word *homoousios* received great opposition especially from the strict Arian party, the *anomoeans*. The main reason advanced being that it was not a scriptural term but a Greek term. Benedict XVI in his *Jesus of Nazareth* book agrees that it's not biblical when he says that *homoousios* is the only philosophical word which found its way in the creed.<sup>124</sup> Beatrice Pier Franco remarks that “Arian Supporters had rejected that word as heretical.”<sup>125</sup> On account of it being a Greek philosophical term which they considered heretical, they protested its enshrinement in the definition of faith. It is indeed not a scriptural term, for it is not found in the Bible, just like the word *trinity* does not appear in the bible, but what it stands for or depicts is a scriptural concept. By this term, the council fathers wanted to distinguish Jesus from the creatures. “The son is begotten while the creatures are created. This is the basic meaning of *homoousios*, that the essence of the father is the same as that of the son.”<sup>126</sup> In this debate on the *homoousios*, the council fathers saw it necessary to say new things, even while still professing to make no new changes to the deposit of faith. This will be discussed in details in the next chapter on Hellenisation and Inculturation.

## 2.7. Conclusion

One of the greatest scores of this Holy council has been its focus on precision of words to rule out any possible ambiguity. The word *begotten* has appeared quite a number of times in this chapter because of its key role in the unlocking of the mystery surrounding the status of the son and his relation to the father. This term ‘*begotten*’ is above all a relational term. In as much as it leads us to arrive at defining the son as being divine as the father, it does on another hand bring in the strong aspect of relations in the godhead. The father is not a lonely, isolated monad as portrayed by Arius, but one who relates to the son from eternity. The word ‘*father*’ itself entails the son just as the word ‘*son*’ entails the father. And like

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<sup>124</sup> Cf. Joseph RATZINGER- Benedict XVI., *Jesus von Nazareth*, (Freiburg : Herder, 2007), 369.

<sup>125</sup> Pier Franco BEATRICE, *The word “Homoousios” from Hellenism to Christianity*, in: *Church History*, 71 no 2, Jun 2002, 245.

<sup>126</sup> Uchenna A. Ekeh, *Jesus Christ the Ancestor*, 192.

Athanasius expressed it, the father has always been father and the son has always been son. And as Jan–Heiner Tück captures it in his article; “the father would never be father without the son.”<sup>127</sup> And as Ambrose of Milan would further put it, there is no time when the father was not father, for he was not only God at first and later become father.<sup>128</sup> If that were to be the case, then it means that God ‘became’ father. To become, however, means changing. But God does not change, he is immutable.

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<sup>127</sup> Jan -Heiner TÜCK, *The Father without the son would not be the father*, 16-17.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Jan -Heiner TÜCK, *The Father without the son would not be the father*, 16-17.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3. INCULTURATION OF CHRISTOLOGY IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT

In this chapter, we want to turn our focus to the Inculturation of Christology in an African context, taking the inculturation of the fourth century as our model. We will begin by looking first at inculturation of the Gospel in general and then, later on, we shall narrow down to the inculturation of Christology. Generally, Inculturation of the Gospel or of Christianity happens, when the Gospel, which was originally preached in a Jewish cultural set-up, using Jewish concepts and language, encounters another culture. It is part of our basic knowledge that all the Apostles were Jews and as they and other early Christians dispersed to various territories outside the Jewish territory to preach the Gospel, did come across new cultures, languages, and beliefs different from those of the Jews.

This encounter between the Gospel and the cultures, entailed that the culture which accepted the Gospel of Christ, converted to Christianity and in turn, Christianity also underwent some changes, in that the Christian teaching had now to be reformulated, i.e. re-expressed in the language and concepts of the newly evangelised culture, for that culture, for it to be fully understood in that culture, but without however Christianity or the Gospel losing its central message. This then resulted in having the faith becoming part of the culture. This is the foreseen process of every inculturation journey. For as Pope John Paul II in 1994 during the African synod held in Rome observed; "A faith that does not become a culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived."<sup>129</sup> This encounter therefore between the gospel and new cultures gives birth to a process called Inculturation. But what really is Inculturation?

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<sup>129</sup> Pope John Paul II, *The Church in Africa, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), # 78.

### 3.1. What is Inculturation?

Inculturation has not just one but several definitions. Different authors who have handled this theme define it differently. Here we take a look at only a selected few definitions that will give us the keywords or elements for inculturation to let have a good picture of it. We take the first definition from Aylward Shorter who says: “Theologically, Inculturation means the ongoing dialogue between the Gospel and Culture.”<sup>130</sup> Inculturation is here not to be confused with acculturation which is purely an encounter between two or more cultures on a sociological level. Acculturation in the purely anthropological sense is “the process whereby individual persons or groups of people are transformed as a result of their contact with one or more cultures that are not their own.”<sup>131</sup> By inculturation, however, the encounter is strictly restricted to the meeting of the Gospel and a particular culture, hence the carefully chosen keywords in Shorter’s definition, which contains the words - *theologically, gospel and culture*. Shorter emphasizes here the dialogical aspect of Inculturation in theological circles. And the word dialogue here means an exchange of ideas or concepts between two or more persons, parties or in this case, cultures and the gospel.

The sort of dialogue implied in inculturation is not just any dialogue which discusses things on the surface but rather deep dialogue meant to change the perception of the partners in that dialogue. Speaking about dialogue in more details in one of his earliest writings, Aylward Shorter says; a dialogue is “a serious exchange, a confrontation of beings, a meeting of meanings, values, attitudes and understandings.”<sup>132</sup> Inculturation as a dialogue is, therefore, a two-way process where the deepest cultural and faith treasures are brought into discussion in an open but critical manner. On the one hand, the culture accepts and gets converted to the Gospel, not once and for all but gradually, for it takes time for a culture to digest the gospel in order to be converted to it fully. On the other hand, the evangelised culture contributes something of its self as it tries to re-express what it has received. Thereby, it leaves its mark or imprint on the Theological concepts that are developed after the encounter. The end result

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<sup>130</sup> Aylward SHORTER, *The African Synod: A personal response to the outline document*. (Nairobi: St Paul’s Publications Africa, 1991), 54.

<sup>131</sup> Vicente Carlos KIAZIKU, *Culture and inculturation, a Bantu viewpoint*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2009), 48.

<sup>132</sup> Aylward SHORTER, *African Christian Theology-Adaptation or Incarnation?* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), 5.

is "the inculturation of Christianity and the Christianisation of the culture."<sup>133</sup> This is what our second chosen definition from Fr. Midali tries to stress. He says:

Inculturating the Gospel can refer to the fact that the Gospel is not only received and assimilated by a culture, which is thereby modified, but it is, in turn, re-expressed in the said culture and gradually even enriched by the values of that culture. And this is obviously the most radical aspect of the Inculturation journey.<sup>134</sup>

This definition emphasizes the reformulation or re-expression of the teachings of the Gospel in new concepts, understandable in that culture, without changing the central message of the Gospel and Christianity. So Christianity in the process gets richer and also shaped to some extent by the cultures it encounters, for from the moment of encounter with a particular culture, it carries some marks of that culture. Christianity and culture thereby mutually enrich each other. This definition at the end makes mention of inculturation as a journey. Since culture is part of a person, to change the culture is also to change a person which naturally requires a lot of time, hence it being a journey, for it cannot be accomplished at once. Inculturation of the gospel has also historically made its way through various cultures for the past two thousand years, first in the Greco-Roman world and later to all parts of the world. In a particular culture, inculturation cannot be said to have reached its final goal for cultures continue to evolve, and so should inculturation, hence it being a continuous journey in that sense also.

And finally, our third chosen definition comes from Fr. Secondini, who gives us a long but detailed definition, in which all the above aspects from the two definitions above are incorporated. He defines Inculturation in the following words:

It is a process of dialogue and incarnation, of conversion and assumption and transformation, through which the Gospel and the faith as a Christian and ecclesial experience – without losing any of their essential specifics – become integrated in the specific culture of a people, in such a way as to be re-expressed in elements proper to that culture, causing them to become instruments of grace and of gospel truth, a power that animates, directs and renews the culture from within, until it creates a new identity, in unity and communion, not only with the culture in question but also – as an enrichment – with the universal church.<sup>135</sup>

This is a rich definition and very detailed. Keywords from the above definition are; dialogue, transformation, conversion and assimilation. They all underline the fact that both the culture which is Christianised and the Christianity which is inculturated undergo some changes. On

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<sup>133</sup> Vicente Carlos KIAZIKU, *Culture and Inculturation, a Bantu viewpoint* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2009) 106.

<sup>134</sup> Vicente Carlos KIAZIKU, *Culture and Inculturation, a Bantu viewpoint*, 81.

<sup>135</sup> Vicente Carlos KIAZIKU, *Culture and Inculturation, a Bantu viewpoint*, 81.

the part of the evangelised culture, this change could entail additions to its cultural set of values, beliefs and traditions or indeed even subtraction or pruning by way of discarding some of its negative traditions, values and beliefs which are not in conformity with the Gospel. This is a process that cannot be accomplished in a short period of time but is always ongoing. The gospel, on the other hand, remains unchanged but ways of re-expressing its content may change. The elements of that culture used in the re-expression of the content of faith become at the same time instruments of Grace and of the gospel.

The first process of Inculturation of Christianity, in general, took place in the early centuries of Christianity as Christianity, which was originally embodied in Jewish culture, came into contact with the Greek culture. It (Christianity) converted the Greek culture to the Gospel and so the Greek culture became Christianised and the Gospel, in turn, had to be re-expressed in a new language and expressional forms of "the critically purified Greek heritage,"<sup>136</sup> i.e. the Gospel or Christianity became, so to say, Hellenised. By 'critically purified Greek heritage' is meant that only those concepts which were critically purified by the Gospel itself were used in re-expressing the Gospel. That means there is a distinction now between the Greek culture that was there before the encounter with the Gospel and the Greek culture after the encounter, hence the term of Benedict XVI as the purified Greek heritage in reference to the latter.

The New Testament, the whole of it, was even originally written in the Greek language, and not in Aramaic, the language which Jesus spoke, as one would have expected. It was not translated into Greek but "written in Greek and bears the imprint of the Greek Spirit."<sup>137</sup> This gave the Greek culture a rare chance to put the vast treasure of its language heritage at the disposal of the New Testament authors. The Greek culture by this fact occupies, therefore, a unique place in the history of inculturating the Gospel and for this reason, it becomes a model to look up to in carrying out inculturation today. The Greek culture and Christianity (the Gospel) mutually enriched each other. This first Inculturation, as we may call it, of the Gospel and Christianity in the early centuries in the Greek culture, is commonly referred to as Hellenisation. However, Hellenisation as a term has its own semantics which could also mean Greek occupation or cultural domination among other meanings as discussed

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<sup>136</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections*, Lecture: University of Regensburg, 2006. Downloaded from: [vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060912\\_university-regensburg](http://vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg).

<sup>137</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections*,



at length by Marksches in his lecture presented in Amsterdam.<sup>138</sup> Here, however, we are going to limit our understanding of it only in the theological circles as "the inculturation of ancient Christianity into Greco-Roman culture."<sup>139</sup> Hellenisation as a term in the Theological debates however only became more pronounced in the fourth century during the Arian controversy especially with regard to the term 'homoousios.' It is in that sense that we are going to understand it in this chapter. Hellenisation having been the first inculturation of the gospel, other cultures, going in the direction of inculturation have a lot to learn from it, both its positives and its negatives.

A similar process of Inculturation took place centuries later but not once and for all, when Christianity encountered the African cultures from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to this period, there were two other phases of evangelisation in Africa. 1). The first phase involved the evangelisation of North Africa lasting up to the seventh century when the entire North Africa fell to Islam. The Arian controversy itself was born in North African during the first phase. 2). Then came the second phase, this time south of the Sahara along the sea coasts, among the countries, evangelised during this phase are Congo, Angola and Mozambique. This phase lasted from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century when eventually all missions completely disappeared.<sup>140</sup> 3). The evangelisation going on now in Africa belongs to the third phase which started in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and it is in this phase where we are looking at the encounter between the gospel and the cultures.

The inculturation of this third phase differs from the inculturation of the first century. This is because the New Testament is already written; nothing from the African cultural spirit can find its way into the bible, for the chapter is already closed. But the inculturation (Hellenisation) of the fourth century, carried out after the canon of scripture was already decided, becomes a model of all other inculturations. It belongs to inculturation to interpret the scriptures and the deposit of faith in a particular culture. This is precisely what the council of Nicea tried to do, to preserve the deposit of faith which was already defined and closed, while at the same time being courageous enough to express it in new and sharper terms understood in that age and environment, to clarify certain scriptural truths whose meaning was either not clear or remained hidden.

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<sup>138</sup> Christoph MARKSCHIES, *Does it make sense to speak about a 'Hellenisation of Christianity' in antiquity?* In: Church History and Religious Culture, Volume 92.1, 2012, 6.

<sup>139</sup> Christoph MARKSCHIES, *Does it make sense to speak about a 'Hellenisation of Christianity' in antiquity?* 26.

<sup>140</sup> POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 25-27.

The African culture, just like the Greek culture, can offer something of its heritage to enrich the expression of the Christian theology today. It is however noted that, at the beginning, dialogue proper did not take place between the Gospel and the African culture<sup>141</sup> as the case was when Christianity first encountered the Greek culture. Christian missionaries who came to this part of Africa did not enter into dialogue with the African culture. Many questions would arise as to why that was not the case. Vicente Carlos of Angola is of the view that it had to do with the mentality of the European missionaries of that period. He says: "Africans were considered to be people without a culture and without civilization, and so the westerners were, all in all, face to face with nothing."<sup>142</sup> In other words, there was a cultural vacuum in Africa. This created a problem for Christianity in Africa as observed by Uchenna Ezeh:

How could a genuine African Christianity develop in a cultural vacuum? The Christian faith could but vegetate as an imported, 'second hand' western Christianity. The result has been the so often deplored dichotomy of the African personality. Christianity was grafted on to the person as an alien faith, and exercised on the surface, while deeper convictions and reactions remained rooted in traditional religion.<sup>143</sup>

Since the Africans had no culture as it was believed, it appeared to be a non-starter to enter into a dialogue with 'a non existing culture'. This view is also re-echoed by Jon Sobrino when he says; "*Der Grund für diese paradoxe Tatsache liegt in der ... Kirchlichen Überzeugung, dass die griechische Kultur jeglicher anderen überlegen sei und ihr Universalisierungspotential weiter reiche als das jeder anderen Kultur.*"<sup>144</sup> So their one approach was to westernise Africans in order to enable them to become capable of understanding and accepting the gospel as further noted by Vicente: "Westernisation seemed to be a condition *sine qua non* for the acceptance of the Gospel."<sup>145</sup> This view then justified the deliberate non-dialogical approach which they employed when they brought the gospel to Africa. They felt their task was to plant Christianity on the continent. It was an approach of superimposing Christian beliefs without regard even to the positive beliefs which really were already in existence at that time. The Africans on the contrary already did believe for

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<sup>141</sup> The African culture referred to here is that found in African countries which lie below the Sahara desert or sub-Saharan Africa as it is commonly called.

<sup>142</sup> Vicente Carlos KIAZIKU, *Culture and Inculturation, a Bantu viewpoint* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2009) 24. Vicente Carlos is the current Bishop of Mbaza Congo diocese in Angola.

<sup>143</sup> Uchenna a. EZEH, *Jesus Christ the Ancestor*, 96.

<sup>144</sup> Jon SOBRINO, *Der Glaube an Jesus christus*, (Ostfildern: Matthias-Grünwald, 2008), 381. Literally Translated; „The ground for such a paradoxical fact lied in the conviction of the church that the Greek culture was superior to other cultures and its potential for universalisation was far much richer than that of other cultures." The translation is mine.

<sup>145</sup> Vicente Carlos KIAZIKU, *Culture and Inculturation, a Bantu viewpoint*, 24.

example in the world of spirits, in life after death, they had a cult of ancestors and believed in the existence of the creator God among other beliefs.

Christian Missionaries that came to Africa during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century decided to pay a blind eye to that reality. The teaching they brought was also unfortunately not re-expressed in African concepts which would have helped the African converts to understand the Christian concepts fully and probably enrich it further. The African culture and its beliefs were totally rejected, condemned and classified as pagan. What Jon Sobrino echoed when he spoke generally about inculturation in third world countries also perfectly applies here: "*Es wurden Kulturen missachtet und unterdrückt, indem kulturelle und religiöse Rechte verletzt wurden*"<sup>146</sup>. This lack of interest on the part of some missionaries to know religious beliefs of the indigenous people, and the suppression of the African culture, did not just have the potential of killing local cultures or in the words of Vicente Carlos, *de-culturation of the continent of Africa*,<sup>147</sup> but also made the ground not well prepared enough for the seed of the gospel to be fully nurtured. Probably that could be one of the reasons why all the Christian missions disappeared in sub-Sahara Africa at the end of the eighteenth century after having been in existence there from the fifteenth century as noted by John Paul II in *ecclesia in Africa*.<sup>148</sup> To convert to Christianity for example, one was required to leave and throw away everything African for it was all labelled as pagan and adopt everything mostly clothed in European culture that Christianity brought with it. But it is not easy to give up something that defines and guides you without having proper reasons for that. Without having gone through a gradual process and dialogue to understand what was wrong with what they believed and why it was wrong, made the Africans deep down in their hearts to resist change to some extent.

On account of that missionary approach, of not having taken the trouble of exploring and understanding existing African beliefs, one thing was obvious; most African converts resorted to leading a double standard of life. To please the Christian missionaries, most Africans adopted a double standard of life, where on Sundays they would be Christians and go to church, but throughout the week in their homes, they would still go back to their traditional belief practices. This is as noted by Bishop Mugadzi of Zimbabwe in the

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<sup>146</sup> Jon SOBRINO, *Der Glaube an Jesus christus*, 382. Literally translates as: "cultures were disregarded and suppressed in that cultural and religious rights were violated."

<sup>147</sup> Cf. Vicente Carlos KIAZIKU, *Culture and Inculturation, a Bantu viewpoint*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2009). This quote is taken from his CV at the back cover of his book.

<sup>148</sup> Cf. Pope JOHN PAUL II, *The Church in Africa*, 26.

statement; “*After the first evangelisation, many Christians find themselves leading double lives: one foot in the African tradition and another in the church.*”<sup>149</sup> An African could not therefore at that time be authentic African and authentic Christian. That could only be realised if an African was not ashamed of living out his or her culture, bring it in the open and through the light of the Gospel refine it. That way, the talk about double standards would not have arisen.

It was only after the second Vatican council, that particular attention was paid to Inculturation of Christianity in African culture, after seeing how Christianity almost disappeared completely from North Africa, which became Islamised, but the inculturated church in Ethiopia, for example, maintained its Christian roots and identity and survived the Islamic wave. Church historian John Baur says; “the new Christian converts in the west and south looked upon Ethiopia as the ideal country that had produced an authentically African Christianity.”<sup>150</sup> The authenticity of African Christianity in Ethiopia or Ethiopianism as it was sometimes referred to, lay in the fact that it was inculturated. The question one can ask is why did Christianity survive in Ethiopia, where to this day it remains the biggest religion in the country, while it did almost not survive in North Africa? Among the reasons advanced by Church Historian John Baur, is that in North Africa “the Church failed to translate the bible and the liturgy into the language of the local Berbers.”<sup>151</sup> In other words, Christianity was not inculturated into the Berber culture. The other main reason he advanced was “the inner division of the north African church into the Catholic Church and Donatists.”<sup>152</sup> The first reason advanced by Baur is of great interest to us here for it is related to inculturation. A question now arises; is Inculturation an answer to the solid establishment of the solid future of Christianity in Africa? This was one of the many prominent questions which the African Bishops were trying to answer and they discussed it at length at the African synod held in Rome in 1994.

We want therefore in this chapter to focus our attention on Inculturation, first as it was done in the classical period, i.e. Hellenisation, its positives and negatives and how that can be related to today's ongoing Inculturation of Christology in the African culture. Then we shall

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<sup>149</sup> Nicholas FOGLIACO, *The Family: an African metaphor for Trinity*, in: *Inculturating the Church in Africa*, theological and practical perspectives, edited by C.M. Garry and P. Ryan, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001), 120.

<sup>150</sup> John BAUR, *2000 years of Christianity in Africa*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), 153

<sup>151</sup> John BAUR, *2000 years of Christianity in Africa*, 515.

<sup>152</sup> John BAUR, *2000 years of Christianity in Africa*, 515.

look at a number of African Theologians and the African Christological paradigms that have been proposed as a way of Inculturating Christology in Africa from the 1960s up to date. We shall restrict our Inculturation to Christology, for Inculturation as a theme is a very broad subject.

We now take a look at the Inculturation of Christology as it was done in the fourth century – Hellenisation as a model of Inculturation. How was it done? What can be learnt from it and what can be avoided?

### 3.2. Hellenisation of Christology

In the previous chapter, after the definition of the *fides Nicea*, there were voices that emerged especially from the radical Arian party, “the anhomoi,”<sup>153</sup> a group that rejected the phraseology of the creed of Nicea, on the basis, that it contained words or expressions which are not biblical but Hellenistic. The creed of Nicea was therefore on that basis labelled as having been hellenised. The ‘Hellenistic word’ at the centre of it all was the Greek word ‘ὁμοούσιος.’ The contention was that such an unbiblical term as it was branded by the Arian party at the council of Nicea, had the potential of falsifying the gospel as proclaimed by Jesus and his Apostles. So it was an objection based on a very good intention of safeguarding the Gospel from being corrupted. Protecting the Gospel from falsification was indeed a noble cause and a duty of every Christian. But one may ask however whether the gospel was really falsified by the word ‘Homooousios. Who really, in reality, was on the falsifying side? Was the council of Nicea really on that path or were it the Arians themselves? Before responding to the above questions, let us try to dig a bit more about the usage of the word homooousios itself.

If tracing is done of the very first time that this word homooousios was used in this debate, it leads us to the person of Arius himself. Aloys Grillmeier says “we find this word for the first time in Arius’ Thaleia and in a letter to Alexander.”<sup>154</sup> The Thaleia of Arius, is a script which pre-dates the council of Nicea, and an extract from that fragment reads: “*He (the son) has no characteristic (ιδιον) of God in his individual subsistence (καθ’ ὑπόστασιν ιδιότητος) for he is not like him (Ισος) nor indeed is he ὁμοούσιος*”<sup>155</sup>. So Arius was the first to use the Greek term Homooousios to qualify his teaching and disqualify Jesus from one status to

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<sup>153</sup> Uchenna A EZEH, *Jesus Christ the Ancestor*, 196.

<sup>154</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition, volume one*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975) 269

<sup>155</sup> Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition, volume one*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975) 269.

another. Did he hellenise the Christian faith by applying that term? Was it really the council of Nicea or was it Arius himself? Was Hellenisation only to do with the one term ὁμοούσιος?

It has firstly to be stressed here that Arius was the one who did provoke the Council to use the word *Homooousios* in response to his statement above, hence using the same word to correct his teaching. Had Arius not used the word in the first place, they probably would not have used it. Secondly, there is more to Hellenisation than just the one word *homooousios*. Hellenisation should surely be broader than just this one word. It has to do more with the background concepts carried on by a given teaching than by a single word of *homooousios*. This is the view shared by many Catholic scholars and among them is Jan-Heiner Tück who says: “Arius was responsible for the Hellenisation of Christianity... through his unconditional acceptance of the cosmological scheme of Middle Platonism.”<sup>156</sup> It is Arius therefore who hellenised the faith by lifting the middle platonic concept and superimposing it in Christianity and interpreting certain passages of the bible to fit into that plan. He tried to make the Christian teaching conform to the Middle Platonic cosmological scheme instead of the other way round where middle Platonism was supposed to conform to Christianity.

Arianism did thereby threaten to introduce changes to the deposit of faith and to hellenise the faith (i.e. to make it middle Platonic). The word ‘*homooousios*’ did on the other hand not threaten to introduce changes to the deposits of faith but was simply a re-expression of a statement of Jesus that “the father and I are one”. (John 10:30). So what Arius did is what is broadly taken by Catholic scholars like Aloys Grillmeier and Jan-Heiner Tück as a hellenisation of the faith. The council's decision, therefore, tried to reverse the Hellenisation or in other words to de-hellenise the faith. But, if the usage of the word *homooousios* makes the creed of Nicea also qualify to be classified as a ‘*hellenisation of the faith*,’ as several objecting voices (among them, Adolf von Harnack) have always claimed and insisted, then the latter can be said to have been positive Hellenisation and what Arius did as negative Hellenisation.

In an effort to de-hellenise the negative Hellenisation of faith as carried out by Arius and to positively hellenise it, the council fathers saw it necessary to say new things,(i.e. that the son is *homooousios* with the father) even while still professing to make no new changes to the deposit of faith.

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<sup>156</sup> Jan-Heiner TÜCK, *The Father without the Son would not be father*, in: *Communio*, spring 2015, 20.

### 3.2.1. Lessons to learn from Hellenisation at Nicea

The council fathers did in this case by adopting the term *homoousios* set precedence, that it is possible and correct *to say new things without making new changes to the deposit of faith*. This shall become our maxim for Inculturation in the rest of this chapter. On the other hand, it may be asked, what should not be done when carrying out Inculturation? The council of Nicea rejected the method of taking a cultural concept (in this case middle Platonism) and implanting it into Christian theology. A culture should change and convert to the Gospel, but the Gospel, on the other hand, should never change but how to express it (this is on the explanation part), can change. Such a view is also shared by Johannes Mugabe when he said, “Human cultural traditions must be converted to Christ. They are not absolute but God in Christ is.”<sup>157</sup> Arius, on the contrary, chose somehow the Middle Platonism cosmological scheme as his measure. But the right approach should be to use the gospel as the measure. Therefore, regardless of the content, the other approach is to start from the deposit of faith and then with the lenses of the gospel, look at the concepts of a particular culture.

Coming back to the Hellenisation of the faith, Hellenisation as a term in itself is and was not bad. But as observed by Jon Sobrino, Hellenisation can be positive or negative.<sup>158</sup> It is negative if it loses connection with the scriptures or departs from them. In this case, Arius can be said to have done a negative type of Hellenisation of the dogma regarding Christ's status and the council of Nicea did a positive Hellenisation. The council of Nicea, therefore, has been hailed “as a step in the necessary de-hellenisation of the faith”<sup>159</sup> direction.

Connected with the theme of Hellenisation however, there have appeared voices in the modern era that are opposed to the inculturation as it was done in the classical period. They are proposing instead, that in order to really safeguard the teaching of Jesus from falsification; we need to completely de-hellenise the Gospel of Christ. We have to free it from the Greek clothing in which it has been clad. Let us now look closely at this wave of dehellenisation and its rationale.

### 3.3. DE-HELLENISATION OF THEOLOGY

What does this theme of de-hellenisation of theology mean? The theme itself gives a hint that it has to do with the critical evaluation of theology itself. De-hellenisation is a term which

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<sup>157</sup> Henry Johannes MUGABE, *Christology in an African context*, in: Review and Expositor, 88 (1991), 352.

<sup>158</sup> Cf. Jon SOBRINO, *Der Glaube an Jesus Christus: eine Christologie aus der Perspektive der Opfer*, (Ostfildern: Matthias-Grünewald, 2008), 380.

<sup>159</sup> Jan Heiner TÜCK, *The Father without the son would not be father*, 19.

describes a call by some liberal theologians and scholars advocating for a return to the pre-Hellenistic era Gospel. The kind of de-hellenisation implied here should not be confused with that which was carried out by the council of Nicea in rejecting the Middle Platonic teaching that was propagated by Arianism. The proponents of this new wave of de-hellenisation which became more pronounced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, do implicitly consider the Creed of Nicea on account of the word ‘*homoousios*’ to have been hellenised. These proponents neither supported nor condemned Arius explicitly. They also did not directly argue for or against the fides Nicea. They, however, bundled both Arianism and the council of Nicea together and labelled them both as Hellenisation. They were mostly occupied with the Greek spirit and atmosphere in which the definitions of the Dogmas in the fourth century were generally discussed.

Historically, the council fathers and the anti-Nicene party all argued using the Greek concepts as we saw in the second chapter, and so whatever contents both camps came up with, according to dehellenisation campaigners, was already contaminated by the Greek spirit and was, therefore, falsified. Adolf von Harnack did for example during his winter semester lectures say; “*Auch kann niemand leugnen, daß diese verbindung, eingestellt in die griechische Religionsphilosophie und ihren Intellektualismus, zu Formeln geführt hat, die unrichtig sind, einen erdachten Christus an stele des wirklichen setzen...*”<sup>160</sup> So it is claimed that the image of Christ contained in the dogmatic formulations is an idealized or an imagined one, which has departed from the real historical Jesus.

These modern era proponents of de-hellenisation are therefore of a view, that those that have to do Inculturation today (since inculturation is considered indispensable to evangelisation), have a right to start their own inculturation afresh, based on the Biblical resources alone and on the historical Jesus. They should not have an already inculturated Christian theology, that was ‘corrupted by Greek philosophy,’ as their starting point, but the simple gospel that was proclaimed two thousand years ago by Jesus. They are therefore not only advocating for dehellenisation but also pushing at the same time for the inculturation of the faith today in different cultures. It is for this reason that we allocate them some space in this chapter. The main proponent of de-hellenisation campaign has been Adolf von Harnack. We cannot let the

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<sup>160</sup> Adolf von HARNACK, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd mohn, 1977),140.

Literally translates as: “Also no one can deny, that this connection established in the Greek Religious Philosophy with its intellectualism, led to the formulation of forms which are not correct, an imagined Christ put in the place of the real one.”(My translation).



dehellenisation wave go without a response. Several voices have in writing responded to the Claims of Harnack. One of the responses to the teaching of Harnack on de-hellenisation comes from Pope Benedict XVI.

### **3.3.1. Response of Benedict XVI against De-hellenisation**

We now let Benedict the sixteenth respond to his fellow countryman, Adolf von Harnack. Pope Benedict the sixteenth took on Adolf Harnack in his controversial speech delivered at Regensburg University entitled; faith, Reason and the University memories where he strongly disagreed with the above Theses of dehellenisation. According to Christoph Marksches, “it is the Berlin Church historian Harnack who is the real opponent of the Regensburg lecture given by Pope Benedict XVI.”<sup>161</sup> In this speech, the Pope tries first of all to show the emergence and progression of the new dehellenisation wave campaign and then at the end gives his carefully prepared response. He demarcates it (Dehellenisation wave) into three distinct stages.

a) The first wave of dehellenisation can be traced back to the reformation period in the sixteenth century where "Reformers thought they were confronted with a faith system totally conditioned by philosophy, that is to say, an articulation of the faith based on an alien thought system."<sup>162</sup> Their mention of Philosophy here makes it singled out as that element that made Christian Theology alien, in other words, Philosophy was a contaminant of Christianity which ought not to have anything to do with Christianity. On the grounds of mistrust, therefore, the reformers regarded the whole developed classical theology as a teaching that has been falsified and never anymore represented the teaching of the historical Jesus. This left them with only one option, to break away totally from such a theology and develop a new one for themselves based only on scripture. It is from such a background that they came up with the famous phrase of '*sola scriptura*' as their motto. “The principle of sola scriptura...sought faith in its pure, primordial form, as originally found in the biblical word.”<sup>163</sup> Their demands were, therefore, calling ultimately for the end of the marriage that had existed between theology and philosophy. They were accusing the latter of having corrupted the simple message of the gospel and therefore made Christianity complicated, more technical and above all, falsified. On this ground, they rejected all the developed classical theology.

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<sup>161</sup> Christoph MARKSCHIES, *Does it make sense to speak about a Hellenisation of Christianity in Antiquity?* In: Church History and Religious Culture, Volume 92.1, 2012, 25.

<sup>162</sup> BEDECTICT XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections*, Lecture: University of Regensburg, 5.

<sup>163</sup> BEDECTICT XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections*, Lecture: University of Regensburg, 5.

b) The second stage of dehellenisation is that one which came on the stage in the nineteenth and twentieth Centuries with Adolf von Harnack as its outstanding representative.<sup>164</sup> The central theme of this phase was “to return... to the man Jesus and to his simple message.”<sup>165</sup> The dogmatic formulations of the church according to Harnack only make the relationship to God for an individual complicated. His was a goal of liberating Christianity “from seemingly philosophical and Theological elements such as faith in Christ’s divinity and the triune God.”<sup>166</sup> He shares the same views with the Reformers who held on to sola scriptura. His view is that Jesus preached about God the father and about his kingdom and never about himself. So focusing on dogmatic formulations that focus on the centrality of Jesus, when Jesus did not focus on himself, is a diversion from the message of Jesus and that made Harnack uncomfortable. Ernst Troeltsch summarises the position of Harnack in a sentence:

An Stelle der Dogmatik tritt, unendlich einfacher, wirksamer und überzeugender, die historische Darstellung des Evangeliums und seiner Fortwirkungen als des Wesens des Christentums, und Harnacks Schrift ist gewissermaßen das symbolische Buch für die historisierende Richtung der Theologie.<sup>167</sup>

So according to Troeltsch, Harnack replaced the dogmas with an infinitely simple, effective and convincing historical presentation of the Gospels. Theology as a historical discipline is the direction in which his book is leading to. Harnack seems to accuse the classical theology (especially Christological dogmas) of having focused more on the messenger than on the message he preached, which was about the Kingdom of God and on God himself but not about Jesus. How different will Jesus be then, from the prophets who were mere messengers of God? This concept, therefore, shows that Harnack, was not only uncomfortable with philosophy and some theological elements but ultimately wanted both philosophy and Theology centred on Christ (Christological Dogmas) which he considered as a diversion from the core message, out of Christianity. What will Christianity remain with then? Only the Bible and its discipline of "historical-critical exegesis of the New Testament"<sup>168</sup> would be his answer and only this should be taught in the universities. The Old Testament with its cultic and institutional precepts does not receive a favourable place in his thesis too.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. BEDECTICT XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections*, Lecture: University of Regensburg, 5.

<sup>165</sup> BEDECTICT XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections*, Lecture: University of Regensburg, 5.

<sup>166</sup> BEDECTICT XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections*, Lecture: University of Regensburg, 6.

<sup>167</sup> Ernst TROELTSCH, *Zur religiösen Lage, Religionsphilosophie und Ethik, Zweiter Band*, (Aalen: Scientia Verlag 1962), 387.

<sup>168</sup> BEDECTICT XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections*, Lecture: University of Regensburg, 6.

12<sup>th</sup> September 2006, 6. Downloaded from: [Vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/document/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060912\\_university-regensburg](http://Vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/document/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg), on 12/10/2016.

c) Coming to the third stage, this is the dehellenisation which is currently in progress. This is the dehellenisation that is connected to the inculturation of the faith in different cultures today. In the name of inculturation, they (dehellenisation proponents) want to have nothing to do with the classical and scholastic theology as well for it is already inculturated. The main thesis as was captured by Benedict XVI in his speech at Regensburg states:

It is often said nowadays that the synthesis with Hellenism achieved in the early Church was an initial inculturation which ought not to be binding on other cultures. The latter ... have the right to return to the simple message of the New Testament prior to that inculturation, in order to inculturate it anew in their own particular milieux.<sup>169</sup>

They refer to the first encounter between the Gospel and the Greek culture as an initial inculturation. Pope Benedict XVI does not refute that statement, giving an impression that he is agreeable. They, however, want a break from it and start their own inculturation from square one with only the scriptures as their basis. Not an already inculturated theology (probably even corrupted theology as they suspected it) should be the starting point for inculturation for other cultures but the bible alone suffices. This shows that they too are believers in the principle of *sola scriptura*. But is it possible to have the simple message of the New Testament that is not inculturated? The New Testament carries within it the Greek spirit having been written in Greek. The challenge with this demand lies in the undressing of the gospel from the Greek culture. Is it a realistic demand? If it is, who can be qualified for that task? Should we take it that it can be done, will the newly re-written gospel still remain a Christian Gospel or it will rather be something else? In wanting to redeem the gospel from falsification (if it is falsified), won't they end up with an even more falsified Gospel? We may ask countless questions for his position raises many questions than answers.

Benedict XVI responds to his fellow countryman Adolf von Harnack and criticizes him together with all the other proponents of dehellenisation for advocating for a discontinuation from the transmitted deposit of faith.

### **3.3.1.1. Position of Benedict XVI regarding dehellenisation**

Benedict XVI in his response to the above theses begins by pointing to the very beginning of the compilation of the New Testament. He agrees with Harnack that the Greek culture had some influence on Christian Theology. He tries, however, to go even further beyond the

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<sup>169</sup> BEDECTICT XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections*, Lecture: University of Regensburg, 7.

fourth century where Christological formulations were made, to the writing of the Bible itself. He reminds us that the Greek culture and Christian theology have had a long journey together. They have journeyed together for such a long time such that there is already an existing synthesis between the Faith and Greek reason, and it is almost next to impossible to split them apart now. He says; “*The New Testament was written in Greek and bears the imprint of the Greek spirit which had already come to maturity as the Old Testament developed.*”<sup>170</sup> He tries here to show us that the relationship between the Greek culture and the bible existed even before the development of classical Christology. Classical Christology was preceded by the writing of the New Testament which was already some kind of inculturation into the Greek culture. For that reason, it is almost impossible to undress or strip away from the New Testament the Greek spirit. They are so intertwined that it would no longer be the New Testament if anything thought to be ‘*hellenistic*’ in it is removed. This is also the view shared by Adolf Schlatter, a conservative professor who taught at the same time with Harnack, and who, shortly after leaving the University of Berlin opposed Harnack in the following words:

Alles im Neuen Testament hat den Hellenismus mit zur Voraussetzung. Ich leugne rundweg, daß es eine einzige Silbe im Neuen Testament gebe, für die die drei Jahrhunderte während deren Jerusalem Provinzialstadt eines griechischen Staates war, bedeutungslos geblieben, roughly translated into english as -Hellenism is the precondition for everything in the New Testament. I flatly deny that there is a single syllable in the New Testament that remained untouched by the three centuries during which Jerusalem was the provincial city of a Greek state.<sup>171</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI indicates further, that the Greek culture and spirit which left its imprint on the New Testament, is that one which was purified and had come to maturity. He also acknowledges by that, that cultures, in general, do have certain elements in them which are not pure and which are in need of purification and not everything in the Greek culture is pure. But those elements which came in contact with the Christian message and thereby found their way into Christianity are those that were purified. In other words, only the best of the Greek culture that which got purified already during the time that it came into contact first with the Old Testament during the translation of the Septuagint (LXX) from Hebrew to Greek, is the one which got synthesized with Christianity. Implicitly Benedict affirms that inculturation of the Gospel into the Greek culture took place. Hellenisation can be said therefore to be part of the nature of Christianity as also held by Martin Hengel and Adolf Schlatter who said; “there

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<sup>170</sup> BEDECTICT XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections*, 2006.

<sup>171</sup> Christoph MARKSCHIES, “Does it make sense to speak about a Hellenisation of Christianity in Antiquity? 17.

is no nature of Christianity that is free of Hellenisation.”<sup>172</sup> In this case, one should not mistrust the marriage union between classical theology and the purified philosophy.

In view of the call for *sola scriptura*, the view of Benedict will be that it is almost inconceivable to think of the end of marriage between philosophy and theology. In as much as one has to have faith in God, important as faith is, it is also important to apply rationality to faith, for faith must also be understandable. Thus the Pope comes to the defence of theology in general and also of its place in the university when he says; "*Theology rightly belongs in the university and within the wide-ranging dialogue of sciences, not merely as a historical discipline and one of the human sciences, but precisely as theology, as inquiry into the rationality of faith.*"<sup>173</sup> Doing away with theology which has as its duty to deepen the understanding of some aspects of scripture which otherwise remain unclear, is not a solution.

Theology is not a creation of the church, detached from the historical Jesus but is actually based on Jesus and on his message. Philosophy (reason) on the other hand is that tool which is at the service of Theology. Thus, faith and reason are inseparable. Human beings as rational creatures do not need to suspend their God-given reason in order to embrace faith. Suspension of reasoning in the name of faith degrades faith itself and leads to fundamentalism. Religion without reason not only leads to blind faith but also reduces religion to something that is for the illiterate. This would then come nearer to the description of those voices that are totally opposed to religion like Karl Max who said that "religion is an opium of the people". Blind faith can for that matter become a recipe for violence in the world and has the potential of relegating faith to the level of a subculture. On the contrary, however, this Christianity which is a synthesis of faith and reason has been behind the shaping of European civilization; it "created Europe and remains the foundation of what can rightly be called Europe."<sup>174</sup> God has always acted with reason and there exists an analogy between the God and our created reason.<sup>175</sup> Benedict XVI thus strongly defended the place of reason (philosophy) in doing theology when he further said:

For this reason, the world's profoundly religious cultures see this exclusion of the divine from the universality of reason as an attack on their most profound convictions. A reason which is deaf to the divine and

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<sup>172</sup> Christoph MARKSCHIES, "*Does it make sense to speak about a Hellenisation of Christianity in Antiquity?*" 18.

<sup>173</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections*, 7.

<sup>174</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections*, 5.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections*, 4.

which relegates religion into the realm of the subcultures is incapable of entering into the dialogue of cultures.<sup>176</sup>

The entire Regensburg speech is centred on the subject of faith and reason and Benedict XVI tried to drive home a point that *acting unreasonably i.e. not to act with logos even in matters of faith contradicts God's nature*. Benedict uses this statement “*not to act in accordance with reason is contrary to God's nature*,” four times. He further underlines that God is Logos (reason). And that word ‘*reason*’ appears forty times in his nine paged speech. This all goes to show that reason and theology belong to each other. Theology and reason though different from each other are united in the truth, both play an important role at the service of truth and all find their source in the truth.<sup>177</sup> Philosophy (Reason) should for that reason therefore not be divorced from theology, for as Anselm of Canterbury in his proslogium once said, that theology is “*faith seeking understanding*.”<sup>178</sup> That understanding belongs to reason.

### **3.3.1.2. Recommendations of Benedict XVI for inculturation**

The campaigners for dehellenisation are advocating for inculturation but are also at the same time condemning ‘*reason*’ as not having a place in the realm of faith. This is contradictory according to Benedict XVI. For that might either lead to suppression of cultures by accepting unquestionably or literally all that is written in the gospels or to syncretism by inculturating the gospel in a culture without the critical voice of reason, where cultural elements are taken on without critically analysing them. The point of Benedict XVI in the Regensburg Lecture is that inculturation has to be sensible. The inculturation which took place in the fourth century was reasonable and so should be any other inculturation if it is to be authentic. Thus, in correcting the proponents of dehellenisation, Pope Benedict also offers direction as to how authentic inculturation has to be done even today. Reason must be carried along and must be allowed to play its critical role. It is obvious that he considers inculturation as a necessity but that it must be cautiously undertaken.

Having seen the mind of Benedict on inculturation, we now turn to the views of Pope Francis on the same before we look at the actual inculturation in the African context.

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<sup>176</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections*, 7-8.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. Kardnal Ratzinger präsentiert die neue Enzyklika, in: *Fides et Ratio*, (Stein am Rhein: Christiana – Verlag, 1998), 108.

<sup>178</sup> ST ANSELM, *Proslogium, Monologium, an appendix in behalf of the fool*, translator: Sydney Norton Diane, (Massachusetts: Bibliotheca Sacra, 1854), 7.

### 3.4. Pope Francis on Inculturation

Pope Francis is a firm believer that inculturation belongs to the evangelisation of the Gospel, and with that, also to Christology. He looks at inculturation more from a pastoral point of view while his predecessor looked at it more from a theological and academic point of view. The two approaches complement each other. Pope Francis gave the inculturation drive more impetus in his first Apostolic Exaltation, *Evangelii Gaudium* where he says:

*“Today’s vast and rapid cultural changes demand that we constantly seek ways of expressing unchanging truths in a language which brings out their abiding newness. “The deposit of the faith is one thing... the way it is expressed is another”.*<sup>179</sup> Two aspects can be drawn from the above quotation. The first aspect is that the deposit of faith which he also calls ‘the unchanging truth’ should continue being passed on from generation to generation and in different cultures as part of the Christian mandate to go out to the whole world and preach the gospel. Secondly, different cultures are encouraged to express the deposit of faith in concepts that are particular to their context for it to be easily understood. This is a renewed call for inculturation coming from a Latin American Pope who echoes especially the aspirations of the third world countries in general, which had received the gospel from mainly European missionaries. He reiterates what was stated by the second Vatican council when it opened doors to inculturation and called upon the church to engage in respectful dialogue with men of all nations, race or culture both within and outside the church.<sup>180</sup>

The African cultures can now search in their reservoirs for those elements that are in agreement with the revealed divine truth. In carrying out this inculturation, emphasises the pope, the fundamentals of Christianity should always remain unchanged but explanations of the same can and should be dynamic, i.e. they should not be Spanish or German but African in Africa or Asian in Asia. Concepts or a language that is understandable to a particular group of people should, therefore, be employed to successfully pass on the deposit of faith. The Pope laments that if this is not done, then the gospel risks being perceived as foreign by the people. He describes the current situation as regards to transmission of the deposit of faith. The pope points out some of the weakness as contained in the current approach of evangelisation in the church today and he calls on us to be courageous towards inculturation. This is emphasized by Pope Francis further in the following quote:

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<sup>179</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium, on the proclamation of the Gospel in today’s world*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), # 41.

<sup>180</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, #92.

We hold fast to a formulation while failing to convey its substance. This is the greatest danger. Let us never forget that “the expression of truth can take different forms. The renewal of these forms of expression becomes necessary for the sake of transmitting to the people of today the Gospel message in its unchanging meaning.”<sup>181</sup>

The pope here mentions the danger that lays in not inculturating the gospel from a pastoral point of view. It makes the gospel difficult to be passed on and therefore making it difficult on the part of the receivers to accept it fully. The language contained in dogmatic formulations, for example, may not be understandable to everyone, hence the need to re-express it in simple or renewed forms but which are appropriate concepts of a particular culture. This is especially a challenge thrown at Theologians and missionaries working in Africa, to search and find those fitting positive concepts from their communities, which will help in the explanation of theological concepts, for them to be easily understood in Africa and thereby enrich further the Christian heritage. In as much as the pope is very much for the idea of the inculturation of the gospel, he also challenges cultures for a need to constantly grow and constantly get purified when he says:

It is imperative to evangelise cultures in order to inculturate the Gospel. In countries of Catholic tradition, this means encouraging, fostering and reinforcing a richness which already exists. In countries of other religious traditions or profoundly secularised countries, it will mean sparking new processes for evangelising culture, even though these will demand long-term planning. We must keep in mind, however, that we are constantly being called to grow. Each culture and social group needs purification and growth.<sup>182</sup>

By growth here is entailed that cultures need to be open enough to the gospel and so need to continually and critically analyse their values in the light of the Gospel. For as Jon Sobrino said, “*in allen Kulturen gibt es die Neigung zur Sündhaftigkeit*”<sup>183</sup> – there exists in all cultures the inclination towards sinfulness or iniquity. Certain things in almost if not in all cultures need to be discarded from the cultures in order for them to be in conformity with the deposits of faith.

### **3.5. Inculturation of the Gospel in an African Context**

Having laid down the foundation for inculturation from the fourth century to date in the church in general, we now turn to the actual task of inculturation in an African context. To

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<sup>181</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, # 41.

<sup>182</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, # 69.

<sup>183</sup> Jon SOBRINO, *Der Glaube an Jesus christus*, Grünewald, 2008, 383.



begin with, we quote again Jon Sobrino. Jon Sobrino calls it a matter of Justice to inculturate the Gospel in others cultures. This is contained in the following quote:

Es wäre absurd und ein wirklicher Widersinn, heute griechische Lehren und byzantinische Liturgien, die Inkulturationen einer ursprünglich jüdischen Tradition sind, zu loben (oder aufzuzwingen) und gleichzeitig Inkulturationen in andere Kulturen – vor allen Dingen der Armen – zu ignorieren (oder gar zu verbieten).<sup>184</sup>

Since inculturation has been given a green light as a matter of justice but also as a matter of necessity, and the doors for inculturation having been opened for all cultures, it is now a challenge thrown at Theologians in African to get to work and inculturate the gospel as part of the process of evangelisation in Africa. “The hour has come,”<sup>185</sup> as Cardinal Arinze proclaimed at the opening of the African synod. It is now time to practically do inculturation, a moment of trying to explore how to effectively make the ordinary African man and woman understand the deposit of faith so as to become authentically Christian and authentically African. What positive values (which were at first ignored by missionaries) among the many values, can Africa offer to the continent and the entire church and which can be considered for inculturation here? Are there specific areas of concentration for inculturation?

Going back to the period before the pontificate of Francis and Benedict XVI to that of John Paul II, we find some hints to answering the above question. Pope John Paul II in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation – *Ecclesia in Africa*, provides us with some of the positive values that are found in African cultures which probably could be considered here for inculturation, as follows:

Africans have a profound religious sense, a sense of the sacred, of the existence of God the Creator and of a spiritual world. The reality of sin in its individual and social forms is very much present in the consciousness of these peoples, as is also the need for rites of purification and expiation.<sup>186</sup>

This acknowledgment and appreciation of the positive African values by the Pope unlocks the door to dialogue, a longing that has been there for centuries. The view of “*a profound religious sense*” of Africans as highlighted above can be confirmed further by a famous African Theologian John Mbiti who said, “*Africans are notoriously religious, and each*

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<sup>184</sup> Jon SOBRINO, *Der Glaube an Jesus christus*, Grünewald, 2008, 382.

<sup>185</sup> John BAUR, *2000 years of Christianity in Africa: An African Church History, Second Revised Edition*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), 510.

<sup>186</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Post –Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Ecclesia in Africa*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995), # 42.

*people has its own religious systems with a set of beliefs and practices. Religion permeates all departments of life that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it.*<sup>187</sup> It is this profoundly religious sense, among other positive values acknowledged above, that made the Africans from the very beginning to be receptive to the Gospel for it appealed to that which was already in their religious nature. This receptivity of an African can be converted to become instruments of grace and of gospel truth for the church in African.

Having acknowledged the existence of these spiritual African riches, the Pope then goes a step further to offer what can be termed as a criterion for inculturation by which these positive African values have to be assimilated into Christianity and thereby enrich Christianity on the African continent and cultures themselves, in turn, get enriched and purified. He says inculturation should be in, “*compatibility with the Christian message and communion with the universal Church ... In all cases, care must be taken to avoid syncretism*”.<sup>188</sup> Not everything African is allowed in the name of inculturation just like not everything is disallowed, but allowed are (should be) only those carefully selected and critically analysed positive values that conform to the gospel. What does not conform to the criteria should prudently be given up as a way of self-pruning. The Pope then goes on in offering guidance for the process by proposing what may be termed as the terms of reference and at the same time threw a challenge at the Episcopal conferences in Africa and universities to study the issue of inculturation when he says:

Episcopal Conferences, in cooperation with Universities and Catholic Institutes ... set up study commissions, especially for matters concerning marriage, the veneration of ancestors, and the spirit world, in order to examine in depth all the cultural aspects of problems from the theological, sacramental, liturgical and canonical points of view.<sup>189</sup>

A deliberate step through study has to be undertaken by the teaching office of the church in Africa to inculturate the faith. A lot has been done already in the area of inculturation of liturgy and sacramental theology, which has seen among other successes, the use of traditional musical instruments in liturgy and composition of local liturgical hymns. We shall, however, limit our attention here more to the veneration of ancestors and the spirit world for the question of Christology which is our focus here would fall precisely into that category. We now take a look at the theme of veneration of ancestors.

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<sup>187</sup> John S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (London, Heinemann, 1969), 1.

<sup>188</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Post –Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Ecclesia in Africa*, # 62.

<sup>189</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Post –Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Ecclesia in Africa*, # 64.

### 3.5.1. *The cult of Ancestors*

To understand the ancestors in an African community, we will need first of all to situate them in their rightful place within the African cosmology. Just like there exists the middle platonic cosmology or the Hebrew cosmology, there exists also in Africa an African cosmology.

#### 3.5.1.1. *African cosmology*

The African cosmology is the view of the world from an African perspective. How does an African, from an African Religious point of view look at his world? According to Uchenna Ezeh, the Bantu African cosmology is a pyramidal hierarchy comprising of the following four categories: “Supreme Being, Nature gods, Ancestors and Magical Powers.”<sup>190</sup> *Magical powers* as a term sounds as if it has something to do with magic or esoteric, it is not obviously understandable. What does it stand for? Geoffrey Parrinder, a professor of comparative Religion comes to our aid by providing us with the answer that, what is meant by the term *Magical powers* is the earth.<sup>191</sup> There has also been a debate and discomfort over the terminology of ‘*Nature gods*’ for such a term evokes the concept of polytheism as in Graeco Polytheism. For this reason, “Ikenga Metuh prefers the term deities for Nature gods.”<sup>192</sup> This above cosmology can ultimately be further classified into two, i.e. the spiritual world where we have the Supreme Being, nature gods and ancestors and the physical world on the other side which is the earth. However, Africa being comprised of hundreds of ethnic groups and cultures, minor differences are noticeable in terms of the African cosmology too.

Stephen Mwewa, a Zambia Theologian in his dissertation presented at Innsbruck University, presents the view from a Zambian and central African view in general, where he also categorizes the African cosmology into two, which is, the world of spirits and the Physical world. In the spiritual world, the pyramidal hierarchy comprises of God the Great Spirit, ancestral spirits and then nature spirits.<sup>193</sup> The concepts of nature gods or deities are non-existent in central and southern Africa.

According to the mostly West African cosmology as presented by Uchenna, God the Supreme Being or the Great Spirit as he is called, has his place at the apex of the pyramid and is the creator God from whom every power comes from and to who everything later returns.

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<sup>190</sup> Uchenna A. EZEH, *Jesus Christ the Ancestor*, 40

<sup>191</sup> Cf. Uchenna A. EZEH, *Jesus Christ the Ancestor*, 40

<sup>192</sup> Uchenna A. EZEH, *Jesus Christ the Ancestor*, 40

<sup>193</sup> Cf. Stephen Kapita MWEWA, *Traditional Zambian eschatology and ethics confronting the advent of Christianity*: Dissertation presented at the Theological Faculty of the University of Innsbruck, 31.03.1977, 12-13

Immediately under him come the nature gods (deities). Then immediately under deities follow the ancestral spirits in their ascending order<sup>194</sup>.

According to the Bantu tradition of central Africa, citing Zambia as an example, they (Zambian tradition) distinguish three categories of spirits namely God who is taken to be the Great Spirit, who brought other spirits into being. Immediately below God come ancestral spirits known by several names in different tribes such as Mipashi (in Bemba), Mizimu (in Chewa) or Mizimo (in Tonga). Under the ancestral spirits come the nature spirits which are generally regarded as being neutral to man.<sup>195</sup> All the three above named categories of being exist in the spiritual world and rule over the world. The Spirits are generally regarded to be intermediaries between God and the human beings. They (Ancestral spirits) are also taken to be intercessors for their families and communities. Then at the bottom of the ladder is the physical world. But who really is an ancestor in an African context? Is there a criterion for one to be an ancestor or does anyone who once lived automatically become one?

#### *3.5.1.2. An ancestor in an African context*

In the world view of Africans, an ancestor is someone who led a good life while on earth, who lived peacefully and in harmony with others and with the world of spirits including the Supreme Being and who now lives in a spiritual state. The founders or heads of clans, heroes and kings or tribal chiefs occupy a special place among the ancestors. Others were people known for their great deeds and skills, for example in farming, hunting, tough warriors who defended their communities from external dangers among others. Others are those people who led good lives and died in their ripe age.<sup>196</sup> Those who died young were in this case, though good people never invoked upon or mentioned as ancestors on the ground that they had left no history behind which was to be emulated. Ancestors are therefore persons whom one can look up to as a model. Having been models for their community, ancestors are returned into their same human community by naming the newly born children after them and sometimes even the living members of the family may acquire an extra name of the recently departed one. This was all for the purpose of maintaining their existence in the community of the living. They are still very much part of the community but just existing in another form, i.e. in the spiritual world. They still exert some power and influence in their communities.

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<sup>194</sup> Cf. Uchenna A. EZEH, *Jesus Christ the Ancestor*, 40

<sup>195</sup> Cf. Stephen Kapita MWEWA, *Traditional Zambian eschatology and ethics*, 12.

<sup>196</sup> Stephen K. MWEWA, *Traditional Zambian eschatology and ethics*, 14.

The living members aspire to also become ancestors one day. To be an ancestor, therefore, is a stage of being.

It is however not every adult person who has died who can join the company of ancestors, some people do unfortunately miss that company of the ancestors. There is a class of people that are never supposed to belong to the class of ancestors and therefore never to be remembered or revered and even to be named after. These include a person like thieves, witches, someone who committed suicide or someone who was struck by a bolt of lightning among others.<sup>197</sup> They are taken to be bad models not worth of emulation and should therefore not be part of the human community. They are believed to be “restless and ceaselessly doing evil against their own people who are still living.”<sup>198</sup> It is not the wish of the community, therefore, to have them among them in the community. They are supposed to be forgotten and removed from the community by way of not returning their spirits and names.

The ancestors by virtue of their existing in the spiritual realm are believed to be nearer to God and are therefore taken to be intercessors for the human communities in which they lived. In some other African communities especially in West Africa, they (ancestors) are considered to be divinities because of their proximity to the divine Supreme Being.

### **3.6. African Christological concepts**

Jesus Christ was not known in Sub-Sahara Africa before the coming of the Christian missionaries. The African people already had believed in the existence of a creator God and worshiped him, so it was easy to accept and understand God the father. They already believed in the existence of the spiritual world and in spiritual beings, so a concept of the Holy Spirit immediately appealed to their belief and they had no difficulties in accepting him. But for Christ, they had never heard of him before. How are they going to understand him in familiar terms? Which concept which is familiar to an African can depict Jesus well and help an African to understand Jesus well and so accept him as an object of faith? Several African theologians have tried to propose certain concepts in trying to sell him to the African person. The concepts that we shall soon look at below are attempts at making the person of Jesus

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<sup>197</sup> Stephen K. MWEWA, *Traditional Zambian eschatology and ethics*, 13.

<sup>198</sup> Stephen K. MWEWA, *Traditional Zambian eschatology and ethics*, 13.

understood in terms which are local to a particular people. We now look at some of these concepts as proposed by some African theologians.

### **3.6.1. Jesus as a King or Chief**

As seen above, candidates for ancestorship included Kings, Chiefs, and warriors among others. Some theologians have tried to develop Christological concepts from these titles also. Here we take a look first at the paradigm of Christ as a chief or king before we come to the most popular paradigm of Christ as an ancestor.

Why has this concept of Christ as a king or chief been thought of as a depiction of Christ in Africa? Though we have very few absolute Monarchs surviving in Africa, we do have traditional chiefs and paramount chiefs who are the custodians of traditions and customs and are therefore familiar figures in the community. In Africa, every person is a subject of one chief or the other. In Zambia for example, one cannot identify himself without mentioning the name of his chief where he hails from. It is a requirement in Africa, for instance in order for one to get an identity card, one has to provide among the required details, the name of his village and chief. So one exists in Africa because he or she belongs to a community or traditional grouping under the traditional leadership of a chief, as Uchenna re-echoes; "I am because we are, or I am related therefore I am (*cognatus ergo sum*)."<sup>199</sup> In this sense, the Africans who have embraced Christianity do identify themselves as Christians by virtue of their baptism. They accept him as Lord. Christ becomes the new unifying factor among all Christians and the source of a new identity. This unity in Christ makes African theologians like John Mbiti as he has been quoted by Henry Johannes Mugabe to be best understood by the model of a king when he says: "Since belonging to a kingship group is a mark of a man, our attempt at constructing an African Christology would emphasize the kingship of Jesus."<sup>200</sup> According to Uchenna Ezech, a King or a Chief has in an African society specific roles. "The king or the Chief mediates between the living and the ancestors, and the ancestors also mediate between the living and God."<sup>201</sup> So in this case, apart from being a traditional ruler a king is also a priest and therefore a bridge between the physical and the spiritual world, and for this role, Bantu Christians find this title as a fitting title for Christ who is the mediator between God and the world. The Bantu Christians have even expressed this concept

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<sup>199</sup> Uchenna EZECH, *Jesus Christ the ancestor*, 65.

<sup>200</sup> Henry Johannes MUGABE, *Christology in an African Context*, in: *Review and Expositio*, 88 (1991), 344.

<sup>201</sup> Uchenna EZECH, *Jesus Christ the ancestor*, 273.

in one of their worship and praise songs like in the famous Zulu song of 'Bayete inkosi' a popular gospel song in southern and Eastern Africa:

Bayete, Bayete Inkosi  
Bayete, king of kings  
Bayete, Bayete Inkosi  
Bayete Inkosi is King Lord of Lords

Who can match your greatness?  
Who can know your power?  
Who can search your riches?  
Who can deny you are crowned Lord of Lords

You are crowned King of Africa  
You are crowned Lord of Lords  
You are crowned King of Africa  
Who can deny you are crowned Lord of all.<sup>202</sup>

Bayete inkosi means king of kings in the Zulu language of South Africa. Originally, the first verse is taken from the praises which are showered on the Chief or king by his subjects. By using the same kind of praises on Jesus, they express their greatest respect to him as their king and more so as one who even transcends the kings, hence the title – king of kings in the song. The song further makes mention of him as king of Africa, all to show their ready understanding of him as a king before whom they are ready to bow and submit to his authority. The Christian liturgical feast of Christ the king is from this background a well-celebrated feast in Africa. In West Africa, it is celebrated just like the feast of Corpus Christi where they process with the Blessed Sacrament in the streets.

This title and concept of Christ as a king or Chief is however found to be inadequate, for a king is under or below the ancestors, his mediation is between the human community and the ancestors and not directly to God. This leads us then to look for models in the superior level of existence, in the world of the ancestors.

### **3.6.2. Christ as brother ancestor**

Since an ancestor or “the living dead”<sup>203</sup> as they are sometimes referred to, is a person who was fully a human being, and who in the judgment of his own community was a good person and lived in harmony with the spiritual world and with fellow human beings, but who now

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<sup>202</sup> Diane B. STINTON, *Jesus of Africa, Voices of Contemporary African Christology*, (Newyork: Maryknoll, 2004), 180.

<sup>203</sup> John S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion, second edition*, (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1991), 77.

upon death joined his ancestors, Jesus fits in quite well in this criteria. African theologians, among them Charles Nyamiti, Benezet Bujo and John Pobee want to conceptualise him as an ancestor for he, like other ancestors, was born, passed through the rites of initiation, lived in harmony with the father and died as an adult and who after his death lives again but in another form, i.e. in the spiritual form. It belongs to the nature or an office of an ancestor not to be there (physically) but at the there same time being there (spiritually). Jesus as an ancestor is in this sense very much alive among his followers but at the same time not there. His followers feel he is their brother ancestor and this makes Charles Nyamiti propose the ancestral relationship based on an analogous brother-ancestorship.

Jesus did refer several times to his followers as his brothers and sisters and mothers. But he expressed it clearly in these words of Luke's gospel; "My mother and my brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it." (Luke 8: 21). This background becomes the springboard from which the concept of the brother-ancestor analogy can be understood. African Christians are brothers and sisters of Jesus and Jesus is their Brother. But Nyamiti in his analogy goes even further to allude brotherhood to Jesus even in term of material generation. His analogy goes as follows:

The dogma that Christ is true man implies not only the reality and integrity of His human nature but likewise the origin of the nature from Mary. It is in this latter fact which beyond anything else guarantees the reality and integrity of our Lord's sacred manhood. In other words, Christ is truly and integrally a man because, by material generation from the virgin mother Mary, He is a son of Adam according to the flesh, and consequently our brother.<sup>204</sup>

There are countless numbers of ancestors in the universe and for this reason; one would lead his or her life without relating to most of those ancestors. It is however not possible not to relate to one's ancestors from one's family or brother ancestor as Nyamiti puts it. Their life and history continue to shape and influence us. It is for this reason that Nyamiti tries to draw this genealogy of some kind to lead us through the common ancestorship of Adam the first man to Jesus, by showing that Jesus, by becoming a man, shared in our flesh and is, therefore, our brother. "He became after his death our brother ancestor in Adam."<sup>205</sup> This concept of brother ancestor seeks to create a closer relationship between individual African families and the person of Jesus Christ. Only when Jesus is brought into the family line of ancestors can a strong relationship with him be guaranteed, hence the concept of 'brother ancestor'.

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<sup>204</sup> Uchenna A. EZEH, *Jesus Christ the Ancestor*, 300.

<sup>205</sup> Uchenna A EZEH, *Jesus Christ the Ancestor*, 300.



However, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead brings him even closer to his divine roots. That makes him unique and an ancestor par excellent.

### 3.6.3. Christ as Proto ancestor

We are conscious of the fact that Jesus was not African and aligning him with ancestors in an African cosmology is not an attempt to sneak him into the African culture. But as Bertram Stubenrauch puts in his paper on Kenosis, the name of Jesus, like that of Adam stands for all or is there for all people. It is universal. He says:

Der Name Jesu, des Christus, steht wie jener Adams – für alle Menschen. Er, steht in diesem Sinne für das Universale und Lebendige Zeichen des Göttlichen und Religiösen schlechthin wie es sich weltumspannender und kulturübergreifender nicht denken lässt.<sup>206</sup>

Whereas Stubenrauch speaks in general terms of the universality of Jesus in relation to all religions and cultures, African theologians of the ancestor Christology address themselves to Africans who have embraced the Christian faith. The name and person of Jesus which is universal is welcomed by the African Christians as a name that they fully equally have a right to. Theologians of ancestor Christology take advantage of the universality of Jesus and try to re-express that view in an African ancestral set-up. The concept of the proto-ancestor, going a step further than brother ancestor concept, tries to express this universal dimension of the ancestorship of Christ.

One of the main proponents of the "proto-ancestor" theologians is Benezet Bujo. He introduced the title in the following statement: "I would like to suggest that such a new way of speaking would be to give Jesus the title of ancestor par excellence, that is, of 'proto-ancestor'.<sup>207</sup> The reason for doing so was from the background of understanding the status or office of ancestor as an ideal state or perfect state of being attainable. In Jesus are fulfilled the ideals which an African ascribes to an ancestor and fulfilled in a way which even surpasses them. Thus, Benezet Bujo says:

The term ancestor can only be applied to Jesus in an analogical or eminent way since to treat him otherwise would be to make him only one of the founding ancestor among many. That is why the title 'proto-ancestor' is reserved for Jesus. This signifies that Jesus did not only realise the authentic

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<sup>206</sup> Bertram STUBENRAUCH, *Christus, die Kenosis Gottes und das Gespräch zwischen den Religionen*, in: *Communio* 36. Jahrgang 2007, 142.

<sup>207</sup> Uchenna A. EZEH, *Jesus Christ the ancestor*, 293.

ideal of the God fearing African ancestors, but also infinitely transcended that ideal and brought it to a new completion.<sup>208</sup>

The term Proto ancestor is reserved solely for Jesus alone. No one among humans has borne that name before. Jesus is here looked at as an ancestor but at the same time distinguished from them for the perfect manner in which the ancestor ideals are fulfilled in him. He transcends the ancestors and so can only be called as the very first ancestor or the source of all ancestors. This is re-echoed by John Pobee who referred to Jesus as Nana, as the greatest, when he said; “Our approach would be to look on Jesus as the great and greatest Ancestor-in Akan language *Nana*.”<sup>209</sup> But that is the title that actually describes God himself, the Supreme Being. *Nana* becomes then a term shared by both the Supreme Being and Jesus the proto-ancestor. Thus, Jesus by his sharing the same title with the Supreme Being (God the Father) makes him then to be precisely homoousios with the father. Thus, the ‘*proto-ancestor*’ portrait would be a term that would re-express the homoousios closely to an African. Bujo at the end of his proposal tries to evaluate this concept against scripture when he says that “Jesus as proto-ancestor in no way contradicts New Testament thought. Rather the image reflects the belief that he is the ‘firstborn among all the ancestors’, not on a biological level but on ‘a soteriological level of re-birth and supernatural life and mode of existence.”<sup>210</sup>

### 3.7. Conclusion

No culture is passive. As the gospel encountered firstly the Greek culture, then the Roman and later the western culture in general before reaching Africa especially south of the Sahara in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, receptive cultures influenced the re-expression of that the gospel. The famous noted Greek imprint on Christianity and in Christological circles was the Hellenistic word Homoousios. It shows how the Greek culture was not passive but an active co-operator with the Gospel. The Greek culture as the first culture to be encountered by the Gospel outside the Jewish culture received and digested the gospel and later re-expressed it in concepts suitable to their context, hence the term – homoousios. Had the gospel first encountered the German or English culture, they would have done the same thing of re-expressing the unchanging truths of faith in their cultural concepts. This is all because

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<sup>208</sup> Uchenna A. EZEH, *Jesus Christ the Ancestor*, 294.

<sup>209</sup> Diane B. STINTON, *Jesus of Africa: voices of Contemporary African Christology*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 118.

<sup>210</sup> Diane B. STINTON, *Jesus of Africa: voices of Contemporary African Christology*, 120-121.

cultures are not passive recipients of the gospel but active. The encounter and friendship between the Gospel and Greek thought were mutually beneficial.

The growing church in Africa south of the Sahara, which is relatively young has accepted and converted the African culture to the gospel. The method employed at the first encounter, which was that of implanting the faith, had proved to have contained many disadvantages for it did not take account of the activeness of the African culture. This is re-echoed by Korean Theologian Chung Hyun Kyung who said that “the traditional image of mission as planting is dangerous and imperialistic because ‘*the seed has every ability to determine while the soil is passive*’.”<sup>211</sup> The method however which is effective and which she prefers is that of producing babies, in that both the sperm and the egg have the ability to determine the nature of Christianity in her land<sup>212</sup> and indeed in any other land. The gospel and the culture together have the ability to determine the nature of Christianity in a particular society.

The Church in Africa, encouraged by the Vatican II council adopted an open and dialogical method of approach, moving away from mission as implantation which has been criticised. In its ongoing dialogue with the Gospel, the church in Africa through its theologians, is proposing the concept of ancestor as one of the ways of trying to describe the status of Jesus. They are not proposing a new dogma of Christology but merely attempting to explain in familiar terms the person of Christ in their cultural set-up. The proposed African Christological paradigms do not exhaust the teaching about Jesus but explain only certain aspects of Him. The model of Christ as a king brings up some aspects of Christ but they are inadequate in the mediatorial role of Christ. This is because the human king only goes up to the ancestors in mediating for his people. The paradigm of an ancestor is found to be a better one. The proposed image of the proto-ancestor tries moreover to explain the term of *homousios* for it describes not only the function of the ancestor but partly also his nature, by sharing the same ‘title’ of proto-ancestor with the Father, as the unmoved mover of some kind.

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<sup>211</sup> Henry Johannes MUGABE, *Christology in an African context*, in: Review and Expositor, 88 (1991), 351.

<sup>212</sup> Henry Johannes MUGABE, *Christology in an African context*, 351.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

One thing that has consistently been observed in the course of this paper is that the development of Christological formulations and also of all dogmatic formulations, in general, is culturally influenced. This is confirmed by Clifton Clarke who says “*all Christologies are cultural constructs*”.<sup>213</sup> This is so truer in relation to the subject at hand in this paper, the Arian controversy. The first Christological and dogmatic formulation regarding the status of the son in relation to God the Father and the created world took place in a Greek culture of the fourth century. The Arian controversy originated in the Greek world and culture of the fourth century which covered the known world of that time, that is, the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea.

One of the strongest Greek cultural thought patterns of that century was the middle platonic cosmological scheme, which influenced the way they looked at the world at that time. This purely philosophical and cultural thought pattern did find its way into theology through the creative mind of Arius. He attempted enthusiastically to inculturate Christianity by trying to interpret the status of the son as the demiurge or a secondary god using this cultural background. This scheme, though appealing to the mind, was mainly a cosmological scheme which had no plans or place in it for soteriological solutions for the world. Arius found support for his inclination in the teachings of Origen who portrayed the son as subordinate to the father. Arius became, therefore, a champion for the doctrine of subordination of the son to the father from this perspective. He thereby christianised the Greek thought by trying to sneak it into theology and on the other hand attempted to hellenise Christianity by re-expressing especially the creation accounts of the bible after the thought pattern of Greek thought. Further on, on the theological front, he found the position of Origen to be a bit

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<sup>213</sup> Clifton R. CLARKE, *African Christology: Jesus in Post-Missionary African Christianity*, (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 10.

ambiguous or contradictory somehow, for though he (Origen) held the father alone as being God in the strict sense, he lacked the required courage to declare the son as a creature when he concluded that he (Jesus) still belonged to the godhead. Such a conclusion was not what he expected. He would have wished the syllogism to run like this: a) *The father alone is God in the strict sense*, b) *The son is not the father*, c) *therefore, the son is not God*. Arius, however, found the conclusion of Origen about the son as God, to be blunt and disappointing conclusion according to his judgment. He took it upon himself to complete what Origen failed to do, or rather to correct the conclusion of Origen.

Arius found the declarations of Gregory Thaumaturgus to be even more provocative a position than that of Origen, for the doctrine of subordination is missing completely by him. The greatest provocation according to Arius' views was the ascribing of divinity to Jesus when he (Gregory) said that Jesus is perfect God from perfect God. In coming up with his (Arius) teaching about the son, the above provocative lines of thought played a major role. Using the middle platonic cosmological scheme, Arius totally rejected the position of Gregory Thaumaturgus who had focused more on the similarities in the godhead. Arius took the position of Origen of subordination as his springboard by upholding Origen's position that the father alone is God in the real sense, but pushed this position even further by saying that this God (Father) is the Monad, one who is totally transcendent above the son and exists on the other side of the unbridgeable gulf. He rejected the son's divinity and his eternity by stating that as a creature, he (the son) must have had a beginning. He further concluded that his existence had a beginning outside time before the eons were created. Arius misdirected or contradicted himself also on the understanding of *eternity*, for at one time he says the son is not eternal but on the other hand says he was created outside time. But "outside time" and "eternity" is one and the same thing.

The correction of this heresy was done through the council of Nicea. The council realised that the efforts of Arius to hellenise the faith were done in a bad way. He canonised the doctrine of the three principles of middle Platonism which stood in contradiction to the scriptural doctrine of creation. This realisation attracted a response from Alexander and Athanasius among others. Through the council of Nicea whose efforts can be said to be a de-hellenisation of the bad way in which Arius attempted to hellenise the faith, Arianism was rejected. This reversal was done by way of carefully adding of the four Christological interpolations, by which the son was in line with the scriptures, defined to be "true God from true God", "born not made", "from the substance of the father" and indeed as being "of the same substance

with the father – homoousios.” All the four added propositions go to emphasise the ontological status of the son.

Arius was in love with the middle platonic doctrine of the three principles such that it was very difficult for him to give it up, a thing that made him be seen as stubborn and finally lead to his being anathematised. The definition of the fides Nicea did however not go without polemics. The most famous word in the fides Nicea, the word ‘*homoousios*,’ has equally been cited as a hellenisation of the faith. The *anomoeans* being the first to raise such a claim, but their voice was even strongly re-echoed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Adolf von Harnack. Aloys Grillmeier and Jan-Heiner Tück, on the contrary, insist that what Arius attempted to do, by unconditionally bringing the middle Platonic cosmological scheme into Christianity is what was tantamount to a hellenisation of the faith. What the council of Nicea did, on the other hand, was an ‘*Enthellenisierung*’<sup>214</sup> or a ‘*de-hellenisation*’ of the faith. Jon Sobrino on the other hand however accepts the labelling of hellenisation for Nicea’s ‘*homoousios*’ terminology as insisted by Adolf Harnack, but adds that it is positive hellenisation and that the label does not drop off from what Arius did but instead, an adjective is also added to it and it becomes ‘*negative hellenisation*’ on the ground that it would have introduced or threatened to bring changes to the unchanging truths of the Gospel. Hellenisation in itself is not bad, but if it departs from the Gospels then it becomes negative whereas if it stays faithful, then it is positive and to be encouraged.

Finally, in the last chapter, inculturation took centre stage where the positive hellenisation of Nicea becomes an example of how to rightly go about with inculturation. The negative hellenisation of Arius becomes also a lesson of not how to go about with inculturation, the criteria being, making no changes to the deposit of faith. Benedict XVI emphasised that during the first inculturation of faith in the Greek culture, Philosophy and Theology mutually enriched each other beginning with the translation of the LXX, writing of the NT and the eventual usage of a Philosophical term of “*homoousios*” in the profession of faith. The inculturation done during classical theology cannot be undone. In defending that marriage between Philosophy and Theology in classical Christology, Benedict XVI repeatedly stated that not to act with reason (philosophy) is contradictory to the nature of God for God is logos (reason). The right use of reason (philosophy) is what Benedict defended. This implies not being naive to the fact that there can be a negative use of philosophy. The emphasis for Pope

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<sup>214</sup> Anton SVOBODA, *Nicaea unter Hellenisierungsverdacht*, 97.

Francis as for Pope John Paul II is that inculturation has to always remain in conformity with the teaching of the deposit of faith.

The encounter of the gospel with the African culture gave chance to a process of African inculturation which gained momentum from the 1960s onwards during the time when most African countries began to gain their political independence from their colonial masters. As observed by Ikenna Okafor, “inculturation is the theological counterpart to decolonisation, permitting indigenous people to discover their own ways of internalising and responding to the Christian kerygma.”<sup>215</sup> Among the many paradigms suggested, the Christological paradigm of Christ as an ancestor is found to be more appealing. Being conceived of as an ancestor (the living dead), Jesus is both always present (spiritually) and absent (physically) for he died on the cross and thereby ceased to be physically. As an ancestor, his presence is more pronounced than his absence. His presence is even stronger than his absence for he is not restricted now by space and time. The *proto-ancestor* paradigm comes closer to representing what Nicea by the term *homousios* was trying to put across. This Ancestor Christological paradigm is however not a proposal to create new dogmas but is simply an attempt to explain the unchanging truths in contextual forms of expressions particular to Africa. This finds an echo in the words of Pope John XXIII who at the opening of Vatican II said; “the substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, the way it is expressed is another”<sup>216</sup>.

In relation to the question as to whether inculturation is an answer to the firm foundation of the gospel on the African continent, our answer is in the affirmative. Yes, Inculturation is an answer to an authentic Christianity in African as anywhere else. The success history of Christianity in Ethiopia which was established in the fourth century to date tells it all. Despite its isolation from the Christian world after the Arab and Muslim invasion, this inculturated Christianity remained self-sustaining and self-propagating<sup>217</sup>. A faith that has become a culture dies hard.

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<sup>215</sup> Ikenna U. OKAFOR, *Toward an African Theology of fraternal solidarity: Ube Nwanne*, (Oregon: Pickwick publications, 2014), 144.

<sup>216</sup> Pope JOHN XXIII, *Address for the opening of the second Vatican council* (11 October 1962): AAS 54 (1962), 792.

<sup>217</sup> Cf. John BAUR, *2000 years of Christianity in Africa*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), 153.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAS	Acta Apostolicae Sedis
AD	Anno Domin – Year of the Lord
BC	Before Christ
BCE	Before Christian- era
<i>Ca</i>	circa – about
CE	Christian era
<i>Cf</i>	Confer
Ed	Editor
FR.	Father (Priest)
<i>i.e.</i>	id est - that is
LXX	Septuagint



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## ABSTRACT

In the Arian controversy of the fourth century is found a very decisive and controversial question ever arisen in the history of the church. The present work tries to reconstruct firstly this controversy by investigating the historical context in which Arius lived and tries to trace the intellectual streams of influences which shaped his Christology. The cosmological scheme of middle Platonism is in the background of his thoughts, especially the doctrine of the three principles and the concept of the platonic god, the monad. The doctrine of the subordination of the Logos as developed by Origen is taken on by Arius who radicalized it by ascribing the son, Jesus Christ, to the realm of creatures. The council of Nicea, summoned by Emperor Constantine in 325 AD, was to resolve the disputes which threatened the unity of the Church and the empire. The profession of faith from Nicea, corrected the teaching of Arius through the four Christological propositions, which held firmly that Jesus is “true God from true God”, “begotten not made”, “from the substance of the Father”, and the most prominent concept of the council, “*homoousios* with the father.”

This transmission of the faith in Jesus into the Greek culture, which the council of Nicea resolved to do, can be conceived of as a model for future inculturations. A question arises, whether the inculturation of the faith as was carried out in the fourth century, provides impetus to the African culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to inculturate the faith in Christ, by taking recourse to African paradigms. John Mbiti proposes the paradigm of “Jesus as King”, while Charles Nyamiti and Benezet Bujo conceptualize him as “ancestor”. All these paradigms express important aspects of Christology, but the model of proto- ancestor comes closer to defining Jesus Christ as son of God, for God as the ultimate source of Heaven and Earth, would also be conceived of in an African conception as proto ancestor. The identicalness in names (of Proto-ancestor) between Jesus and the Father, from the world view of Africans shows the same ontological status.

## ABSTRAKT

In der arianischen Kontroverse des vierten Jahrhunderts geht es um eine ganz entscheidende Streitfrage in der Geschichte des Christentums. Die vorliegende Arbeit versucht diese Kontroverse zunächst zu rekonstruieren, indem sie den historischen Kontext erforscht, in dem Arius lebte, und die intellektuellen Einflüsse nachzeichnet, die seine subordinatianistische Christologie prägten. Das kosmologische Schema des Mittleren Platonismus steht im Hintergrund seines Denkens – insbesondere die Lehre von den drei Prinzipien und der platonische Gottesbegriff des differenzlosen Einen. Die Lehre von der Subordination des Logos, wie sie bereits von Origenes entwickelt wurde, greift Arius auf und radikalisiert sie, indem er den Sohn, Jesus Christus, dem Bereich des Kreatürlichen zuordnet. Das Konzil von Nicäa wurde im Jahr 325 von Kaiser Konstantin einberufen, um die theologischen Streitigkeiten beizulegen, die die Einheit der Kirche und des Reiches bedrohten. Das Glaubensbekenntnis von Nicäa korrigierte die arianische Lehre durch vier christologische Einschübe, welche festhalten, dass Jesus Christus „wahrer Gott vom wahren Gott“ ist, „gezeugt nicht geschaffen“, „aus dem Wesen des Vaters“ und schließlich, um den prominenten Begriff des Konzils anzuführen, „*homoousios* mit dem Vater“.

Diese Übersetzung des Glaubens an Jesus Christus in die hellenistische Kultur, die das Konzil von Nicäa vorgenommen hat, kann als Modell für künftige Inkulturationen betrachtet werden. So stellt sich die Frage, ob die Inkulturation des Glaubens, wie sie 4. Jahrhundert vollzogen wurde, für die afrikanische Kultur im 21. Jahrhundert Anstöße bietet, um den Glauben an Jesus Christus unter Rückgriff auf afrikanische Paradigmen zu inkulturieren. John Mbiti schlägt das Paradigma von Christus als „König“ vor, während Charles Nyamiti und Benezet Bujo Christus als „Vorfahre“ oder „Ahne“ begreifen. Alle diese Paradigmen können wesentliche Aspekte der Christologie zum Ausdruck bringen, aber das Modell des Proto-Ahnen kommt der Definition Jesu Christi als Sohn wohl am nächsten, weil Gott als die endgültige Quelle des Himmels und der Erde im afrikanischen Verstehenshorizont mitunter als Vor-Vorfahre bezeichnet wird. Die Übereinstimmung im Namen (des Proto-Vorfahren) zwischen Jesus Christus und dem Vater zeigt in der Weltanschauung der Afrikaner den gleichen ontologischen Status an.

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