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INTRODUCTION

The Monophysite Controversy was an important event in the history of Christianity. Following the apostolic age, the church spread geographically from Jerusalem to all parts of the Roman Empire. Bishops were appointed in cities across the empire. An age of persecution threatened Christianity until the emperor Constantine in 313 CE legalized and embraced Christianity. The church began to interpret the meaning of New Testament Scripture within the universal Christian community. The focus of interest was primarily on the person of Christ. During the period beginning around 313 CE until a final resolution around 638 CE, the controversy over the nature of Christ was debated between church and secular leaders within Christianity. The outcome of the debate determined the orthodox position on the nature of Christ. The non-orthodox position was labeled heretical. The Monophysite position was condemned as heretical. Some church leaders and their followers chose to continue in their support of the Monophysite belief causing a division in the Christian church. This division weakened the testimony of the church and the loyalty of Monophysite Christians to the Byzantine Empire. This led to two problems. First, the missionary outreach of the orthodox faith was hindered from spreading south and east by the dominance of Monophysitism in these areas of the empire. Second, the Byzantine Empire was weakened politically because the Monophysite Christians were not loyal to its spiritual and political leaders. As a result, the rise and spread of Islam, beginning in 610 C.E. came in contact with Monophysite Christianity. The lands which were dominated by Monophysites were the first to fall to Islam by 700 CE.

From a theological perspective, Muhammad claimed to receive the revelation from the angel Gabriel from 610 C.E. until 632 CE. His travels before this as a caravan trader were limited to the north-south route between Mecca, Arabia and Damascus, Syria. During his travels to Syria, he came in contact with both Jews and Christians. When reciting the message of the Koran, the explanation of the nature of Jesus is similar to the Monophysite belief. The Monophysites were prevalent in Syria at this time. Therefore, Mohammed and the Koran both formulated a non-orthodox and heretical view of Jesus Christ.

The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of the Monophysite Controversy on the growth and spread of Christianity during the critical period when the orthodox position was being formulated and as Christianity came in contact with the new religion of Islam. The first step in this process will be to understand the origin and basis for Monophysite belief. This includes: (1) defining Monophysitism, (2) determining the time, place, and persons who supported this concept, (3) interpreting the theology underlying Monophysitism; and (4) examining the history of the controversy based on...
early writings and subsequent commentaries on the subject. The second step will be to explore the theological debate concerning the one nature of Christ, versus the two natures of Christ. Arguments in support and in condemnation of both positions were debated during the controversy. These will be presented during the research. It should also be understood that there were differing explanations of the one nature position between Monophysite apologists. Equally, there were differing explanations of the two nature position between Dyophysites. These various explanations will also be explored to determine which one became the orthodox position within Christianity and which one became the dominant position within Monophysite Christianity. The third step will be to examine the people, places, and events that undertook to propagate, condemn, or reconcile the Monophysite Controversy. The period of activity extended from the beginning of the fourth century CE to the middle of the seventh century CE. The geographic context resided in the decline of the Western Roman Empire and in the highpoint of the Byzantine Empire focusing on Asia-Minor, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, north and northeastern Africa, and Rome. An historical timeline of the people, places, and events will be developed to provide space-time context to the controversy. The fourth step will be to analyze the writings of the canons, creeds, and councils of the period of the controversy. The councils recorded the debates and the conclusion of the majority attending the councils. The creeds were often the summarized synopsis of the orthodox position. The canons were manuscripts of church leaders arguing for their understanding of a doctrinal issue. The writings of the church leaders, bishops, patriarchs, popes, monks, and emperors who addressed the Monophysite controversy will be explored to determine each person’s relevant position and contribution to the debate. One result of this will be to determine if the person’s contribution had an historical, theological, or political impact on Christianity. The fifth step will be to research early Islamic belief regarding the nature of Christ. The Islamic belief regarding Christ is recorded in the Koran, which was received between 610 CE and 632 CE. Islam came in contact with Monophysite Christianity during the entire period of the seventh century CE. The study will focus on how Monophysite teaching regarding the nature of Christ impacted Islamic belief in the formative years. In addition, the study will explore how the Monophysite Controversy weakened the Byzantine Empire, making the Monophysite controlled lands more susceptible to the spread of Islam.

The research objectives are to investigate the history and theology of the Monophysite Controversy in order to help the reader understand the impact on the development of Christianity and of Islam. This will involve answering many questions. First, the research will investigate the origin and basis of the historical setting and theological arguments for the Monophysite Controversy. The key question to answer is why is it important to establish whether Christ has one nature or two natures? Second, the research will investigate the process regarding the debate. The key question to answer is how a majority position becomes orthodox and a minority position is condemned as heretical. Third, the research will investigate the chronology of the events. The key question is when each doctrine was debated, what was the timeline for debate and resolution. Fourth, the research will investigate the persons who entered into the debate. The key question is who led the debate either for or against the Monophysite position. Fifth, the research will investigate the impact of the controversy on Christianity and
Islam. The key questions will be: (1) how were Christianity and the Byzantine Empire weakened and (2) how was early Islamic theology affected.

The research will add to the body of historical and theological knowledge of Christianity. The majority of research on early church history focuses on issues that resulted in the orthodox position. Controversies are given limited research time because the non-orthodox position is dismissed as an error which should be forgotten. In the example of the Monophysite Controversy, the Monophysite segment of Christianity survived intact. These churches were the remaining testimony in lands on the eastern and southern borders of the Christian world. This placed Monophysite Christians in the important position of spreading Christianity beyond these borders to pagan lands. In addition, with the advent of Islam in Arabia, a competition for believers occurred which shaped the culture of the Middle East. The history of this contact between Monophysite Christians and Muslims has not been the focus of significant research.

The theoretical implications of this study are significant. If the Monophysite Christians had won the argument regarding the nature of Christ, orthodox Christianity would be constantly defending a savior, who is not a completely human nor completely divine person in his nature. This would be an endless and defenseless apologetic. If the Monophysite Christians had been absorbed within Christianity, the Byzantine Empire would have been strengthened rather than weakened by the lack of support for the Byzantine spiritual and political leaders. If the orthodox view of the nature of Christ had influenced Muhammad, the theology concerning Christ in the Koran might have been closer to orthodox Christianity such that a new religion separate from Christianity might not have emerged. If the Christians in the entire expanse of the Byzantine Empire were united in their beliefs regarding the nature of Christ, the spread of Islam might have been halted and limited to Arabia, while the spread of Christianity might have been more effective and permanent in the Middle East.

The literature which is available provides an introduction into the research concerning the history and theology of the Monophysite Controversy. For example, several Bible dictionaries provide complete and concise definitions. Texts are available on dogmatic and systematic theology which describe the various interpretations of the nature of Christ in terms of theology. A number of texts provide a survey of church history. Bible commentaries provide some insight to the people, places, and events. The value of many of these resources is limited because the dictionaries are too brief, the texts on dogmatic and systematic theology do not always explain the context, surveys of church history may be biased from a given theological perspective, and the Bible commentaries may be segmented in their approach and produced much later than when the events took place. The original writings from the persons involved are more informative. These are produced in the Ante-Nicene, Nicene, and Post-Nicene Series. The creeds and council’s publications in the original are helpful in analyzing the positions debated. The Koran is the source for Islamic theology. The early history of Islam needs to be presented by both Western and Islamic scholars such that both sides of this history are explored. The history of the Monophysites is usually presented by orthodox Christians, therefore, this bias must be weighed in one's conclusions. The research proposed is focused on exploring and determining how the controversy weakened the Byzantine Empire, divided the Christian community, influenced Islamic theology, and facilitated the spread of Islam.
Statement of the problem

The major research question is to determine if the Byzantine Empire was weakened by the lack of support for the spiritual and political leaders from the Monophysite Christians. As a result, the orthodox form of Christianity was hindered from spreading to adjacent pagan lands and the spread of Islam was rendered more successful. Finally, the theology of Islam was affected in regard to Muhammad's understanding of the nature of Christ due to the influence of Monophysite teaching.

The areas of inquiry which are in the nature of minor research questions will be identified. The following questions relate to Monophysite Christianity. First, what is the Monophysite belief? Second, who was the first church leader to teach the one nature of Christ? Third, who resolved the controversy? Fourth, when did the controversy first begin? Fifth, when was the controversy resolved? Sixth, what variations were supported for the interpretation of the one nature position? The following questions relate to the theology of the nature of Christ. First, what are the arguments in support of the one nature position? Second, what are the arguments in support of the two natures position? Third, what factors determined the orthodox position? Fourth, what became of the one nature position after being condemned as heretical? Fifth, did the controversy contribute to the progressive schism between the Western and Eastern branches of orthodox Christianity? Sixth, in what way did the one nature interpretation weaken Christianity theologically?

The following questions relate to the historical understanding of the Monophysite Controversy. First, what was the chronological progression of people, places, and events in support or in condemnation of the controversy? Second, what position on the nature of Christ was held by the schools at Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria, and Constantinople? Third, what position did the emperors Constantine, Zeno, Justinian, Justin II, Heraclius, Pulcheria (empress), Theodosius II, and Marcian hold during the period of the controversy? Fourth, what position did the patriarchs Severus, Peter Mongo, Timothy, Timothy Aelurus, Anatolius, and Flavian hold? Fifth, what position did the popes Vigilius, Leo the Great, Simplicius, Gelasius I, Gregory, and Honorius support? Sixth, what position did the bishops Cyril of Alexandria, Julian of Halicarnassus, Facundus of Hermiane, and Athanasius of Antioch maintain? Seventh, what position did other key persons in the dispute hold including Eutyches, Jacobobus Baradaeus, Theodora I, John the Grammarian, and Theodoret? The following questions relate to the canons, creeds, and councils of the period between 300-700 CE. First, what was resolved in the Henoticon, Tome of Leo the Great, Canon LXXXI, Epistle L, Three Chapters, Syriac canon, Epistle LXVI I, Monophysite canon, and the New Testament canon? Second, what was resolved in the Nicene Creed, the Chalcedonian Creed, the Athanasian Creed, the anathemas of the second Council of Constantinople, and the Creed from the third Council of Constantinople? Third, what was resolved at the following councils: Nicene 325 CE, Constantinople 381 CE, Ephesus 431 CE, Chalcedon 451 CE, and Constantinople 553 CE? The following questions relate to the hindrance or spread of Christianity and Islam. First, what factors promoted the spread of Monophysite Christianity? Second, what factors hindered the spread of orthodox Christianity? Third, what factors promoted the spread of Islam. Fourth, why did Islam largely replace Monophysite Christianity in the Middle East? Fifth, how did Mohammed develop his understanding of the nature of Christ?
The thesis is that the missionary outreach of the orthodox Christian faith was hindered from spreading south and east due to the dominance of the Monophysite Christian faith in these areas. As a result, the Byzantine Empire was weakened resulting in the rapid spread of Islam into these geographic areas. Further, Muhammad may have been influenced by the Monophysite teaching regarding the one nature of Christ, which became the theology incorporated within the Koran.

The study will be limited in several important ways. First, the study will be delimited to Christology as it pertains to theology. Within the area of Christology, the study will be limited to the Monophysite Controversy. The theological concern will be delimited to the debate over the person of Christ having one nature or two natures. This will entail analyzing both the orthodox and the heretical arguments. Some other earlier heresies, if they had been accepted as orthodox such as Gnosticism or Arianism, would have been fatal to Christianity. Once these heresies were rejected, later heresies were contentious but not fatal to Christianity. Controversies such as that of the Monophysite position tended to divide and weaken Christianity. The following heresies will not be extensively included in the study: Gnosticism, Docetism, Marcionism, Montanism, Patripassianism, Monarchianism, Sabellianism, Arianism, and Pelagianism. Second, the study will be delimited to a specific timeframe during the early church age. The study will exclude the apostolic age (33-100 CE) and the age of persecution (100-313 C.E.). By 313 CE, Christianity as a religion had become both legal and the official religion of the empire. The Monophysite Controversy occurred between Christians rather than between Christians and pagans. Other heresies such as Gnosticism and Arianism passed into history leaving no functioning church. Monophysite Christianity, while a minority church in Christianity, still exists as a functioning church today. The study will incorporate the theologies and history of Apollinaris, Nestorius, and Eutyches because they influenced the doctrine concerning the nature of Christ. The Council of Chalcedon (451 CE) was the high point for the declaration of the orthodox position of the Dyophysites. This position was argued and debated with the Monophysites until the orthodox position was reaffirmed in 680 CE. Thereafter, the issues moved on to the use of icons and the political survival from the threats of Islam to Christian lands. Third, the study will be limited to those church leaders, bishops, patriarchs, popes, monks, and the emperors of the Roman and Byzantine empires of the period. The study will not include writings of the apostles nor the early church fathers. The study will focus on the Eastern theologians rather than the Latin writers. However, the contributions on this subject of Hillary of Poitier, Ambrose of Milan, and Augustine of Hippo will be included. The study will not include Greek or Persian writers of the period. Fourth, the study will be limited to the period of Muhammad's life and the first succeeding Muslim caliphs up to the completion of the Koran and the overthrow of the Christian Middle Eastern lands by the Muslims by the date of 700 CE. The theology of the Koran will be limited to the writings concerning the person of Jesus Christ. The scope of the history of the spread of Islam during this period will be limited to only those Christian occupied lands where the Monophysites were dominant. The histories will include both Christian and Muslim writers in the English language only. Fifth, the geographic area to be studied will include the Near East, Asia-Minor, North Africa, and Rome. The study will not include Greece, Persia, the balance of Europe, or the Far East. The schools of Christianity which will be the focus of the study
will include Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople with a lesser focus on Rome and Carthage.

A number of key terms will be used repeatedly in the study.

**Canon.** The orthodox interpretation of the scriptural doctrine expressed in writing and sanctioned by an official church council.

**Council.** An official meeting of authorized church leaders held at a specific place and time to debate and decide on a church issue.

**Creed.** The summarized orthodox position on a doctrinal issue produced in writing and meant to be taught in all the churches.

**Coptic.** The Monophysite church in Egypt which utilizes the Coptic language.

**Heresy.** Any teaching which has been judged by the majority of a church council to be in error and was forbidden to be taught.

**Monophysite.** The belief and teaching that Christ has only one nature.

**Nature (s).** The view of a person (Christ) that identifies one, two, or three essences of the person such as divine, human, or merged.

**Orthodox.** Any teaching which has been judged by the majority of a church council to be acceptable and taught by the churches.

**Syriac.** The Monophysite church in Syria which utilizes the Syriac language.

A number of concepts will be presented in the study. First, there is a progression from the Trinity, to the nature, to the will of Christ; which is central to the doctrine of Christology. The progression moves from the concept of divinity to the concept of humanity. The debate centers on an understanding of the God-man that had never existed before or after the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. The natural question arises as to two parallel claims. Jesus is the eternal, pre-existent Son, and at the same time He is also an obedient individual, a historic human being. The orthodox position asserts the unity of deity and humanity in one person. The heretical position maintains that the deity or the humanity dominates the person such that one or the other is absorbed into the other or into a third person. This was important because it suggests limits to the power of Christ to fulfill the plan of redemption. If he is not fully and completely divine, then he may not as less than God be able to save humans from their sins. In like manner, then how can his suffering and death be put to the account of human beings? Apollinaris argued that Christ had two natures before the incarnation, one divine and one human, but afterward he had only one nature. His explanation is based on the Logos (Spirit of God) indwelling a human body with a Spirit intellect rather than a human intellect. This understanding placed Apollinaris into the position of a Monophysite where the Word made flesh results in the one nature of God. Apollinaris began to teach this doctrine in 352 CE. He was labeled a heretic by 362 CE by Athanasius because he believed if Christ was not fully human then his followers were not his brethren as human beings as he claimed believers to be. For Christ to be the substitute for the salvation of mankind, He must be a man subject to suffering and death. Further, Christ must be a man with a human intellect and will if he is to be obedient to God where Adam had failed and thereby become mankind’s Redeemer. He was exiled in 388 CE by Emperor Theodosius I. Second, the Antiochene School supported the Dyophysite concept of the two natures of Christ as distinct but united in one person. The objective of the Antiochene School was to preserve the unity of Christ in one person while supporting the fullness of Christ in two natures. The Dyophysite teaching of this concept is adamant about not mixing, blending, or absorbing
the two natures into one. The resolution of this position was that Jesus Christ was not a deified man nor a humanized deity but rather the God-man. The Alexandrian school supported the Monophysite concept of the one nature of Christ. The leading proponent of the Alexandrian school was Cyril who supported the idea of the unity of the unchanged, unmixed divine and human natures in one person. The one incarnate nature of Christ became the settled position of the Alexandrian school. Third, the study will explore the methodology to resolve theological disputes. Attempts were made by various means such as the Tome of Leo the Great, the hastily called Robber Council in 449 CE, the Henoticon writing, the Three Chapters writings, the official Chalcedonian Council in 451 CE, and the Chalcedonian Creed. Each of these methods represented a concept of the way to resolve a doctrinal dispute. Which methods failed to resolve the dispute of the Monophysite Controversy and which method succeeded resulted in a proven methodology to resolve future controversies in the church. Fourth, the Monophysite position is not a single doctrine but rather encompasses a variety of interpretations. For example, some Monophysites by definition are labeled as such only because they opposed the findings of the Council of Chalcedon. This would include Eutyches. Severus was a Monophysite because he taught that a synthesis of Christ’s two natures occurred in the incarnation. Julian of Halicarnassus was a Monophysite who taught that Jesus possessed a glorified nature after the incarnation such that his humanity was indestructible. Leontius of Byzantium was a Monophysite who taught that the two natures are united according to their essence, while preserving the distinctiveness of each where Christ’s human nature received its distinctiveness only after it had united with the Logos. Each of these concepts which interpreted the nature of Christ is different, but each is called Monophysite. Two actions led to the separation of the Monophysites from the orthodox church. The actual words and meaning of their writings separated church leaders due to their differing beliefs within the church. Also, the animosities and political power struggles separated church leaders in regard to their fellowship with each other within the church. Fifth, Muhammad claims to have received visions from the angel Gabriel, wherein he was instructed to recite the words of God. As with all biblical authors, the human factors of language, custom, location, education, and experience are incorporated in the biblical writings. Muhammad had the same tendencies which are evident in the text of the Koran and from the history of Muhammad’s life as recorded by some of his followers. He knew Christians and commented on his understanding of who Christ was. The concept he expressed is a partly divine, but mostly human understanding of the nature of Christ. The study will explore how Muhammad conceptualized the person and nature of Jesus Christ.

The study is based upon five theological and philosophical assumptions. First, the development of a consensus of learned men is the method by which a theological belief becomes the orthodox position. The minority consensus becomes heretical because the majority declares it to be so. Despite the heretical status, the minority position may live on and become central to a segment of Christianity. Second, during any controversy, leaders take sides in expressing their opinion. It was inevitable that men exercising power from competing positions and locations would debate the important issue of the nature of Christ. This competition surfaced between: the schools of Alexandria and Antioch, the church leaders from Constantinople and Rome, and Western versus Eastern geographical bishoprics. Third, political events during the period affected the outcome of the
controversy. The fall of Rome strengthened the position of the emperors and patriarchs in Constantinople after 476 CE. The theological debates strengthened the orthodox church, but weakened the Byzantine Empire. Fourth, canons, creeds, and councils served as the structure to argue and decide the issues of church doctrine. These meetings and publications served the purpose of deciding what the church would believe and teach. These records also serve as the record for inquiry today of the controversies thereby enabling modern historical research. Fifth, Islam originated in the Arabian Desert during the period 610 CE and 632 CE. Islam claims Jesus as a prophet with a human nature. The Koran incorporates an understanding of Jesus which seems to have been learned from Monophysite Christians. The contact between the Arab Muslims and Christian Monophysites weakened the Byzantine Empire rendering it susceptible to the spread of Islam.

The following focus statements will be used to explore the research thesis in detail:

(1) To determine the origin and basis for the Monophysite belief regarding the nature of Christ.

(2) To research the arguments supporting and condemning the one nature versus the two natures of Christ debate.

(3) To develop an historical timeline of the Monophysite Controversy which includes people, persons, and events.

(4) To research the writings, canons, and creeds which document the positions of persons engaged in the controversy and the findings of church councils of the period in order to determine the impact on Christianity.

(5) To investigate the impact on Muhammad's teaching as reflected in the Koran and the impact on the spread of Islam.
Procedural Overview

The content chapters will be outlined as follows:

**Chapter 2: Origin and Basis for Monophysite Belief**
The origin of the belief that Christ has only one nature will be explored. Monophysite belief will be defined and discussed as to how this interpretation originated. The theology and history of this position will be reviewed.

**Chapter 3: Christ: One Nature or Two Natures**
The debate regarding the nature of Christ will be explored. The arguments supporting and condemning each position will be discussed. The two nature position became orthodox Christology while the one nature position became the teaching of the Oriental churches.

**Chapter 4: Historical Timeline of the Monophysite Controversy**
The period of the controversy extended from 300 CE until 700 CE. A timeline of people, places, and events will be presented to provide a chronological history of the controversy. The setting of the Byzantine and Roman empires will provide geographic and political context to the research.

**Chapter 5: Canons, Creeds, and Councils**
The writings of church leaders, bishops, patriarchs, popes, monks, and emperors will be explored to discover the contributions of each relevant person addressing the Monophysite Controversy. These positions were either accepted or rejected by the church councils of the period. The official findings of the church councils will be presented.

**Chapter 6: Impact of Monophysite Christianity and the Spread of Islam.**
Muhammad received the recitation of the Koran between 610 CE and 632 CE. The research will explore the teachings of early Islamic belief regarding the person of Jesus of Christ. The Monophysite teaching impacted this belief and the controversy weakened the Byzantine Empire at a time when Islam began to spread.

**Conclusions**
Implications of Findings
Applications of Findings
Further Study

The mode of reasoning will research two disciplines. First, the process will be to research and understand the complex nature of the theology of the Monophysite Controversy. The primary sources of original writings will be reviewed followed by resource material of secondary sources. Second, the process will be to determine the history of the controversy. This will involve researching various dictionaries, commentaries, and church histories. In regard to the church histories, the primary sources will be original publications while secondary sources will be researched from various modern texts discussing church history. Third, the writings of the church canons and creeds and the publications from the church councils will be researched from primary sources. Secondary sources consisting of encyclopedias, systematic theologies, handbooks, and articles will be researched. Fourth, the Islamic history and theology of the person of Christ will be researched. The primary source will be the Koran. Secondary sources will be commentaries and histories on early Islam provided by Western and Islamic authors. The plan for each chapter (2-6) will be to define, describe, compare, analyze, and summarize Monophysite theology and history of the period between 300-700 CE. This process will form the foundation to the next step, which is to determine the
impact of the controversy on the Byzantine Empire and on the spread of Islam as the two peoples, religions, and cultures came into contact.