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CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA'S CRITIQUE OF THE TERM *THEOTOKOS* BY NESTORIUS CONSTANTINOPLE

ABSTRACT

The God Word became truly human. He had the real human nature (body and soul), but without propensity to sin. Jesus Christ was the incarnate Word of God. He was born of the Virgin Mary and conceived by the Holy Spirit. His divinity is manifest in the extraordinary circumstances of His birth and, in particular, in the preservation of the virginity of the *Theotokos*. His humanity is guaranteed in that He was born of a woman, a real historical person. Nestorius of Constantinople rejected the title *Theotokos* for the mother of the incarnated Word. He insisted that Mary as a human being could give birth only to a human being, and not to God. He persisted in calling the Virgin Mary *Christotokos*. This teaching jeopardised the salvation of the human race. Cyril of Alexandria disproved this erroneous belief and supported the reason why the mother of God should be called *Theotokos*.

1. THE CHRISTOLOGICAL CONTROVERSY BETWEEN ALEXANDRIA AND CONSTANTINOPLE

In his sermon, Nestorius of Constantinople refused to give Mary, Mother of Christ, the predicate *Theotokos*, God – bearer, Mother of God. The reaction to this sermon and, in particular, to the condemnation of *Theotokos* was immediate and unfavourable: "He disturbed many of the clergy and all of the laity in this matter" (*πολλούς κληρικούς τε καί λαϊκούς ἐν αὐτῷ πάντας ἐτάραξεν*). Everywhere he forbade the word *Theotokos* (Socrates Scholasticus PG 67:7.32). His heretical teaching led to a dispute about his conception of the unity of the human and divine natures of Christ. When Cyril of Alexandria

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was informed about Nestorius's teaching, he tried to explain to him why Mary should be called *Theotokos*. Unfortunately, he did not succeed in his explanation. A correspondence with Nestorius followed in a rather moderate tone. The Bishop of Constantinople insisted on refusing to use the term *Theotokos* for the mother of Jesus.

The Nestorian controversy was fundamentally Christological (Nikephoros Kallistos PG 146:1160-1164), but Mary, the mother of Christ, was the focus of this dispute between Cyril and Nestorius (Evagrius Scholasticus PG 86:2424A-D). The Bishop of Constantinople was an Antiochian in Christology. He was influenced by the teaching of Theodore of Mopsuestia (PG 66:981BC). Early in his reign, he was called upon to give his opinion on the suitability of *Theotokos* (the woman who gave birth to God) as a title for the Blessed Virgin, and he would support the doubtful nature of this term unless *Anthropotokos* (the woman who gave birth to man) was added to compensate for it. He insisted that the title *Christotokos* (the one who gave birth to Christ) was preferable as it did not beg questions. God did not originate from a creaturely human being and, for this reason, the word *Christotokos* would be preferred. In support of his theory, Nestorius told his congregation that Mary bore a mere man, the vehicle of divinity, but not God (Cyril PG 76:25-28, 72-77, 120). He argued that, in the case of the term *Theotokos*, he was not opposed to those who wanted to use it, unless it would lead to confusion, as in the case of the insanity of Apollinarius or Arius. Nonetheless, he had no doubt that the term *Theotokos* was inferior to the term *Christotokos*, as the latter was mentioned by the angels and the gospels (Loofs 1980:181-182). Nestorius also mentioned that "the term *Christotokos* kept the assertion by both parties to the proper limits, because it both removed the blasphemy of Paul of Samosata, who had claimed that Christ the Lord of all was simply a human being, and also flees the wickedness of Arius and Apollinarius" (Loofs 1980:181-182).

To Nestorius, the Catholic doctrine of Incarnation, the manhood united by God the Son to His own self, was Apollinarianism or a heretic mixture. In his letter to Pope Celestine, he told of the "corruption of orthodoxy among some" and thus described it:

> It is a sickness not small, but akin to the putrid sore of Apollinarius and Arius. For they mingle the Lord's union in man to a confusion of some sort of mixture, insomuch that even certain clerks among us, of whom some from lack of understanding, some from heretical guile of old time concealed within them are sick as heretics, and openly blaspheme God the Word Consubstantial with the Father, as though He had taken beginning of His Being of the Virgin mother of Christ, and had been built up with His Temple and buried with His

> flesh, and say that the flesh after the resurrection did not remain flesh but passed into the Nature of Godhead, and they refer the Godhead of the Only-Begotten to the beginning of the flesh which was connected with it, and they put it to death with the flesh, and blasphemously say that the flesh connected with Godhead passed into Godhead (Concilium Ephesus P.i.c. 16).

Similar thoughts were expressed in Nestorius's second letter to Cyril:

> But to use the expression 'accept as its own' as a way of diminishing the properties of the conjoined flesh, birth, suffering and entombment, is a mark of those whose minds are led astray, my brother, by Greek thinking or are sick with the lunacy of Apollinarius and Arius or the other heresies or rather something more serious than these (Nestorius PG 77:56A).

It is obvious that, behind the description of Mary as *Theotokos*, he professed to detect the Arian tenet that the Son was a creature, or the Apollinarian notion that the manhood was incomplete. When Cyril read it, he realised that he had found the scandal he was seeking. Cyril was greatly disappointed with Nestorius' teaching. Initially, he tried to refute Nestorius's (Socrates PG 67:810CD) heretic teaching about the mystery of the Word's Incarnation by sending letters (Cyril PG 77:40C-41D, 44C-49A, 106C-121D) to the Bishop of Constantinople. Unfortunately, he was not successful.

2. THE REJECTION OF THE TERM *THEOTOKOS*

2.1 Cyril's first letter to Nestorius and the latter's reply to the Bishop of Alexandria

When Cyril was informed that, during the Divine Liturgy and in front of the Patriarch of Constantinople Nestorius, Bishop Dorotheos cursed those who accepted Mary, Mother of Christ, as Theotokos. Nestorius remained silent and decided to react. This disturbed the thoughts of some of the Monks of Egypt to such an extent that Saint Cyril wrote a letter to them, pointing out that the Incarnation meant that God the Son united to Him His own human nature which He took, as completely as soul and body are united in each of us, and in this way His Passion and Death were His own, though He, as God, could not suffer. This letter was circulated extensively and reached Constantinople. It irritated Nestorius. He wrote to the monks of Egypt mentioning his dissatisfaction with Cyril's letter

Initially, Cyril wrote this letter (PG 77:40C) in a style that showed his anger with Nestorius. He explained that the letter to the Monks of Egypt was written in order to dispute the confusion concerning doctrine caused by the preaching of Nestorius or Anastasius. Anastasius, a presbyter who accompanied Nestorius to Constantinople, delivered a sermon in which he criticised, or rather, attacked the term *Theotokos.* It is claimed that Anastasius proclaimed:

> Let no one call Mary *Theotokos*, for Mary was but a woman and it was impossible that God should be born of a woman (Socrates PG 67:7,32).

Whether this attack on the terminology and meaning of *Theotokos* began with the presbyter Anastasius or with Nestorius is not the issue. Nestorius strongly supported this attack and preached on the subject, regardless of whether he preached the first sermon. Thus began what Saint Cyril referred to as the "scandal" of the household of the Church — *σκάνδαλον οἰκουμενικόν*. Cyril indirectly asked Nestorius: "How is it possible for you to stay quiet when the doctrine of our faith is perverted?" (Socrates PG 67:7,32; Cyril PG 77:41A). In his letter, Cyril explained to Nestorius that anything that was taught distorted the truth of the Christian faith, and he urged him to accept the term *Theotokos* for the Holy Virgin Mary in order to end the theological dispute relating to the refusal of the term *Theotokos* for the Virgin Mary. This would mean the end of the "ecumenical scandal" within the Church: "*Καὶ οὐχὶ μᾶλλον ἐπανορθοῖ τὸν ἑαυτῆς λόγον, ἵνα παύσῃ σκάνδαλον οἰκομενικόν; Εἰ γὰρ καὶ παρερρύη λόγος, ὡς ἐπὶ λαοῦ τρέχων, ἀλλ' ἐπανορθούσθω ταῖς ἐπισκέψεσι, καὶ λέξιν χαρίσασθαι τοῖς σκανδαλιζομένοις καταξίωσον, Θεοτόκον ὀνομάζων τὴν ἁγίαν Παρθένον*" (Cyril PG 77:41B).

The Christological argument was mainly about soteriology, redemption and worship, and this was the reason why Cyril reacted so strongly against Nestorius's teaching. Cyril believed that Nestorius's teaching, epitomized in his attack on *Theotokos*, presupposed a merely external association between an ordinary man and the Word. From this point of view, the Incarnation was not a real fact. It was a simple illusion, a matter of "appearance" and "empty words" (Cyril PG 76:324AB). If Christ's passion, suffering and saving acts were not those of the Word incarnate, but of a mere man, there was no redemption for mankind (Cyril PG 76:129C, 189BC, 220C). Nestorius's refusal of the term *Theotokos* was a "scandal" for the entire Christian world. For this reason, Cyril mentioned to Nestorius that the Pope of Rome Celestine had been informed of his heretic teaching (Cyril PG 77:41AB). Finally, Saint Cyril asked him to redress the dispute by using one word, *Theotokos*, for the Holy Virgin.

With an excellent knowledge of church history, Cyril realised that Nestorius's heretic falsehoods would not be solved by means of discussions or letters between him and Nestorius. A Regional Council or even an Ecumenical Council should be convened. The Patriarch of Alexandria was absolutely certain that Nestorius had made a dogmatic error. Cyril mentioned to Nestorius that he always advocated the same on the Church's doctrine. For fear of misapprehension, he invoked as irrefutable witness the book written earlier about holy and consubstantial Trinity. In this book, which he called "The Treasure", he refuted the whole system of Arianism. In it, he answered all the objections by those heretics, and established from Holy Scripture the divinity of the Son of God, and of the Holy Ghost. He also explained the Incarnation of the Word (Cyril PG 77:41C). He described that in this book he had interwoven some issues on the Incarnation.

This holy doctor emphasised that the rejection of the term Theotokos was tantamount to a refutation of Christ's divinity and a falsification of the Divine Incarnation. Then, Christ would not be true and simultaneously "perfect" God and "perfect" man; he would be a mere tool of the Deity, a God-bearing man (Cyril PG 77:41C). He passionately emphasised that Christ was not a God-clad man, nor did the Word of God merely dwell in a man, but rather that He was made flesh, or perfect man, according to the Scriptures.

Cyril supported the fact that "the holy Virgin is able to be called the Mother of God. For if our Lord Jesus Christ is God", he wondered, "how should the holy Virgin who bore Him not be the Mother of God", adding:

> They say that God the Word hath taken a perfect man from out the seed of Abraham and David according to the declaration of the Scriptures, who is by nature what they were of whose seed he was, a man perfect in nature, consisting of intellectual soul and human flesh: whom, man as we by nature, fashioned by the might of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin and made of a woman, made under the law, in order that he might buy us all from the bondage of the law, receiving *the* sonship marked out long before, He in new way connected to Himself, preparing him to make trial of death according to the law of men, raising him from the dead, taking him up into Heaven and setting him on the Right Hand of God (Cyril PG 75:1273AD).

Nestorius avoided answering Cyril's letter. He referred to Cyril's attitude against him and presented himself as a victim of Cyril's misunderstanding and empathy (PG 77:44C). Nestorius avoided exacerbating the already critical ecclesiastical state and, at the same time, he gave no apologies

to Cyril's charges on the rejection of the name *Theotokos* for the mother of Christ.

2.2 Cyril's second letter to Nestorius and the latter's answer to the Patriarch of Alexandria

Cyril's answer to Nestorius's letter was quite clever. He did not attack Nestorius, but simply explained to him that he was accused of doubting Nestorius's piety, so that his accusers could hide their wrong actions:

> [H]ear that some are rashly talking of the estimation in which I hold your holiness, and that this is frequently the case especially at the times that meetings are held of those in authority. And perchance they think in so doing to say something agreeable to you, but they speak senselessly, for they have suffered no injustice at my hands, but have been exposed by me only to their profit; this man as an oppressor of the blind and needy, and that as one who wounded his mother with a sword. Another because he stole, in collusion with his waiting maid, another's money, and had always laboured under the imputation of such like crimes as no one would wish even one of his bitterest enemies to be laden with (PG 77:44C).

He took little notice of the words of such people, because ultimately they would give an account to the Judge of all, Jesus Christ (PG 77:44C). The holy doctor also mentioned to Nestorius their obligation that their teaching as bishops should be in accordance with the teaching of the Fathers of our church. They should be in the faith according to that which is written, and conform their thoughts (Cyril and Nestorius) to their honest and irreprehensible teaching (PG 77:44C, 45C). If they did not accurately teach the word and the doctrine of the faith to the people, they would tempt their flock. This would be a great sin, because the giving of scandal to one even of the least of those who believe in Christ, exposes a body to the unbearable indignation of God (Math. 18:6).

Following this letter, Cyril made a short reference to the symbol of Nice – Constantinople. He spoke of the Incarnation of the Son and the Word of God. He explained clearly that the only begotten Son, born according to the nature of God the Father, came down, and was incarnate; he partook of flesh and blood like us; he made our body his own, and there came forth a man from a woman, not casting off his existence as God, nor his generation of God the Father (PG 77:45B). Cyril insisted on the Incarnation, because this was the sentiment of the holy Fathers; therefore, they ventured to call the holy Virgin *Theotokos*, not as if the nature of the Word or his divinity had its beginning from the holy Virgin, but because of

her was born that holy body with a rational soul, to which the Word, being personally united, is said to be born according to the flesh (PG 77:45C). Christ became perfect man and remained perfect God, the two natures being brought together in a true union; there was of both one Christ and one Son; for the difference in their nature was not taken away by the union, but rather the divinity and the humanity make the one Lord perfect for us (PG 77:45C).

Cyril purposely used the words "Christ" and "Son" in order to make obvious to Nestorius that the first one referred to the humanity of Jesus and the second expressed his deity as the Word of God. There was a real union of two natures, "*hypostatic union*". This term was introduced for the first time by Cyril's Christological teaching, in order to expose Nestorius' falsehoods (Theodorou 1955:81).

As had been the case earlier with the Trinitarian doctrine, Cyril was fully conscious of the necessity of positing the union of Incarnation at the level of person, not that of nature. As in the Trinity, there were not three natures and three persons - which would be tritheism - or one nature and one person in three different modes (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) - which would be modalistic monarchianism. In the Incarnation, there was one person, but two natures. The Bishop of Alexandria tried to explain that neither the divine nature overwhelmed the human nature, nor were the human and divine natures juxtaposed. The two natures found their union in the one divine hypostasis and yet maintained their distinction. In Cyril's words:

> The natures, however, which combined into this real union were different, but from the two together is one God the Son, without the diversity of the natures being destroyed by the union. For a union of two natures was made, and therefore we confess One Christ, One Son, One Lord ... two natures, by an inseparable union, met together in him without confusion, and indivisibly (Cyril PG 77:304A, 152AB, 200A, 232AC, 260C).

In Christ's person, there was a true union – hypostatic – of the two natures and this followed from the Exchange of Properties or Communion of Idioms. As such, one could understand that Christ suffered and rose again; not as if God the Word suffered in his own nature (the piercing of the nails, or any other wounds), for the Divine nature is incapable of suffering, in as much as it is incorporeal. However, since that which had become his own body suffered in this way, he is also said to have suffered for us; for he who is in himself incapable of suffering was in a suffering body. Similarly, he himself had suffered death for people, not as if he had any experience of death in his own nature (for it would be madness for someone to say

or think this), but because his flesh tasted death. Likewise, his flesh being raised again implies his resurrection, not as if he had fallen into corruption (God forbid), but because his own body was raised again (Cyril PG 77:48B; Heb. 2:9).

The divine Word became true human with flesh and blood "not merely as willing or being pleased" (*'ού κατά θέλησιν μόνην ἤ εὐδοκίαν*) (Cyril PG 77:45C). On this point, Cyril referred to Theodorus of Mopsuestia's teaching, which was adopted by Nestorius. Cyril wrote that it would be "absurd and foolish" to say that the Word that existed before all ages, coeternal with the Father, needed a second beginning of existence as God (Cyril PG 77:45C). Mary did not give birth to a mere holy human, but she gave birth to Christ, the one person of the incarnate deity. In Christ, there was a hypostatic union of Godhead and manhood. This meant that Godhead and manhood took place dynamically, because there was only one individual presiding over them both, the person of Christ.

Cyril proposed the concept of hypostatic union to summarise his key objections to Nestorius's theories:

> Rather do we claim that the Word in an unspeakable, inconceivable manner united to himself hypostatically flesh enlivened by a rational soul, and so became man and was called son of man, not by God's will alone or good pleasure, nor by the assumption of a person alone. Rather did two different natures come together to form a unity, and from both arose one Christ, one Son. It was not as though the distinctness of the natures was destroyed by the union, but divinity and humanity together made perfect for us one Lord and one Christ, together marvellously and mysteriously combining to form a unity. So he who existed and was begotten of the Father before all ages is also said to have been begotten according to the flesh of a woman ... If, however, we reject the hypostatic union as being either impossible or too unlovely for the Word, we fall into the fallacy of speaking of two sons. We shall have to distinguish and speak both of the man as honoured with the title of son, and of the Word of God as by nature possessing the name and reality of sonship, each in his own way. We ought not, therefore, to split into two sons the one Lord Jesus Christ (Cyril PG 77:48B).

On this point, Cyril rejected Diodorus of Tarsus's teaching about the two Sons. Diodorus claimed that the divinity, comprised of the Word and the flesh, formed a substantial (or hypostatic) unity analogous to that formed by body and (rational) soul in man. In his reaction, his own theory made him view the divine and the human as separate, leading him to distinguish the Son of God and the Son of David. He stated that the Holy Scriptures draw

a sharp contrast between the activities of the two Sons. Otherwise, why should those who blaspheme against the Son of Man receive forgiveness while those who blaspheme against the Spirit (the Holy Spirit) do not? Diodorus stated that the Son of God is not the son of David; there are two sons. He relied on the teaching of Jesus Christ when He said: "And anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven" *(*Lk 12:10*).* Diodorus mentioned that blasphemy against the Son of Man is not considered blasphemy against the Son of God, because, according to Jesus, blasphemy against the Son of Man will be forgiven, and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not. The Holy Spirit is God; the Lord Jesus Christ explained that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not forgiven because it is blasphemy against God. Since Jesus is not God, blasphemy against the son of man is forgiven. With this cunning interpretation, he subordinated the Son of God to the son of man. They have a relationship together, or they are linked to each other by some kind of conjoining or indwelling. Blasphemy against the son of man is not against the Son of God. This distinction between the two sons forms the core of Diodorus of Tarsus's teaching.

In his second letter to Cyril (PG 77:49-57), the Bishop of Constantinople remained steadfast in his dogmatic teaching. He did not reply to "the insults" against him as contained in Cyril's second letter (PG 77:49CD). He believed that these insults would in time be redressed by his patience and by events (PG 77:49D). It is obvious that he referred to the audacity of the Patriarch of Alexandria to challenge the reverence and appropriateness of Nestorius's teaching. He replied to Cyril's accusations of heretic teaching, arguing that everything was based on the previous patristic tradition of the Church. He insisted that Cyril had superficially understood the words of his teaching and of the Fathers. Nestorius urged:

> By reading in a superficial way the tradition of those holy men (you were guilty of a pardonable ignorance), you concluded that they said that the Word who is coeternal with the Father was passible (PG 77:49D, 52B; Filipp. 2:5-8).

He asked Cyril to scrutinise their language and he would discover that

> the divine fathers never mentioned that the consubstantial godhead was capable of suffering, or that the whole being that was coeternal with the Father was recently born, or that it rose again, seeing that it had itself been the cause of resurrection of the destroyed temple (Nestorius PG 77:52C).

Nestorius emphasised that Cyril's belief was that the coeternal Word of God – Father was passible. This was impossible and he used the passage from Paul's letter to the Philippians:

> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, and so on until, he became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Nestorius PG 77:52A)

to explain that in Christ, in one person, there were both the impassible and the passible natures, in order that Christ might be called both impassible and passible - impassible in godhead, passible in the nature of his body (Nestorius PG 77:52C). The "conjunction of the two natures of Christ in one person" was a superficial union and not a hypostatic, a real one (Nestorius PG 77:52C). In Nestorius's opinion, it was crucial that God's impassibility be preserved, and that the man retain his spontaneity and freedom of action. Hence, although he occasionally mentioned a union (ἕνωσις), he preferred the term conjunction (συνάφεια), which seemed to avoid all suspicion of a confusing or mixing of the natures.

The term "conjunction" (synapheia) had been used by the holy Fathers, Athanasius of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom and by Cyril himself, but now its meaning was heretic. We must not forget that the term "conjunction" was technicus terminus for the Antiochians who supported the two natures of Christ. If the union had the same meaning as the conjunction, then there would be two prosopa of Christ. This was wrong. In the earlier patristic tradition, the term "conjunction" was generally used to explain the perception of human nature by the Only-begotten Word of God during the Incarnation. It meant the true union of two natures rather than welding them (Artemi 2004:237). In Nestorius's letter it did not mean the real, natural union of the two natures of Christ. Cyril wrote:

> One therefore is Christ both Son and Lord, not as if a man had attained only such a conjunction with God as consists in a unity of dignity alone or of authority. For it is not equality of honour which unites natures; for then Peter and John, who were of equal honour with each other, being both Apostles and holy disciples [would have been one, and], yet the two are not one. Neither do we understand the manner of conjunction to be apposition, for this does not suffice for natural oneness (*πρός ἕνωσιν φυσικήν*). Nor yet according to relative participation, as we are also joined to the Lord, as it is written 'we are one Spirit in him'. Rather we deprecate the term of 'conjunction' (synapheia) as not having sufficiently signified the oneness (Cyril, PG 77:112BC).

Nestorius insisted that each nature had its own *prosopon*. In order to avoid the assumption that, if the Son had two natures, he would also have two *prosopa*, he referred the conjunction of the natures to one person, Christ (Nestorius PG 77:52C): "... division of natures into manhood and godhead and their conjunction in one person". He spoke ironically about the Word's second generation from Virgin Mary (Nestorius PG 77:52C). He did not allow the birth of Word as a human, because he supported the fact that Mary gave birth to Christ and not to God:

> Holy scripture, wherever it recalls the Lord's economy, speaks of the birth and suffering not of the godhead but of the humanity of Christ (Nestorius PG 77:52C).

The conjunction of Christ's natures resulted in the rejection of the title *Theotokos* for the Virgin Mary: "... the holy virgin is more accurately termed mother of Christ (*Christotokos*) than mother of God (*Theotokos*)" (Nestorius PG 77:52C; PG 77:53B). He quoted biblical passages which were misinterpreted, and referred only to Christ's human nature (PG 77:53B-D; Math. 1:16, 18, 20; Math. 2:13; Jo 2:1; Act. 1:14; Rom. 8:3; I Cor. 15:3; I Pet. 4:1; Lk 22:19). He wrote that Holy Gospels proclaimed only Christ and not God, as the son of David, the son of Abraham (Nestorius PG 77:53B; Math. 1:1). The Son of God was sent by his Father "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Nestorius PG 77:53B). By this phrase he explained that the Son of God had never become perfect human, but that he was only perfect God. Thus, he proved that Christ was a man, in whom the Word of God dwelt. Consequently, if something different was claimed, it would be the

> mark of those whose minds were led astray by Greek thinking or were sick with the lunacy of Apollinarius and Arius or the other heresies or rather something more serious than these (Nestorius PG 77:56A).

The use of this term clarifies Nestorius's hatred of Apollinarius and his teaching and his fear of any potential resurgence of Apollimarism.

The Bishop of Constantinople was so confident of the correctness of his teaching that he urged Cyril to reconsider his assertion for Christ. In closing his letter, he pointed out:

> If anyone is disposed to be contentious, Paul will cry out through us to such a one, 'we recognize no other practice, neither do the churches of God' (Nestorius PG 77:56A; I Cor. 11:16).

3. THE VIRGIN MARY IS *THEOTOKOS* AND NOT *CHRISTOTOKOS*

Nestorius's fear of confusing the two natures of Christ led to his reluctance to call Mary *Theotokos*. He believed that Mary was a human being and that God cannot be born of a human being (Cyril PG 77:41C). Cyril denied the rejection of the term *Theotokos* for the Virgin Mary and its replacement with the words *Christotokos* or *Anthropotokos*. Mary bore the Only-begotten Word of God made flesh (body and soul). The Logos was united with human nature hypostatically, and with his human nature (his flesh) is one Christ, Emmanuel, the same God and man. The refusal to use the term *Theotokos* and its replacement only with *Christotokos* caused problems regarding the salvation of the human race. If Mary bore only human Christ, in an indirect way there was a denial that Christ was also God (Cyril PG 75:1273A). On this point, Christ would be another saint of Israel. From this perspective, the Incarnation became an illusion and the redemption of the human race was undermined, since Christ's sufferings were not those of the Word God incarnate, but of one who was a mere man (Cyril PG 77:236A-C). In the Incarnation of the Son of God, the most important role belonged to *Theotokos*.

Cyril used the term *Theotokos* for the Virgin Mary as the Great Athanasius, predecessor to the throne of Alexandria had done previously: "Our father Athanasius of the church of Alexandria ... called the Virgin Mary as Theotokos" (Cyril PG 77:13BC; Athanasius PG 28:1272B; Athanasius PG 26:349C, 385AB).

> A common man was not first born of the holy Virgin, and then the Word came down and entered into him, but the union being made in the womb itself, he is said to endure a birth after the flesh, ascribing to himself the birth of his own flesh (Cyril PG 77:45C).

Because the two natures are brought together in a true union, there is of both one Christ and one Son; for the difference of the natures is not removed by the union, but rather the divinity and the humanity make perfect for us the one Lord Jesus Christ by their ineffable and inexpressible union (Cyril PG 77:45C).

By this presupposition, the term *Theotokos* declared the hypostatic union of the godhead and the manhood in one person, Jesus Christ. It is known that from the time of Gregory of Nazianzus at least the bishops of the capital seemed generally to have accepted *Theotokos* without any doubt (Bethune-Baker 1908:56-59). *Theotokos* was a powerfully evocative term which belonged to the "language of devotion". Of course, he claimed

that the Virgin Mary should be called *Christotokos* only if this term was related to *Theotokos* – simultaneously *Christotokos* and *Theotokos*. Cyril's letter to the Monks of Egypt emphasised the unity of Christ as divine and human to justify the term *Theotokos* (Cyril PG 77:20D).

Cyril rejected Nestorius's accusation of not understanding the real meaning of the Incarnation according to the patristic teaching (Nestorius PG 77:49B-57B). He stressed that the Only-begotten Word of God was incarnate and made man:

> That was, taking flesh of the holy Virgin, and having made it his own from the womb, he subjected himself to birth for us, and came forth man from a woman, without casting off that which he was; but although he assumed flesh and blood, he remained what he was, God in essence and in truth (Cyril PG 77:109C).

He was a perfect man with a body (*sarx*) and a soul (*nous*), and he was borne by the Virgin Mary. It was obvious that the holy Virgin Mary did not give birth to a common man in whom the Word of God dwelt (Cyril PG 77:112A), lest Christ be thought of as a God-bearing man. For all this, the holy Virgin should be called *Theotokos*.

Finally, when Cyril had managed to refute Nestorius's teaching by means of his letters and theological works, he emphasised that in Christ his two natures were united hypostatically. And, since the holy Virgin brought forth corporally God made one with flesh, for this reason the Virgin Mary should be called *Theotokos*, not as if the nature of the Word had its origin in the flesh. Cyril instructed Nestorius to accept the 12 *Anathemas*, proposed by Cyril and accepted by the Council of Ephesus. The first *anathema* was:

> If anyone does not confess that Emmanuel is God in truth, and therefore that the holy virgin is *Theotokos* (for she bore in a fleshly way the Word of God become flesh), let him be anathema (Cyril PG 77:112A, 120C).

The fact that Cyril's first *anathema* was the acceptance of the title *Theotokos*, shows clearly that the term *Theotokos* was very significant in the teaching of *Christology*. The rejection of the term jeopardized the teaching or the hypostatic – natural union of the two natures in Christ. If there was no hypostatic union of the Godhead and the manhood in Christ, the redemption of the human race from the shackles of death and sin would be impossible. Man could not come near to God again.

For every Christian, *Theotokos* Mary is not only the mother of God, but also his/her mother. For this reason, Christians beg her with tears in their eyes to help them: "O all-praised Mother Who didst bear the Word,

holiest of all the saints, accept now our offering, and deliver us from all misfortune, and rescue from the torment to come those that cry to Thee: Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!" (Akathist Hymn to the holy Virgin, *Kontakion* 13). In concluding this short essay, we will chant: "More honourable than the Cherubim, and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim, without corruption Thou gave birth to God the Word: True *Theotokos*, we magnify Thee".

4. CONCLUSION

In his letters, Cyril explained to Nestorius why the Virgin Mary should be called *Theotokos*. He stressed that, if Nestorius refuted the title *Theotokos* for the Mother of God, it would be clear that Christ was not God in flesh (*Theos sesarkomenos*). Christ would be only a divine person and not the incarnate God. Cyril declared that Christ was at once God and man, and that the union was a real and concrete event, or we might say "a substantive reality", not a cosmetic exercise. In his third letter to Nestorius, Cyril mentioned the hypostatic union as a "natural union", whereby he meant a radically concrete union "such as the soul of man has with its own body" (Mcguckin 1994:212). Nestorius' heretic teaching jeopardized the salvation of the human race. The term *Theotokos* had been used by both Athanasius the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus. The term *Christotokos* for the Virgin Mary should be accepted only if it is related to the term *Theotokos*. Nestorius's denial of the title *Theotokos*, with its inherent denunciation of the communication of idioms, negated, for him, an authentic understanding of the Incarnation and so the efficacy of Christ's salvific work (Weinandy & Keating 2003:31). Mary gave birth to Emmanuel (God and man) and, for this reason, she deserves the title *Theotokos*.

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ABBREVIATION

PG: Patrologia Graeca. Ed. J.P. Migne

Keywords	*Trefwoorde*
Theotokos	Theotokos
Cyril of Alexandria	Cyril van Aleksandria
Virgin Mary	Maagd Maria