

JESUS NOT JUST A PROPHET. JESUS CHRIST, SON OF GOD IN HEBREWS 1:1-14

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ABSTRACT. A defining note of contemporary society is the diversity of the religious phenomenon, a diversity that extends into the sphere of religious values, morality and practices. This has led to the emergence of religious pluralism. From the perspective of religious pluralism, there are several ways to reach the divine reality – God. The world’s religions are culturally determined responses to divine revelation, but the truth of each religion is to be complemented. This article aims to offer an exegetical analysis of the text in Hebrews 1:1-14 from the perspective of dogmatic content. Our intention in this paper is to give an answer to the redefined image of Jesus as presented in the Qur’an, by demonstrating the superiority and uniqueness of the person of Jesus Christ, while emphasizing his theological relevance (through concepts like exclusivism, inclusiveness, theological pluralism, etc.); Islam’s perspective on the person and identity of Jesus; Christ’s exegetical relevance as he is the only way; Christ’s superiority in his being, and the characteristics of his relationship with the Godhead.

KEY WORDS: Christ, relationship, Godhead, theological pluralism, Qur’an

Introduction

In the context of a pluralistic society, whose relational paradigm is theological pluralism, the Epistle to the Hebrews reminds us of the need for salvation, given by God in Christ. Christ and His Gospel are not one of the many ways of salvation. The Epistle to the Hebrews shows the necessity of Christ’s redemptive work, not the probability of the cross; rather, its absolute necessity. Thus, it is necessary to scripturally redefine the concept of the superiority of Jesus Christ’s person and work, showing that He is not only an enrichment of mankind’s religiosity, but God’s unique way of reconciling the world to Himself. Christianity is unique, and its uniqueness is Christ. In this context, we propose this paper as an attempt to demonstrate the superiority and uniqueness of the person of Jesus Christ. In order to present the identity and person of Jesus Christ, we chose a reading of the text of Hebrews 1:1-14 from the perspective of dogmatic content. The approach we propose is an attempt to define Christ’s superiority from the perspective of His relationship with the Godhead. Christ is superior because of the ontological status of His being, a status that qualifies Him for a higher work, the work of mediation between

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God and man. One could thus say that through this incursion into the truth of Scripture, we will become aware of Christ's superiority, manifested in His being and actions. He is the only way to God, and the Church is called to affirm and live according to this truth in a context of religious pluralism.

Theological Relevance

The contemporary society is characterized by religious pluralism, which claims that there is not a single, unique and final revelation in history, made by God in His Son. From the perspective of religious pluralism, there are several ways to reach the divine reality, God. The different religions of the world are culturally determined responses to divine revelation, and the truth of each religion is complemented (see Runia 1994: 4-28).

Klass Runia presents three main attitudes toward the other religions. The first attitude is exclusivism, promoted by Karl Barth who rejects God's self-revelation outside of Christ. There is one Savior and one Gospel. All men have a certain knowledge of God through the general revelation in nature, but this cannot save them. The second attitude is that of inclusiveness, which supports openness to other religions while preserving the religious tradition of each religion. The inclusive position holds that salvation is potential in every religion, and the one who always saves is Christ, through His hidden presence. This makes Karl Rahner speak of the so-called anonymous Christian who, although not in direct contact with Christ, exists in Christ's realm. The third main attitude pertains to theological pluralism as promoted by John Hick, who rejects Christianity as the supreme expression of religious life, considering it to be one of many beliefs. In fact, he considers all the world's religions as valid and equal ways of reaching the supreme reality. From this perspective, the incarnation is not seen as a unique event that took place literally in history, but as a myth (Runia 1994: 4-28). In this theological framework, Islam, through the theology it promotes, seeks a redefinition of Jesus Christ's person and work. The proper name used for Jesus in the Qur'an is Isa, the Arabic equivalent for Jesus, and it is mentioned 25 times (Saritoprak 2014: 6).

The Qur'an conveys its own special message about Jesus (Isa), meant to correct, reinterpret, refute and replace previous biblical revelations about the incarnation. In the text of the Qur'an, the following honorable titles are attributed to Jesus: Messiah (Masih, see Jeffery 2007: 265) is a word borrowed from Hebrew, and the Christian meaning of this title was never adopted by Muslim writers) and Son of Mary, Messenger, Prophet, Servant, Word and Spirit of God (Parrinder 2003: 16). Isa from the Qur'an is a mere creation of Allah's power, "a product of God's commandment coming into being (Beaumont 2018: 139)" [...] He [the angel] said: (So it will be). Allah creates what He will. If He decrees a thing, He only says unto it: Be! and it is!" [Translation

of the meanings of Noble Qur'an, 3:47] and a physical descendant of Mary... "Messiah Jesus [Isa], son of Mary [Maryam], was [no more than] a Messenger of Allah [...]" [translation of the meanings of Noble Qur'an, 4:171]. From an Islamic perspective "Lo! the likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, then said unto him: Be! and he is" [translation of the meanings of Noble Qur'an, 3:59]. By transferring upon Muhammad some fundamental features belonging to Christ, Islam distorted the true image of Christ in order to conform to a new religious framework. Christ in Islam has a completely human dimension, the Qur'anic emphasis being on His human nature. For this reason, there is no possibility of establishing a connection between the person of Christ and Muslim theology (Oddbjorn 2010: 2-3). The Qur'anic paradigm teaches that Jesus was *one* in the prophetic line, simply "a servant of God" (Khalidi 2003: 12), a messenger of God who brought the divine message to humanity and who does not claim to claim to be God. The denial of divinity is based on the idea that every messenger of God is a *shahid* (witness, see Massod 2012: 227) of the true faith before his people.

So who is Jesus to Muslims? Mehdi Hasan claims that "*Jesus* or Isa, as he is known in Arabic, is considered by Islam to be a Muslim prophet rather than the Son of God or God incarnate" (Hasan 2009). Therefore,

say [o, Mohammed]: He is Allah, [Al] Ahad [One and Unique, the One who does not have a partner and outside of whom there is no other divinity, Unique in His divine Being, in His Attributes and Actions. He is Indivisible and not three in one, as Christians say]. ~ [The One who is sufficient to himself, the One who is Perfect in his Glory and Honor, in His Attributes, in his Knowledge, in His Power, Who needs nothing from His creations but Whom the entire creation needs, while He does not eat, does not drink and does not die]! ~ He neither begets nor is born ~ And there is none equal or comparable to Him.» [Translation of the meanings of Noble Qur'an, 112:1-4]

Islam humanizes and assimilates Jesus as a prophet secondary to Muhammad, giving him the title of "Chief of the Prophets" (Qureshi 2018: 97). Isa, redefined by the Qur'an, is one of those in the prophetic line, a prophet with a unique narrative of birth, a created being who is a slave of Allah and a sign to people. Carefully but clearly, the Qur'an vehemently denies Christ's Sonship in relation to God, disapproves His divinity and redemptive status, and implicitly denies the truth of the incarnation. Such a religious context raises the following questions: Are there alternative soteriological spaces in which people can find salvation? Is salvation possible without the moment of conversion, without the acceptance of Jesus Christ? Is Jesus Christ the true center of God's self-revelation? Is Jesus Christ the true God?

Exegetic Relevance

For centuries, the Jewish nation's idea of God had been centered around the Jerusalem Temple, the Levites and the priests. The appearance of Jesus, the claim that He is the Messiah of Israel, the Son of God, was officially rejected. However, there was a growing group of Jews who claimed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. The tension was between Jesus and the Temple, between the animal sacrifices and His sacrifice, between Judaism and Christianity (Gooding 1995: 4).

The Epistle to the Hebrews is a word of counsel (Hebrews 13:22) to a group of Jewish Christians facing a crisis of loyalty. The recipients were in danger of losing their trust, hope, and thus returning to Judaism. Returning to Judaism involved three things: defying the work of Jesus by deliberately denying His Divinity; the denial of the infinite value of His blood and implicitly of the covenant sealed by Him; considering salvation a nonsense (Gooding 1995: 19, 21).

The fundamental issue between Judaism and Christianity was about the divinity of Jesus. The author responds to this need primarily through a doctrinal exposition in which he establishes the uniqueness, superiority and finality of God's revelation in His Son, Jesus Christ. There are several stances regarding the literary structure of the book of Hebrews. The traditional position divides the epistle according to the Pauline model, in a doctrinal and a practical section (1:1-10:39). According to A. Vanhaye, the key for structuring the epistle is found in six literary elements used by the author: announcing the subject (1:4); inclusion (1:5-13); connecting words (1:4, 2:13); characteristic terms; alliteration; chiasm. He divides the epistle according to the practical method of exposition, while Fenton uses the model of exposition-prayer, models that are repeated throughout the entire epistle (see MacLead 1989: 186). Hebrews 1:1-4 encapsulates many of the key themes that will be developed in the following chapters. God's saving action is affirmed *in* and *through* Christ. It is based on two elements that determine the entire Christology of the book of Hebrews: the status of Christ as the exalted Son and the sacrifice of the priestly act by which He made atonement for sins (Attridge 1989: 36). Christ is presented as prophet (1:1-2), priest (1:3b) and king (1:8-14).

The Old Testament plays a crucial role in presenting the argument. It is used because of the author's deep conviction that the Old Testament is a Christ-centered book. Craig R. Koester argues that the letter's argument revolves around four portions of the Old Testament (Psalm 8:4-6, Psalm 95:7-11, Psalm 110:4, Jeremiah 31:31-34). There are other suggestions regarding the Old Testament texts around which the Epistle to Hebrews revolves. For instance, Buchanan mentions only one text (Ps. 110:4), Longenecker mentions five texts (2 Samuel 7:14 and Deuteronomy 32, Ps. 8:4-6, Ps. 95:7-11, Ps. 110:4, Jeremiah 31:31-34), France mentions six texts (Ps. 8:4-6, Ps. 95:7-11, Ps. 110:4, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Habakkuk 2:3-4, Prov. 3:11-12, see these

sources in France 1996: 247, 248, 256). In those circumstances where Christ's messianic status was questioned, it was important for the author to emphasize the continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Christ did not annul the Jewish past but came to bring it to fruition. Without Him, the revelation of the Old Testament is partial, fragmented, preparatory and incomplete (Brown 1982: 28).

Christ's Superiority in His Being

A crucial problem in the study of Christ's person and work is His existence. The doctrine of the Son's eternity underlies a biblical Christology. If Christ is not eternal then He is a creature that comes into existence at some point in time, being unable to accomplish redemption. The arguments for His eternity and divinity are inseparable (Walvoord 1969: 22). Christ is not only eternal, but He also possesses all the attributes of God. The work, the titles, the majesty and the promises that are related to Christ, all belong to God Himself. The statement "God spoke" is fundamental to the whole argument of the epistle. Man cannot know God except as much as God decides to reveal Himself. The climax of God's revelation is His Son, Jesus Christ, who is more than a man. Jesus Christ is infinitely superior to any created being; He is the final revelation of God and in Him all the promises of God find their fulfillment. The first section here will debate on Christ's divinity, superiority and uniqueness, proven by the nature of His relationship with the Godhead.

The Nature of the Relationship with the Godhead

Co-substantial with the Father (Hebrews 1:3a)

There is no doubt that the prologue in Hebrews 1:1-4 contains much of the Christian kerygma. Many have considered Hebrews 1:3 to be hymn material. Several arguments have been put forward in this regard. First, there is a stylistic pause between the verses in Hebrews 1:1, 2 and 3 that corresponds to the change of grammatical subject from God to the Son. This change is marked by ος – a feature of the New Testament Christological hymns (Philippians 2:6, Colossians 1:15). Second, in Hebrews 1:3 we find ἀπαυγασμα, χαρακτηρ ("hapax legomena"), *i.e.*, words that are not used anywhere else in Hebrews or at least not with the same meaning (Ellingworth 1993: 97).

The divinity and superiority of the Son are affirmed by what He is in His being and also in His roles. The verse in Hebrews 1:3 develops the three statements in Hebrews 1:2 – (1) revelation through the Son (2a); (2) the status of heir (2b); (3) His role in creation (2c). The subject of the statements in Hebrews 1:3-4 is the Son, indicated by the use of the relative pronoun in the nominative case ος (Lane 1991: 12).

In Hebrews 1:3a, the Son is presented as ἀπαυγασμα or, the glory of God. The term ἀπαυγασμα is found not only in LXX (The Septuagint), in the

context of celebrating the divine Wisdom. This term is also used by Philo, both for the human mind, and for the world. Plato saw that the world of perfect shapes and ideas is a mere shadow, an imperfect copy for our world. Philo, based on Plato's thinking, describes the universe as the ἀπαύγασμα of the sacred things, the copy of the archetype, and the sense is passive (see Barclay 1978: 317). This term can have an active (brightness) or a passive meaning (reflection). Nouns ending in –μα regularly have a passive meaning, indicating an object that is the understanding of an action rather than a process. The term ἀπαύγασμα may indicate brightness considered an object in itself (see Ellingworth 1993: 98). The active meaning has been preferred by Greek Fathers, while most of the modern commentators argue for the passive meaning. To say that the Son is God's *apaugasma* means that He is either the reflection that flows from God, or the reflection of God through which infinity and eternity are made visible in time to humanity. Each meaning emphasizes an uninterrupted relationship between the Father and the pre-existing Son, through Whom redemption is accomplished. The glory of God is beyond our comprehension and must be attributed to the essential nature of God. In Hebrews 1:3 δοξα is used to indicate the nature of God. Glory is characteristic of the exalted Son and the eschatological finality of those led by Him (Attridge 1989: 43).

The identity of nature, the exact resemblance between the Father and the Son, is further emphasized by the use of the term χαρακτηρ. The term χαρακτηρ is found only here in the New Testament. It is also found in LXX (The Septuagint), but in a non-technical sense. The sense is “to engrave” or “to imprint”. The term χαρακτηρ expresses the idea of imprinting much better than εικον, which is used elsewhere (Colossians 1:15). Philo shows preference for this term which is found 51 times in his works and has various meanings. He applies this term to man's soul which bears the image of God (Lane 1991: 12). This term refers to the minting of a coin bearing the image of the sovereign. The suggested idea is that of exact replication of the original, but also of distinctive peculiarity. To call Jesus χαρακτηρ of God means to recognize in Him the exact replication of what God is in His character (Barclay 1978: 319). If one thinks at the claim that the Son is only ἀπαύγασμα of the Father, this may in fact be a denial of the independent existence of the Son. But to say that Christ is *apaugasma* and *karacter* at the same time means to affirm the essential identity of the Son with the Father and the distinction between Him and the Father; it means affirming His divinity and humanity at the same time (Barclay 1978: 320).

As for the term υποστασις, some argue that it refers to the person of the Father and not to His essence. The term υποστασις appears three times in Hebrews with only small differences, but the nuances overlap. The sense of the term is “essence”, the fundamental substance or nature of an entity. Until

the 4th century the term was used interchangeably with *ουσια* (see Louw and Nida 1989: 586). Here the term does not mean *person*, a sense that it did not gain until the beginning of the 4th century, being used to express the distinction existing within a single deity. Westcott objects to the meaning of *person*, stating that the Son is not the expression of the person of God, but the expression of His essence. Thus, we are brought into contact with the reality of the hypostatic union that exists between the Father and the Son (Rolls 1984: 140). This union enabled Christ to say, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9 NKJV); “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30 NKJV). Christ is the exact expression of the character and essence of God, but at the same time He is a distinct person.

Co-equal with the Father (Hebrews 1:8-9)

In order to emphasize the contrast between the angels and the Son, the author uses a quote from Psalm 45:6-7, a passage that refers primarily to the superiority of the Son. The psalm portrays an earthly king celebrating his marriage. No earthly sovereign could fulfill the words of the Psalm, no mortal could belong to a permanent reign, so the addressing term “God” could not be used. The psalm is typically messianic. The only one who has fulfilled the words of this Psalm is the Messiah (Owen 1854: 55). This quote, as well as the following one (Hebrews 1:10-12), shows that God addresses the Son both as *θεος* as well as *κυριος*. The two titles have close positions, corresponding to the beginning of the quotations. While the introduction of *και παλιν* from (1:5) marks the division of a quotation into two distinct parts, similarly, the inclusion of *και* in 1:8a has the effect of separating two verses of a single quotation. In Hebrews 1:8a the eternal reign of the Son is presented, a theme developed in paragraph 1:10-12; in 1:8b the righteous reign of the Son is presented (Ellingworth 1993: 123).

A textual issue of this quote is the pronoun *αυτου* or *σου* at the end of the verses. Arguments in favor of *αυτος*: (1) this option has Alexandrine support in (p⁴⁶, χβ); (2) it tends to conform the text to the LXX quote that includes three other uses of *σου*; (3) if *αυτος* is in original, inserting *και* may be explained as a quiet attempt to transition from the second to the third person (Harris 1998: 210). Arguments in favor of *σου*: (1) the external evidence supporting *σου* is older (*cop sa bo*) and has a wider geographical distribution (Alexandria, Byzantine); (2) this variant is in harmony with the LXX text; (3) there is no other *αυτος* in Ps. 44 from LXX, while *σου* is found 12 times; (4) even if adding *και* created 2 separate quotations in Hebrews, changing the person from *σου* in 1:8a to *αυτος* in 1:8b is difficult (Harris 1998: 211). Do the verses end with the third person *αυτου* or with *σου*, the second person singular of the personal pronoun? We opt for *σου* which is found in the earliest text. The decision we make in Hebrews 1:8b regarding the pronoun does

not determine how *θεος* will be interpreted in 1:8a. It is possible to accept the option σου and yet a *θεος* to be introduced as a nominative or the variant αυτου, and ο *θεος* to be introduced as a vocative. However, σου harmonizes better with a vocative, while αυτου with a nominative. Since ο *θεος* is much more significant in the broader context, we will analyze the two approaches: the first approach of the ο *θεος* as a nominative, and the second ο *θεος* as a vocative. Arguments in favor of ο *θεος* as nominative: (1) if ο *θεος* is a vocative, αυτος in Hebrews 1:8b it remains without an antecedent; (2) the context – the contrast in Hebrews 1:7 and 1:8 does not refer to the being, but to the role. The author does not compare the angels' changing being with the eternal nature of the divine Son, but rather the fickleness of their roles as God's servants to the eternal reign of the Son (Harris 1998: 212-214). Arguments in favor of ο *θεος* as vocative: (1) in LXX it is more than likely that ο *θεος* is a vocative because the King addresses a warrior not only in Hebrews 1:4, but also in 1:6; (2) if ο *θεος* were a nominative, we could expect a change regarding the order of the words ο *θεος* ο *θρονος* σου. On the other hand, a vocative immediately after σου would be perfectly natural; (3) the meaning of λεγειν προς – of the 35 appearances of λεγειν προς in the New Testament, only in two cases (Hebrews 1:7, 1:8) the phrase means “to speak about”; (4) the context – in establishing Christ's superiority above angels a series of contrasts is emphasized. The antithesis between Hebrews 1:7 and 1:8-9 is marked with the adversative μεν...δε; the angels serve (τους λειτουργους), but the Son reigns (ο *θεος* σου); while serving, the angels change their shape (πνευματα ... πυρος), but the Son's reign lasts forever. One contrast relates the function, while the other the nature. The angels are creatures, while the Son is the divine Creator; they are changing, but He is unchanging. We may conclude that the interpretation of ο *θεος* as a vocative is justified by the immediate context (Harris 1998: 215, 217). Some are reluctant to express a preference for ο *θεος* as a nominative or vocative, stating that both interpretations are admissible. If ο *θεος* is a vocative, then this is one of the three titles given to Jesus Christ in Hebrews: υιος (1:2, 5, 8a); *θεος* (1:8); κυριος (1:10). We can say that the last two explain the two aspects of Sonship: divinity and sovereignty (Harris 1998: 223).

The vocative brings its contribution in the context of the verses in Hebrew 1:8 and 1:9. In the book “Jesus as God,” Murray J. Harris presents three areas in which ο *θεος* brings its contribution. The first area in which it contributes is the paradox of Christ's divinity and humanity. In Hebrews 1:8-9 we find juxtaposed the statement of Son's intrinsic deity ο *θεος* (1:8) with that of His real humanity ηγαπησας δικαιοσυνην και εμισησας ανομιαν (1:9a). The elements of this divine-human paradox are also found in other parts of the epistle, but the author generally emphasizes the aspect required by his argument. Christ is described as the exact representation of God's

glory and nature (1:3). He existed before the beginning of human history (1:2), before the universe was created (1:10). He is the eternal creator (1:10), the sustainer (1:3) and heir of the universe (1:2), the Son of God. The second area in which ο θεος contributes is related to the reason for Christ's subordination. Christ assumed human nature with all its weaknesses and limitations, except for the sin. Probably the most remarkable feature of 1:8-9 is a θεος... ο θεος ο θεος σου. God who addresses His Son as God is also God for His Son. The element of the Son's subordination to the Father, a feature of the New Testament, is much emphasized elsewhere in the book of Hebrews. The Son was dependent on the Father in His appointment as heir to the universe (1:2), in His incarnation (1:6), in His resurrection (13:20), in His ministry as High Priest (5:5) and in the ascension at the right hand of the Father (1:13). Subordination does not make the Son less God. The Son is true God (John 1:1), and as the incarnate Son it is natural for Him to speak of God as His God (John 20:17). The third area in which ο θεος contributes concerns the eternity of Christ. The phrase ο θρονος σου ο θεος εις τον αιωνα του αιωνος states that the reign of Christ is eternal, and Christ is the eternal ruler (Harris 1998: 224, 225).

As an argument in favor of the Son's superiority, the author brings into focus the stability of the throne. Christ is on the throne and the angels stand before Him; He leads, while they are submissive. The phrase ευθυτητος ραβδος affirms the royal authority of the Son. Christ loves righteousness and hates iniquity, something that He demonstrated during His earthly life. His kingdom knows no end and its foundation is righteousness and justice. Because of His love for righteousness, God has anointed Him from eternity. There was no first moment in time when the Son loved righteousness, and this resulted in His anointing. The phrase ελαιον αγαλλασσεως does not refer to the baptism of Jesus Christ nor to His perfect life, but to the triumphal enthronement in heavenly glory. This is the logical consequence of His perfect earthly ministry (Hughes 1997: 65).

In Hebrews 1:9 it is said that the Son was anointed above His μετοχους. The word μετοχους implies the sharing of His righteousness and joy. There have been various identifications of His "companions": (1) the other anointed kings; (2) the angels; (3) the believers. The angels cannot be the intended reference of this statement because their inferiority to the Son is emphasized here, so they cannot be described as His companions. It is more likely that the reference is to the "many sons" (Hebrews 2:10) whom the Son is not ashamed to call "brothers" (2:11) and who share the heavenly calling (3:1, see Ellingworth 1993: 125).

In Hebrews 1:8-9 we find *the greatest statement in Scripture: Jesus Christ is the eternal God*. The strongest proof of Christ's divinity is given by God the Father who recognizes God the Son. The Father's testimony about the Son

corresponds to the Son's testimony about Himself. Throughout His work, Jesus Christ claimed equality with God (John 5:18, 10:30). The Son is equal to the Father by sharing the divine nature ("ο θεος" Hebrews 1:8), but at the same time He remains distinct from Him ("ο θεος σου" 1:9). Christ is superior to the angels in nature but subordinated to the Father in His role.

Co-eternal with the Father (Hebrews 1:11-12)

The quote used in Hebrews 1:10-12a is taken from Psalm 102:25-27. Psalm 102, which is a prayer of believers weeping for Zion, ends with a song of praise about the unchanging God. The author applies this psalm to Christ, the eternal Son of God. The following justification can be used in favor of this application. First, Hebrews 1:2 says that all things were made by the Son. The angels were spectators when the earth was founded, while the Son was the Father's agent in the work. That is why we can understand that He is the one to whom these words are addressed. In the LXX (Septuagint) text, the person to whom these words are addressed is explicitly called κυριος, and the One addressing the words is God (see Bruce 1985: 22). Psalm 102:25-27 finds its echo in the introduction where the doctrine of the Son's eternity is set forth. In fact, the quote develops the statements in Hebrews 1:2c ("by which He made the ages") and 1:3b ("which holds all things through the word of His power"). The quote is divided into two: Hebrews 1:10 shows the activity of the Son in the beginning, while 1:11-12 shows His activity at the end of time.

Psalm 102:25-27 was introduced into the argument to show the radical contrast between the passing of the created order and the eternal, unchanging nature of the Son, emphasizing the superiority of Christ's existence over angels. The attribute of the Creator's permanence corresponds to the durability of His throne and serves to emphasize the contrast between the ephemeral character of creation, creatures and the eternal character of the Son (Lane 1991: 31). Although the Son as the divine agent in creation brought into being the whole universe, from the past creation και αρχας to the future consummation ου δε ο αυτος ει He remains the same. Now the Son is called κυριε, after having been called ο θεος in Hebrews 1:8. The vocative κυριε appears in the LXX text but not in the Hebrew text of Psalm 102. In Greek, κυριος means one that rules and exerts his authority over the others; sometimes it is used as a simple address to a superior person. In LXX the term used is the translation of the divine names Adonai and Yahweh. This term was applied to Jesus in the Christian community only after the resurrection and it was used as a synonym for θεος (Sobourin 1967: 253). The position of κυριε suggests that the author understands it to be synonymous with ο θεος (Hughes 1977: 67). As in 1:5, God addresses the Son using the personal pronoun in the second person ου, and the phrase ου δε διαμενεις used in 1:11 emphasizes the permanent existence, the eternal quality of the Son's nature

in contrast to the creation. The position of the pronoun $\sigma\upsilon$ accentuates the contrast between the Son who is the creator and sustainer of this Universe, and the angels who are simple messengers of God (Ellingworth 1993: 126). Some manuscripts accentuate the verb as being a future active indicative, but this tense does not fit the context. The verb $\delta\iota\alpha\mu\epsilon\omega$ is a present active indicative, and the present tense emphasizes the Son's continuous, permanent existence.

The verse in Hebrews 1:12 has two characteristics: first, the use of $\epsilon\lambda\iota\chi\epsilon\iota\varsigma$, and second, the use of $\omega\varsigma \mu\alpha\tau\tau\iota\upsilon\omicron\nu$. There are several explanations regarding the use of $\epsilon\lambda\iota\chi\epsilon\iota\varsigma$: (1) a transcribing error; (2) a change introduced by the author in Hebrews; (3) a quote found in the LXX text (see Ellingworth 1993: 127). Although the phrase $\omega\varsigma \mu\alpha\tau\tau\iota\upsilon\omicron\nu$ is omitted in some manuscripts, this inclusion receives strong support from the early evidence. As Metzger shows in his *Textual Commentary*, that the absence of the words from most manuscripts is the result of the LXX text confirmation (see Metzger quoted in Kistemaker 1984: 47). By using the present tense in the phrase $\sigma\upsilon \delta\epsilon \omicron \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma \epsilon\iota$, the author includes both the past (1:10) and the future (1:12), as well as the statements about the Son. By using the personal pronoun $\omicron \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma$ in the nominative case, he puts in antithesis the Father's eternity shared by the Son, with the creation's ephemerality. Christ is superior because He existed from eternity, before the beginning, so He is without beginning (John 1:1). The Son is the eternal creator, whose eternity is not shared by creation, but He is also the author of the changes in creation (1 Peter 3:5-10). In the midst of these changes, He lives forever and is always the same.

The Characteristics of the Relationship with the Godhead

The Uniqueness of the Father-Son Relationship (Hebrews 1:5)

The argument for Christ's superiority over angels is now proved by two quotations from the Old Testament: Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14. The verse in Hebrews 1:5 is related to the introductory paragraph by $\gamma\alpha\rho$ and by the repetition $\tau\omicron\nu \alpha\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\omega\nu$ in 1:4. The name inherited by Christ (1:2) is $\upsilon\iota\omicron\varsigma$, which has an emphatic position at both the beginning and end of the quote. The two quotations (Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14), joined by the introductory form $\kappa\alpha\iota \pi\alpha\lambda\iota$, create a chiasm. The first and the last verse deal with Sonship, framing the third one that talks about Fatherhood. The parallelism between the two quotes from Hebrews 1:5 show that the divergent points are of secondary importance. These diverging points are: (1) God's speaking to the Son (Hebrews 1:5a) changes into speaking about Himself (1:5b); (2) the change from perfect tense (1:5a) to future tense (1:5b); (3) the lack of parallel for " $\sigma\eta\mu\epsilon\rho\nu$ " (1:5b, see Ellingworth 1993: 113).

The first quotation from Psalm 2:7 is considered by some interpreters to refer to David or Solomon, but the words of this Psalm find their full

fulfillment only in Christ. It must be understood as a messianic psalm. Psalm 2:7 begins with a rhetorical question, and the expected answer is obviously negative. The words υἱος μου εἶ συ ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγεννηκά σε were never addressed by God to an angel. However, in the Old Testament, the term “son” is applied to the chosen nation (Exodus 4:22) but also to the angels who are called “sons of God” (Job 1:6, 2:1, Ps. 89:6), having a collective and not an individual meaning. None of the angels was called υἱος μου in these terms which were addressed to a single person, thus giving Him a special status (Bruce 1985: 13). The meaning of σήμερον was disputed and the day of birth was placed at different moments in history. There were several opinions about the meaning of σήμερον. Augustine claimed that it referred to the eternal generating of the Son. Chrysostom stated that it referred to the birth of Jesus, and more generally, to the incarnation. Justin the Martyr stated that it had to do with the baptism of Jesus. Others thought it referred to Jesus` resurrection, ascension, or enthronement (Hughes 1977: 54).

At every moment of His earthly mission, the incarnate Messiah was the beloved Son of the Father. The day mentioned here is the day of the glorious victory. In fact, “day” is the purpose of the argument – for all to see Christ’s superiority over angels. This “day” belongs primarily to the resurrection event but extends to the exaltation and glorification of Christ at the right hand of Glory. The resurrection, exaltation and glorification must be seen as forming a unity, each contributing to the demonstration of Christ`s uniqueness and superiority (Hughes 1977: 56). There is only One whom God calls υἱος μου. Christians are called “sons of God” only by virtue of their incorporation into Christ. The uniqueness of Christ`s Sonship is also accentuated using the singular pronoun συ. Many others are called “sons”, but the parallelism of the two verses in Psalm 2:7, characteristic of Hebrew poetry, reinforces this idea: the natural Sonship belongs to One alone.

The second quote is from 2 Samuel 7:14. It contains God`s promise to King David made through prophet Nathan: a successor whose throne will be eternal. The first reference is made to Solomon, who partially fulfilled the promise, but the final reference was to a greater Son of David – the Messiah. In Him, who is the Son of God in spirit and the son of David in flesh (Romans 1:3), the promise has been fulfilled (Wuest 1947: 45). God was never called the Father of angels, and no angel ever addressed God as Father. Emphasis is placed on the second verse, especially on the final word υἱος. The lack of article does not diminish the uniqueness of the relationship between God and Christ but emphasizes its absolute character and its perpetuation. By uniting the two quotations (Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14), the author brings a strong argument in support of the statement: the position of angels is subordinate to the status of the Son. He is the only One who has a unique relationship with the Father, a uniqueness that finds its expression in the name υἱος μου.

The Veracity of the Father-Son Relationship (Hebrews 1:6a)

The word δε marks the transition from the Son in Hebrews 1:5 to the angels in 1:6, where they are subordinate to Christ. The quote is prefaced by an ambiguous remark. It is stated here that God εισαγαγε the first born in the world, but this introduction can be perceived as taking place at either the incarnation, the exaltation or the *parousia* (Attridge 1989: 55).

The problem is the interpretation of the adverb παλιν in the introductory phrase. If παλιν is placed together with the verb λεγει, it has an introductory role, but if it is placed with the verb εισαγαγη, it refers to the second coming of the Son into the world. The term εισαγαγη is interpreted as a reference to a specific or an indefinite time. The use of the aorist conjunctive and the context support the position of a specific time. This specific time may be a future tense for the speaker in the Old Testament text, but past tense for the author of Hebrews (the incarnation) or a future tense for both (*parousia*). The context suggests the enthronement of Christ (Ellingworth 1993: 117). Thus, the term οικουμενη must be taken in a special sense, not as a term for the inhabited world (this is the normal meaning), but as a reference to the heavenly world which includes the realm of the angels called to worship the Son of God (Attridge 1989: 56). The Son brought into the world is described as πρωτοτοκος, a term that refers to the word υιος and is a title given to Jesus. The term πρωτοτοκος denotes priority and superiority. It is used to express a unique, special relationship with the father, especially with God. It is not found in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament it has a particular importance, being used as a title for Christ (see Brown 1967: 664-667). Thus, this term seems to have three meanings: (1) the first born among many siblings (Romans 8:29) or the first born in the entire creation (Colossians 1:15). Here it is used with reference to the eternal existence of God's divine Son; (2) the first born of Mary (Matthew 1:25, Luke 2:7). Here πρωτοτοκος is used with reference to His incarnate person. Christ was not only the first one born in time, but also in rank and position; (3) the first born from death (Colossians 1:18, Revelation 1:5). Christ was the first to be raised from death through resurrection (see Walvoord 1969: 43). The patristic commentators emphasize the difference between μονογενης, which describes the absolutely unique relationship between the Father and the Son in the divine nature, and πρωτοτοκος, which describes the man's relationship with the resurrected Christ in His glorified humanity (Westcott 1997: 23). In the New Testament, the term is used specifically for Jesus, see Matthew 1:25, Romans 8:29, Colossians 1:18, 1:15, Revelation 1:5, and Hebrews 1:6. The text in Hebrews 1:6 is the only verse in the New Testament where the title πρωτοτοκος is used in an absolute manner for Christ. The term πρωτοτοκος is a title of superiority over angels and of the particularity required by context. The designation

“firstborn” belongs to Christ as both the eternal Son and the incarnate Redeemer, who, after being humbled for our salvation, was exalted to the right hand of God (Hughes 1977: 59, 60). In Hebrews 1:6a, the term is used in an eschatological sense, a title given to Jesus at His ascension, at the heavenly enthronement of the risen Lord. Other theologians interpret Hebrews 1:6a as referring to the incarnation of the pre-existent Christ, although they consider that it is possible that it refers to the enthronement of the ascended Christ (see Brown 1967: 668).

Conclusions

The most important subject of Christian theology is the divinity of Christ. This topic is of crucial importance. The divinity of Christ is at the heart of the Christian faith, and it is based on the fact that Jesus is God incarnate and not just an extraordinary man. Some believe that Jesus Christ was a god, a created god; a perfect creature, without actually belonging to the same class as the other creatures; a created being, though the first and highest in rank (Walter 1996: 71). Over time there has been an attempt to establish a connection between the vision of Jesus as presented in the Qur’an (Jesus is only the son of Mary, a creature, a messenger, one of the prophets, a predecessor of Muhammad, but not the incarnate Son of God) and the New Testament description of Him (Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God who became incarnate). However, there is no way to reconcile the Islamic and the Christian perspectives, as they are completely opposite. Therefore, the correct portrait of Jesus is the one made by eyewitnesses. This can only be found in the New Testament, not in the Qur’an.

Hebrews 1:3 clarifies any doubt about the divinity of Christ. It would be illogical to assume that Jesus Christ, who is the image of God’s glory and the exact imprint of His nature (essence), is not God as a Person of the Trinitarian Divinity. This Son through whom God created the world (1:2) also holds all things by the word of His power (1:3). The Son is called *θεος* in 1:8, a title that implies the idea of co-equality with the Father. The title of *κυριος* is attributed to Jesus especially in His state after the resurrection and ascension. Applied to Jesus, this term embodies the idea of divinity and equality with the Father. Christ did not have a beginning nor the status of creature; rather, He is pre-existing (John 1:1). He is the eternal creator through Whom and for Whom all things were brought into being (Colossians 1:16). Christ was not an angel, as the angels’ position is subordinated to the Son. Angels are called “sons of God” in a collective sense (Job 1:6, 38:7), but they keep their status of created beings in contrast to the Son, who has a unique status and relationship. The uniqueness finds its expression in the title *υιος μου*. The use of the noun without the definite article does not suggest that Jesus Christ is one of many sons but rather it has an absolute meaning. Applied to Jesus,

it is invested with new content, describing His own person and unique relationship with God. This title means that Jesus' relationship with the Father is different than with any other man. The Jews understood that through this title Jesus assumed a unique, special affiliation "not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively; not only in degree, but also in type" (see Erickson 1998: 260).

The appointment of the Son as *πρωτοτοκος* attests to the unique status of the Son's relationship with the Father. The term does not have a temporal meaning and it does not primarily mean the first in time, but the first in rank. Jesus is superior because He is not a simple man or angel, nor one of the prophets according to Islamic theology; He is God. He is God just as much and as real as the Father. He is not of a different substance or even of a similar substance, but of the same substance as the Father. Although the work on earth involved subordination to the Father, it did not bestow on Him an inferior status because it was a functional not an ontological subordination. Jesus Christ is co-regent with the Father, therefore He is God in the full sense.

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