Chapter 3

THE INTELLECTUALS AND THE MONKS

We now turn to the battle of the intellectuals.[1] Three general points may be made at the outset. We are dealing with long-standing issues, debated in in the east over the two previous centuries before Chalcedon. There was nothing sudden about the Christological controversy. Secondly, behind the seemingly unending wrangle over whether Christ existed 'in two natures' or 'out of two natures' lay deep questions of human salvation, not least those embodied in the doctrines of the Eucharist and the Atonement. Thirdly, in a world in which combat by the individual with evil spirits and destructive powers was accepted as in the nature of things, the masses of the faithful led by the monks could not accept what they believed to be prevarication and uncertainty over matters affecting their ultimate salvation. The victory of Christianity as the religion of the Mediterranean peoples made religious compromises impossible.

The germ of the future conflict is to be found far back at the turn of the third century with the outbreak of the Monarchian controversies in Rome. Orthodox theologians had opposed Valentinian gnosticism and Marcionism with the assertion of the reality of Jesus' mission and sufferings, and pointed to the Gospels as sufficient warrant for the true character of Jesus' humanity. In the fourth century there were many who saw the Christology of Apollinarius and his disciples as nothing better than a recurrence of these ancient heresies.[2] The problem, however, was just how to define the relationship between the divine and human elements in Christ.

By A.D. 200 some Christians in Rome, such as Noetus and Praxeas, immigrants from the province of Asia, were claiming that in order to exalt

[1] On this theme see the masterly work of A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, and J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London, 1958), chs. 11 and 12, to which I am much indebted in this chapter.

[2] Compare Basil, *Ep.* 261 (*PG* 32, col. 969c), and Didymus the Blind, *Comment. in Psalmos* x. 9, lines 12–14 (A. Gesché, 'La Christologie du Commentaire sur les Psaumes découvert à Toura', *Univ. Cath. Lovaniensis Dissertationes*, ser. III. 7, Gembloux, 1962, p. 108).

Christ's divinity so that he was worshipped truly 'as God',[1] it was necessary to conceive of the Father in some way being associated with his sufferings.[2] This Patripassian or Modalist-Monarchian view of Christ (as a 'mode' of the Father) persisted in the background of much of the thought of Christians in Asia and may be a factor in the popularity of the Monophysite cause there in the fifth and sixth centuries. As against this understanding of Christ, however, were the theories of individuals such as the two Theodoti, also immigrants to Rome, who could point to a text such as Jn. 8. 40 and claim that it proved that Christ was a man in origin in whom the divine power (δύναμις) of the Holy Spirit took up his abode, symbolised by the descent of the dove at Jesus' baptism.[3] This Dynamic Monarchianism represented Jesus in Trinitarian terms, but failed to do justice to the belief that he was truly God. External inspiration and resulting adoption into the Godhead were unconvincing of themselves as attributes of God and smacked too much of Jewish angel-worship or Ebionism. Both Theodotus and Praxeas were condemned. Even so, it was evident that Theodotus' views were shared not only by some intellectual Christians in Rome who used their ethical appeal to bridge Christianity and Aristotelianism,[4] but also among Syrian Christians, perhaps influenced by a Judaic environment, who tended to prefer a literal interpretation of the Gospel narratives. The teachings of Theodotus were carried on by his pupil Artemon in the 230s, and a generation later these were associated with Paul of Samosata at Antioch. Already at this period Christology was beginning to take on a regional colour.

Meantime, in Alexandria one of the impulses that drove Origen to elaborate his Logos-theology was an indignant mistrust of the two Monarchian Christologies. At the end of his lengthy and teasing examination of a Bishop Heraclides who seems to have been suspected as a Modalist-Monarchian,[5]

[1] The requirement occurs already in *II Clement*, ch. 1, the opening words of his sermon ('Brethren, we must think of Jesus Christ as of God, as of the Judge of the living and the dead'). For the emphatic assertion of his humanity against Docetism at this period, see Ignatius of Antioch, *Ep. ad Trall.* IX. Theodoret, *Ep.* 151, claims Ignatius in the succession of the same Christology as he.

[2] Note pseudo-Tertullian, *Adversus omnes haereses* 8 (ed. A. Kroymann, *Corpus Christianorum* 2, Turnhout, 1954, p. 1410): 'Hic [Praxeas] Deum patrem omnipotentem Iesum Christum esse dicit; hunc crucifixum passumque contendit mortuum.'

[3] Eusebius, *HE* v. 28. 6. Compare Hippolytus, *Refutatio* VII. 35. See M. F. Wiles, *The Spiritual Gospel* (Cambridge, 1960), p. 112.

[4] Eusebius, *HE* v. 28. 14.

[5] Origen, *Dialogue with Heraclides* (Eng. text in *Alexandrian Christianity*, ed. Chadwick and Oulton, pp. 437–55, especially p. 439).

Origen defends his assertion of the existence of a duality between Christ and God on the grounds that only thus could the obvious errors of the Monarchians be avoided. 'In this way', he says, 'we avoid falling into the opinion of those who are separated from the church and turned to the illusory notion of monarchy, who abolish the Son as distinct from the Father and virtually abolish the Father also. Nor do we fall into the other blasphemous doctrine which denies the deity of Christ.'[1] The anger roused in Origen at the idea of Dynamic Monarchianism, compared with his tone of admonition towards the Modalists, is significant in itself, and it foreshadows the attitude of the school of Alexandrian theologians towards both alternatives to their own Trinitarian doctrine and Christology. Paul of Samosata, rather than Heraclides, was the enemy. The one was to be deposed by a council, the other merely rebuked. Against Heraclides, Origen emphasised the separation of Father and Son and dwelt on their method of conjunction as 'God'. This leads him to discuss the nature of the Son and in doing so he anticipates the standard anti-Apollinarian reasoning of the Cappadocians at the end of the fourth century. In reply to a certain Maximus, in the same dialogue, Origen points out 'the whole man (body, soul, and spirit) would not have been saved unless Christ had taken upon him the whole man. They do away with salvation', he adds, 'when they say that the body of the Saviour is spiritual.' He has, however, to confess his ignorance of how the body, soul and spirit of Christ became separated at the time of the Passion and reunited after the ascension.[2] As in so much else, he saw the issue clearly and his inability to contribute more significantly to its solution boded ill for the efforts of his disciples.

Origen's main problem was the relationship between God and his Word within the Trinity. Christology was not the decisive issue. He realised, however, in his *Commentary on John* that the apparent conflict between texts such as Jn. 7. 28 and 8. 19, or Jesus' actions to satisfy material needs, like sending his disciples to buy bread, compared with the miracle of the loaves and the fishes, could only be accounted for if Jesus was sometimes speaking of himself as man and at other times as God.[3] Elsewhere, he shows that he had meditated on the significance of Christ's soul, putting forward the view that this alone had escaped blemish at the Fall 'as being the Wisdom and Word of God', and therefore served as the meeting-point of divine and

[1] *Ibid.* p. 439.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 442. See Chadwick's comment, *Alexandrian Christianity*, p. 435.

[3] See Wiles, *The Spiritual Gospel*, p. 112.

human through the incarnation.[1] He thought of Christ's soul as the link between the Logos and the body in which the Logos was revealed to mankind. Through its unity with the Logos it provided a model for the association of the believer with God. These views were, however, peripheral both to his Logos theology and to the urgency of his concern for moral reform and virtuous conduct which he proclaimed as the hall-mark of a Christian.[2] For all his assertion of the real humanity of Christ, the Word-flesh Christology which developed from his teaching made no allowance for a human directing mind or soul in Christ animating the body.

One reason for this may be that in the Neo-Platonist system that formed the background to the theology of Origen and his successors, the body was regarded as alien from the soul in man, and the soul alone was capable of immortality; but the soul itself was looked upon as a 'mixed' substance aspiring towards the sphere of the intellect but also involved in the corporeal world.[3] Christ, however, was the divine Logos who had taken to himself a body like ours (the form of a servant) to manifest the fullness of God to man, for the purpose of man's instruction and salvation.[4] Since the Logos did not change in any way at the incarnation,[5] the human soul in Christ could only be considered as an adjunct, present because humanity would not be complete without it, but wholly passive. Little wonder then, that at the Council of Antioch in 268 Origen's disciple Malchion took the logical step and denied its existence in Christ. 'The God-Logos is in him what the inner man is in us.'[6] The bishops present approved.

[1] Origen, *De principiis* II. 6. 3, ed. P. Koetschau, *GCS* 22, Origenes Werke 5, Leipzig, 1913, pp. 141–3 (gives other references) and *Contra Celsum* IV. 15 and 18.

[2] This comes out clearly in the passage from the *Dialogue with Heraclides*. He reminds his hearers that 'the divine tribunal' was concerned with matters other than doctrine.

[3] See R. A. Norris, *Manhood and Christ* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 39–40: 'For the Neo-Platonist the soul is an ontological Janus, forever turned towards the world of sense, yet – no doubt more fundamentally – forever aspiring to the world of the intellect.'

[4] Origen, *Homil. XIX in Luc.* (ed. M. Rauer, *GCS* 49, Berlin, 1954, pp. 114–15). Christ 'appeared as weak because he had assumed a weak body and is strengthened again because of that body. He had emptied himself as Son of God and therefore was filled again with wisdom.' The use of Phil. 2. 7 as evidencing a kenotic theory of Christology was to be followed by Origen's Alexandrian successors.

[5] Origen, *Contra Celsum* IV. 15: 'The Word suffers nothing of the experience of the body or the soul.' It remained always 'one', *ibid.* II. 9.

[6] Cited from the bishops at the council in reply to Paul of Samosata: H. de Riedmatten, *Les Actes du procès de Paul de Samosate* (Fribourg, Switzerland, 1952), p. 154, frag. 30