

Abstract

Heresies represent the strangest chapter not only in the history of the Church but also in the history of spiritual human behaviour as well. Human reason and sensitivity tend to have such strange absurd ridiculous and even dangerous forms which go from the edge of truth and decency to the deepest irrationality and fantastic, from credible to unconsciousness and thus they sometimes belong to psychotherapy¹.

Although the heresy and the schism were a bad thing for the Church they also brought a positive aspect. Our Lord Jesus Christ didn't write anything, but transmitted His teaching orally. The Saint Disciples and Evangelists were the first to put down in writing what they saw and heard. The defenders of Orthodoxy from the Early Church needed to write the true doctrine. Thus we came in the possession of very beautiful works both from a dogmatic and literary point of view, such as the works of Saint Ignatius, Saint Cyprian, Tertullian, Saint Athanasius, Saint Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus and, why not, of the writer Origen, to whom we have dedicated a chapter in our thesis.

Heresies have been impending in the life of the Church. Both Jesus Christ and the Apostles were aware of the fact that heresies were the impediments that were about to come upon the Church: "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!" (Matthew 18:7); "No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval" (1 Corinthians 11:19). Thus the Church has watched over the revealed truth and learned how to guard it and how to transmit it to the following generations.

From the very beginning the Church stood firmly up for its teachings, although it defended it during the rough times of the persecutions which came upon it, started by the Jews at first, and then by the Roman emperors who thought Christianity to be a dangerous sect against the integrity of the empire. Many of the defenders of Orthodoxy died as martyrs during this period, and this demonstrates once again the strength of their faith and, more than that, the fact that for them, faith was a way of living.

¹ Pr. Prof. T. M. Popescu, *Privire istorică asupra schismelor, ereziilor și sectelor*, in ST 7-8/1950, p. 347.

So, starting from this idea of faith as a way of living, we conceived our thesis *Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church and Teachings for Today* more like a study of patrology than a historical one. Our thesis is full of citations from the works of the most representative Holy Fathers and writers of the first four Christian centuries, citations which emphasize their Orthodoxy and their way of living in an Orthodox spirit. Their wisdom, which can be noticed in their writings, came through prayer as inspiration from the Holy Spirit.

What is Orthodoxy? The Romanian Dictionary gives us the following explanation: orthodoxy – conformity, agreement with the traditional principles of the Christian Orthodox Church.

Orthodoxy comprises in its etimological essence two Greek terms *orthos* and *doxa* which mean rightful praise. It is with this meaning that we used it in our entire thesis.

Heresy means choice, separate opinion, error, sect. It is used to show wrong teachings, deviations from Orthodoxy, errors of doctrine of those who haven't received or haven't kept the Christian doctrine in the way that it was preached by the Saint Apostles.

The first chapter of the thesis is *The Pagan Philosophy and the Genesis of Heresy within the Christian Church*. In order to understand what philosophy stands for, we explained the word and the origins of philosophy, its place of birth, and the factors related to its appearance and we also made a summary of the most important philosophers and their teachings in the ancient period.

Philosophy is of Greek origin: *filosofia* consisting of two parts, or two terms: *filos* which has more than one meaning (friend, loving, love) and *sofia* meaning wisdom. So *philosophy* may be translated through *friend of wisdom* or *love of wisdom*. We may thus give a definition: Philosophy is the love of wisdom. Sometimes the word *filos* has been translated by linguists as study, so we may also say that philosophy is the study of wisdom². The encyclopedic dictionary of philosophy gives the same meaning for the word philosophy, as *love of wisdom*.

² Marin Ștefănescu, *Filosofia creștină*, Universe Publishing House, Bucharest, 1943, p. 26.

The origins of the word *philosophy* do not coincide exactly with the origins of philosophy³. Even from ancient times, people have tried to know what world is, in order to rule themselves better and to be happier. But each of them had different knowledge. The thing that was considered in the contemporary world to be the greatest in value was called *sofia*, in Greek, meaning wisdom, and people who had this kind of knowledge were called *sofoi*, meaning *wise*. The first philosophers of Greece appears to have called themselves “wise” (*sofoi*). The word *sofoi*, which is used by Homer designates a superiority based on a technical ability: *sofox* is someone who has the intention of doing something. The following history of the word supports the idea of a superiority based on knowledge. But where does the least contested superiority come from if not from the highest knowledge? Wisdom comes to indicate, as opposed to particular sciences or techniques, a total knowledge. “I want to speak about everything” says Democritus at the beginning of his book *On Nature*. Thus there were born in Greece a certain kind of people who didn’t have modesty as their strongest feature, but claimed to have the full and complete knowledge; wise *sofoi* and wisemen (*sofistai*) which had all in common this pretension, even though they were different in their abilities⁴.

The historical and geographical conjuncture seems to have enhanced the birth of philosophy in Greece, and the factors which lead to its appearance were of linguistic and sociological nature.

In the second part of the first chapter we showed what was the influence of philosophy on the thinking of the church fathers and writers of the first four centuries of the Christian Church, as well as the opinion of the most important of them.

Christians have used the Greek thinking for its coherent expression of faith. “Once they became Christian, the Greek did not entirely repudiate the Ancient thinking. They were aware of the superiority that this wonderful inheritance gave them on the Western and used this thinking with pleasure, when it didn’t come against the dogmas, in order to present their faith in a coherent form”⁵. Pagan philosophy, especially the Greek one, had, undoubtedly, an influence on the thinking of the Church Fathers and Writers of

³ Marin Ștefănescu, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁴ Aubenque Pierre, *art. cit.*

⁵ Louis Bréhier, *Civilizația Bizantină*, translated by Nicolae Spinescu, Scientific Publishing House, Bucharest, 1994, p. 324.

the first Christian centuries. The first theologians were either pagan, or Jews converted to Christianity, or they were Christian from their birth. In both cases they studied in the great Academies and philosophical schools of the time where they came to know philosophy and studied it in detail, and later on used it, as we have already seen, in their works or borrowed certain terms to help them present their Christian faith. We may mention here Saint Justin Martyr and Philosopher, Origen and Clement of Alexandria the leaders of the Catechetical School of Alexandria and also Tertullian the representative of the west. They had different ideas on philosophy, but Saint Clement of Alexandria is the one who *christianized philosophy* and who saw an identity between the true philosophy and the Christian religion, in that the first is the knowledge that culminates with the latter and that the Christian religion does not chase philosophy away, but wishes it as high as it could be in order for them to become one.

In chapter 2, named *Heresies that occurred within the Church up to the 3rd Century*, I have presented briefly the most important heresies and schisms and the teachings of their founders from this period.

Two great heresies occur within the Church even from the times of the Saint Apostles. The first is mostly Jewish, which supports the obligativity of the Jewish law, and the other, more libertine, which starts a revolt against everything connected to law, which ended up promoting libertinage. To these two other queer speculations added sometimes. It is true that they were never successful among the regular Jews, but they were very popular among Hellenistic Jews. Jewish heresies put Christianity for the first time in front of a real danger, of a doctrinarian nature, trying to transform it into a Jewish propaganda agency among the pagan⁶. The Apostolic Council, from the year 50, is the result of these attempts of Judaization of Christianity.

Gnosticism, in all its variants, which is a strange and complicated system of heresies through the multitude and variation of its ideas and terms, was also a danger for the Church.

Saint Paul was the first to criticize gnosticism in his first Epistle to Timothy, naming the gnostics' science *false knowledge* (1 Timothy 6:20).

⁶ Prof. T. M. Popescu, *Privire istorică asupra schismelor, ereziilor și sectelor*, in ST 7-8/1950, p. 353.

Gnosticism was the attempt to make science a superior understanding of religion. It rationalized religion and thought that it assured the knowledge of the religious truth and the possibility of gaining redemption through it⁷.

According to the Holy Fathers that have been studied, the oldest leader of the gnostic School was Simon Magus (or Simon the Magician). Together with him we also mentioned Marcion, Menander, Saturnilus, Cerinthus and Basilides. They all have been negatively influenced by Greek philosophy and created systems with demiurge and aeons, they share the gnostic dualism, they consider the material world to be eternal and evil, they believe in the pre-existence of the souls which have committed sins in a past life and transform our Lord Jesus Christ into a creature or consider themselves to be the embodiment of Jesus Christ, as in the case of Saturnilus.

The greatest gnostic master is Valentinus. He explains the existence of evil and the fall of the souls not from a dualist perspective, as his predecessors, but as a drama that occurred in within divinity itself. So he attenuates the Oriental gnostic dualism and perceives the world not through the eyes of rigorous dualism but of parallelism between the superior world of ideas and the inferior world of shapes⁸.

During this period the Church also confronted with other heresies or heretical ideas which were spread by Jews or gnostics. Such a heretical idea is that of a kingdom of God which will take place on earth after the parousia. This heresy came from Judaism although officially it was not preached by them. In fact, millenarianism⁹ appeared as a consequence of the wrong interpretation of several texts from the Old Testament, more precisely of several messianic prophecies¹⁰.

These ideas have entered the Church through some of the writers and Fathers of the Church, who stated that after the second advent and before the Last Judgement, there will be a one thousand years kingdom on earth, during which Jesus Christ will rule together with the righteous who will enjoy every happiness.

⁷ Rev. Prof. Ioan Rămureanu, *Istoria Bisericească Universală*, EIBMBOR, 2nd edition, vol. 1, Bucharest, 1975, p. 130.

⁸ Rev. Prof. PhD. Ioan G. Coman, *Patrologie*, vol. 1, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1984, p. 78.

⁹ Millenarianism is the Latin form of what is called *Chiliasm* in Greek.

¹⁰ Such ideas can be found in the Book of Enoch XVII – XXXVI, The Testament of The 12 Patriarchs, the 4th Book of Ezdra.

Millenarianist ideas can also be found in the works of Tertullian, Hippolytus, Apollinaris of Laodicea, Lactantius, Victorinus of Pettau, Saint Ambrose of Milan, but chiliasm receives a heretical meaning only starting with Montanus who stated that a heavenly Jerusalem will be founded and the one thousand years kingdom of Jesus Christ will come and He will rule together with the righteous¹¹.

The third chapter analyses the history and doctrine of the heresies which appeared in the 4th century besides the two great heresies: arianism and pneumatomachism, which are treated in a special chapter of the thesis because of their amplitude.

In the 4th century, the first big inside problem of the Christian Church, which emperor Constantine had to deal with directly, was donatism. This schism can be studied in detail not only from the works of Eusebius of Caesarea, but also from the works of Optatus bishop of Mileve, in Numidia, who left us a thorough account about the facts, fought against the doctrine of the donatism and even attached to his work some of the official papers such as the file of the election of Caecilian. The donatist crisis is the first to have affected the Imperial Church. It was based, at least at its beginning, on a disciplinary conflict between several bishops of North Africa. But in the back of this conflict there is the opposition of two theologies, two ideas of the Church. Blessed Augustine, the main opponent of donatism, was the one who determined the others to consider it as a heresy and treat it consequently. In fact, even emperor Constantine, starting with 313 considered the donatists heretics¹², although the Orthodox Church¹³ hesitated a lot until classifying this crisis: heresy or schism. So, it is very correct to consider donatism a crisis which affected doctrine and not a simple schism.

Donatism occurred during Decius' persecutions. In fact, this crisis known under the name of donatist schism has its origins in the contested election of the bishop Caecilian of Carthage, who was elected by the clergy of Carthage, but the election was immediately contested by a part of the community, who accused him of the fact that he shared his predecessor's attitude and executed his orders very strictly and he let the ones

¹¹ Anton I. Adămuț, *Literatură și filozofie creștină*, vol. 1, Fides Publishing House, Iassy, 1997, p. 39.

¹² Eusebe, *Vita Constantini*, II, 69, P. G., t. XX, col. 1621.

¹³ It is improper to speak about an Orthodox Church during this period but to distinguish between the Donatist Church and the Church that kept the true faith we will use this expression, Orthodox Church for the church that kept the teachings unaltered.

who were imprisoned to starve to death¹⁴. The fact that Caecilian was not confirmed as bishop of Carthage by the council of Cirta and the ordaining of the reader Majorinus as bishop became the beginning of the schism. Majorin was followed by Donatus in 313 who had the idea of opposing the Orthodox Church an Autonomous Church of Africa.

Donatus was intelligent enough to realise that in order to create an autonomous Church and to separate from the Orthodox Church he also needed a doctrine. And he found one. For the donatists the simple fact of being in communion with the one who betrayed Christianity attracted the same punishment for both sides.

Because Caecilian had been ordained by a traitor, he himself became one together with all his party, which meant their total excommunication. This meant also that the mysteries performed by them were not valid. The donatists adopted here the ecclesiological doctrine of Saint Cyprian of Carthage (258) “There is no redemption outside the Church” (Letter 73, 11), so there are no valid mysteries. Because they thought themselves to be the only true church, the Church of the saints, they decided to repeat the Mystery of Baptism to all those who came from the communities that were in communion with Caecilian and his successors. For them the sinners were no longer Christian¹⁵.

The most fervent opponent of donatists was Blessed Augustin.

The other heresies that appeared at the beginning of the 4th century are mostly linked to the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the perpetual virginity of Mary, some of them saying that Virgin Mary had other children as well, the so/called brothers of Jesus mentioned by the Scripture. They are mostly tributary to Donat’s heresy or to Arius who was condemned by the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325.

Starting with the 4th chapter of the thesis we presented the Orthodox opposition to the heresies presented in the previous chapters and we started with the Apostolic Fathers.

Some of the Apostolic Fathers were contemporary with the Saint Apostles whom they have met, and because they heard the teachings directly from their mouths, they convey to us a teaching derived from theirs. Most of their works are pastoral writings. They are based on the New Testament, especially on the Epistles and they are not scientific works which present Christian doctrine, but simple works. Nevertheless their

¹⁴ Daniel Rops, in “*Histoire de l’Église du Christ*”, Edition Bernard Grasset, 1965, p. 377.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 379.

works are of great importance for us because they are “testimonies of the Christian truth against the Jewish and heretical tendencies of infiltration”¹⁶.

Among the Apostolic Fathers who fought against heresies we mention Saint Clement of Rome, Saint Ignatius of Antioch and Saint Polycarp of Smyrna.

Saint Ignatius of Antioch was the most active of them all, he sent pastoral letters within the Church through which he defended faith especially against Marcion and the docetists.

The rule of faith that the saint gives to the Christians against the docetists is the most important and it is also his confession of Orthodox faith: “Be deaf, then, to any talk that ignores Jesus Christ, of David’s lineage, of Mary; who was really born, ate, and drank; was really persecuted under Pontius Pilate; was really crucified and died, in the sight of heaven and earth and the underworld. He was really raised from the dead, for his Father raised him, just as his Father will raise us, who believe on him, through Christ Jesus, apart from whom we have no genuine life”¹⁷.

Although heretics are called by Saint Ignatius, beasts with human faces, he advises the faithful to avoid them, but to pray for them “maybe they will repent, although it’s hard to believe, and this is only in Christ’s power, Who is our true life”¹⁸. However he excommunicates them requiring the community to exclude them from Eucharist for they do not believe in it: “Keep them away from Eucharist and prayer (liturgy) for they do not confess that Eucharist is the body of our Lord Jesus Christ...”¹⁹.

Through his letters, Saint Ignatius wanted to prevent, to give a sentinel voice, as he himself acknowledges, to the Church of Asia, especially to that of Smyrna, which was a proper territory for the *poisonous herbs*, against the spread of the docetism, an enemy who attempted on reality and historical truth which is the fountain that gives life to Christians: the life, death, passions and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the second part of chapter 4, which is the most ample, we presented in detail the known and enshrined works of the Christian apologists which fought against heresies.

¹⁶ Arhid. Prof. Dr. Constantin Voicu, *Patrologie*, vol. 1, Basilica Publishing House of the Romanian Patriarchate, Bucharest, 2009, p. 49.

¹⁷ San Ignacio, *Carta a los Tralianos, La mala Hierba de la Herejia*, VI, 1-2, VII, 1, in *Padres Apostólicos*, introduction, notes in Spanish by Daniel Ruiz Bueno, La Editorial Católica, Madrid, MCML, p. 471.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 489-490.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

The period of the Christian apologists is most important for the Church for it is now that the basis of theology have been established. We may call the apologists the first theologians of the Church. In their works we find the first steps for a formal study of the theological doctrine.

Together with the Greek apologists, the Church literature addresses for the first time to the outside world. The apologists did not address only to pagans or jews. Most of them wrote treatises against heresies, which, unfortunately, got lost in the 4th century²⁰. Among the anti-gnostic writers of this period we can mention bishops such as Melito of Sardis, Philip of Gortyna, Theophilus of Antioch and Justin Martyr and Philosopher, who wrote against Marcion. We may find some anti-gnostic tendencies in apocryphal writings as well, for example in *Acta Pauli* and *Epistula Apostolorum*. Hegesippus also wrote against the gnostics in his memories form which we enharited some fragments. Among the most fervent defenders of Orthodoxy we mention Saint Irenaeus of Lyon, who wrote his famous work *Adversus haereses* and Tertullian of Carthage in the 3rd century, who through two of his works *De carne Cristi I* and *De resurrection carnis* proves with the help of the Holy Scripture that the two gnostic theories on the appearance of Christ's body and the denial of the bodies' resurrection have no basis. Three other works oriented against gonstics are *Against Hermogenes*, *Against the Valentinians* and *Against Marcion*. In his work *De praescriptione haereticorum* presents the value of the apostolic tradition against the gnostic tradition which claimed to have the real teachings of Jesus Christ.

Tertullian was the first and the greatest Wetern apologist who worte in Latin. He combines a deep knowledge of the Greek and Latin philosophy, laws and language with an endless vigour, a vivid rhetoric and a sarcastic humour. He admitted no compromises. It seems that *the truth* was the reason of his conversion: "In front of such an amazing perseverance everybody feels surprised by a disquiet and wishes ardently to discover its cause; when he finds the truth he embraces it immediately"²¹. Truth was his supreme goal in defending the Church against pagans and heretics.

Tertullian wanted to cease once and for all any controversy between Orthodox and all the heresies, using the technical argument, borrowed from Roman law, by the

²⁰ Hubert Jedin, *Manual de Historia de la Iglesia*, Editorial Herder, Barcelona, 1966, p. 298.

²¹ *Ad. Scapulam* 5, Pin p. 547.

prescripts. In the legal jargon, prescription means passing a possession into someone else's property, based on the fact that it has been possessed for a long time. This time, the object of the litigation between Church and its opponents is the Holy Scripture, because the heretics used it often in order to support their ideas which they interpreted incorrectly.

According to Tertullian, heretics do not have the right of using the Scriptures for there is a prescription which excludes all argument: they cannot use the Bible for the simple reason that it is not theirs: "We are therefore come to (the gist of) our position; for at this point we were aiming, and for this we were preparing in the preamble of our address (which we have just completed),—so that we may now join issue on the contention to which our adversaries challenge us. They put forward the Scriptures, and by this insolence of theirs they at once influence some. In the encounter itself, however, they weary the strong, they catch the weak, and dismiss waverers with a doubt. Accordingly, we oppose to them this step above all others, of not admitting them to any discussion of the Scriptures. If in these lie their resources, before they can use them, it ought to be clearly seen to whom belongs the possession of the Scriptures, that none may be admitted to the use thereof who has no title at all to the privilege."²² Without this right of using the Scriptures, heretics remain disarmed in their fight against the Church.

Another famous apologist of the time is Origen, to whom we have reserved a whole chapter entitled *Origen Orthodox or Heretic?*. After a presentation of his life we spoke about his work *The True Doctrine* in which Origen condemns Celsus who wanted to convert Christian to paganism, asking them to "be ashamed by their own religion. From the defense presented by Origen we can understand the author's belief that Christianity is a religion revealed by God, and no matter how fervent and learned were Celsus' critics, they were powerless because, in fact, Origen did not defend a doctrine but most of all the supernatural reality of the divine energy acting within history, and thus contributed to the ennobling of the entire humankind's life"²³.

In the third subchapter dedicated to Origen we presented the opinions of different theologians regarding Origen's teachings and his conviction at the Fifth Ecumenical Council.

²² Prof. Nicolae Chițescu, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

²³ Pr. Prof. T. Bodogae, *Studiu introductiv*, in Origen, *Contra lui Celsus*, in Origen, *Scrieri alese*, part IV, in the collection *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 9, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1984, p. 7.

Among the theologians that we have studied we would like to mention: Rev. Professor Isidor Todoran, Rev. Prof. Teodor Bodogae, Father Dumitru Stăniloae, Archimandrite Paulin Lecca, Jean Danielau, Henri Crouzel, Evans Jonas, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Rev. Prof. Ioan M. Bota and Rev. Teodor M. Popescu.

Their opinions are different. If father Dumitru Stăniloae considers Origen's teachings heretic from the very beginning, father Teodor M. Popescu becomes Origen's advocate, in his study *The Misrepresentation of Origen's Story (Denaturarea istoriei lui Origen)*.

Father Teodor M. Popescu follows Origen's destiny during the period from his first conviction while he was alive for canonical reasons²⁴ and his final conviction three hundred years after his death, "not as a heretic, but as a Greek, pagan, by emperor Justinian in 543 and 553". The Romanian theologian asks himself some questions to which he answers himself: "But how come that the same Origen, considered the glory of the Orthodoxy and Church's athlete in the 3rd-4th centuries, became from *the father of the Christian theology* a pagan idolatrous monster and *father of all heresy*? Why did the Church, after it absorbed all it could assimilate from Origen, after it took everything it needed and suited it, throw everything with horror and disgust, labels him as heretic and throws the rest, together with the author in the tomb of anathema, where he lays to the present day. In this tomb, the *father of theology* was slowly introduced from Demetrios to Justinian. The first anticipated the official attitude of the Church towards Origen. The latter finishes the formalities of this funeral service, and places on the tomb a block instead of a cross: the edict from 543, which shows the successors that there lay the contagious remains of the greatest heretic. This was the threatening announcement that he must be avoided and overpassed"²⁵.

In this article the author brings to light all the ins and outs of the affair, the real psychological reasons and theological consequences of the systematic disparagement of Origen. His conviction caused the rich spring to dry up through passion and ignorance

²⁴ Origen was convicted by bishop Demetrios in 232, because he preached in a church although he was not ordained, and because he had been ordained outside his jurisdiction although self-inflicted wounds excluded him from the clergy.

²⁵ T. M. Popescu, *Denaturarea istoriei lui Origen*, in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, No. 4, 1926, p. 246.

eager to convict what lead to the draining of theology until it inevitably became scholastic.

“Origen’s work was ruined not through a dispute with a theologian or the anathemas of a council: time itself, in a long course of years, kept on hitting just like the waves in a shore, through theologians and councils, on the imposing moment, which was the doctrinary system of Origen, deformed it with the help of unfavourable circumstances, which play the role of natural bad weather, until they brought him to the state of ruin which the Church then convicted as such at the order of the theologian emperor Justinian”²⁶.

This is also the conclusion of the chapter on the great man from Alexandria.

In the fifth chapter we spoke about the great anti-Trinitarian heresies of the 4th century.

Arianism is the first great Christological heresy which denied directly the co-eternity, consubstantiality and the divinity of the Word. Born in Egypt, it created within the Roman Empire a religious crisis for about a century. Defeated in Egypt, the heresy would become popular amongst the Germanic tribes that invaded the empire, but it would slowly die during the 7th century just to reappear after the Reform, at some individuals or religious sects.

It was convicted, as we all know, at the First Ecumenical Council in Niceea.

The second great heresy is pneumatomachism. It represents the extension of the arian crisis, a new form of arianism, the fight against divinity conducted now in relation to the Holy Spirit.

Pneumatomachism (*pneuma* – Spirit and *mache* – fight) is a wrong teaching which fights against the truth about the Holy Spirit denying His divinity, equality and consubstantiality with the Father and the Son. Through a wrong interpretation of the text from the Epistle to the Hebrews (1:14), the pneumatomachi came to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is just a servant, superior to the spiritual nature of the angels, a creation of the Father, for through the expression *all things*, as in *through him all things were made* (John 1:3) the Holy Spirit is implicitly included. In their conception, the Holy Spirit is a creature who occupies an intermediary position between God and the creatures and

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

thus he cannot be venerated as God because he is not consubstantial with the Father and the Son.

Their teaching was convicted by the Second Ecumenical Council from Constantinople.

Among the greatest defenders of Orthodoxy during this troubled period for the Church, we can mention Saint Athanasius the Great, Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, who participated not only to the working sessions of the councils, but they also wrote treatises against heretics because the two heresies, although convicted, continued to exist and poison the Church for a long time after their appearance.

These two important controversies lead to the precise formulation of the dogma of the Holy Trinity which is presented summarized in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

Each local Church had a confession of faith. The first confession of the kind is that of Peter “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16).

There are multiple causes that determined the appearance of the symbols of faith although for a very long period it was thought that the appearance of the symbols of faith was the result of the dogmatic polemics and disputes of the early community. Oscar Cullmann says regarding this problem that “it is a common error to say admit that there is only one external cause”²⁷. He states that there are five simultaneous causes²⁸ which resulted in the appearance of the symbols of faith:

- a. In the early Christian centuries the most frequent reciting of a confession of faith was on the occasion of the baptism.
- b. Each time the community gathered the Christian felt the need of confessing faith through an established text.
- c. The confessions of faith were also present during exorcisms and healings, although these occasions were seldom.
- d. Persecutions.

²⁷ Oscar Cullmann, *Les Premières Confessions de foi Chrétiennes*, dans Cahiers de la Revue D'histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses, publiés par la Faculté de Théologie Protestante de L'Université de Strasbourg, nr. 30, Deuxième Edition, Presses Universitaires De France, Paris, 1984, p.13

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

- e. The polemics against the heretics are the most important reason which lead to the appearance of a confession of faith, the fight against heretics and their wrong teachings.

Both in the New Testament and in the writings of the apostolic fathers we find two models of confessions of faith: binary and trinitary.

The first model is the most frequent. A famous example is given by the acrostic name ICHTHYS (*fish* in Greek) which is formed from the initials of the formula “Jesus Christ, Son of God, the Saviour”. Such binary models can be found both in Saint Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna. They can also be found until the end of the 2nd century in Saint Irenaeus and the beginning of the 3rd century in Tertullian. Polycarp says: “Believing in the One Who resurrected our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead giving Him glory”²⁹.

The trinitary model can be found in the *Didache*: “Concerning baptism, you should baptize this way: After first explaining all things, baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in flowing water”³⁰. This formula which we find in the *Didache* has a very important role in the genesis of the symbols. It is a proof of the use of a trinitary creed within the baptism.

In Orient there was a habit for each Church to use its own particular formula of the Creed. When a bishop was ordained, he sent his bishop brothers the formula of his faith, or better said the Symbol of his Church. They acknowledged the Symbol of their brother and accepted him into their communion. This system seems to have worked for a long time, until the generalization of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

Thanks to Eusebius of Caesarea, we came to know the baptismal Symbol of the Church of Caesarea and Palestine.

“We believe in one God the Father Almighty,
Maker of all things visible and invisible;
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God,
God of God, Light of Light, Life of Life,
the only-begotten Son, the first-born of every creature,

²⁹ Polycarpe, *Lettre aux Philippiens*, 2,1; SC 10bis, Edition de CERF, Paris, p. 205.

³⁰ *Didachè*, 7,1 ; SC 248, Edition de CERF, Paris, p. 171.

begotten of God the Father before all ages,
by whom also all things were made;
who for our salvation was made flesh and made his home among men;
and suffered; and rose on the third day;
and ascended to the Father; and will come again in glory, to judge the quick and the dead.

[We believe] also in one Holy Ghost.

We believe that each of these is and exists,
the Father truly Father, and the Son truly Son, and the Holy Ghost truly Holy Ghost; even as our Lord, when sending forth his disciples to preach, said: ‘Go and make disciples of all nations’³¹.

It seems that the text of this creed formed the basis for the Nicene Creed, which was completed at the Second Ecumenical Council after convicting Macedonius with the Symbol of the Church from Jerusalem, thus giving birth to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, which became rule of faith which maintains the unity of the Church.

The final chapter proves briefly that the heresies of the early church are the spring of the neoprotestant cultures and emphasizes an old heresy which resurfaced under a different name, the bioethic heresy, which states that the conception and fertility are no longer simultaneous acts, but the fertilization is only the beginning of the conception and only at the end of this period we can speak about a human life. These so-called discoveries open the door wide to abortion because the embryo does not have a soul.

This *bioethic heresy* has its origins in the pagan philosophy. Those who speak of a late animation are the Catholic theologians which consider as a base the wrong anthropology of Aristotle, a theory that was later interpreted by Blessed Augustin and by Thomas d’Aquino.

The struggle between Orthodoxy and heresy never ceased and never will cease until the second advent. Until then we must guard Jesus Christ’s words who urges us: “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation” (Matthew 26:41).

³¹ J. Lebreton et Jacques Zeiller, *Histoire De L’Eglise Depuis les origines jusqu’a nos jours*, publiée sous la direction de Augustin Fliche et Victor Martin; L’Eglise primitive 1, Bloud&Gay, Haute Marne 1934, p. 257

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