



Bishara EBEID: *La Tunica di al-Masīh.*
La Cristologia delle grandi confessioni cristiane
dell’Oriente nel X e XI secolo.
Roma: Pontificio Istituto Orientale — Edizioni
Orientalia Christiana, Valore Italiano,
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Bishara Ebeid belongs to the rising generation of Christian experts in the Middle East. He himself was born in northern Israel (in I‘billin); his father is a Greek Orthodox believer and his mother is a Maronite. He is a polyglot: he has spoken Arabic, Hebrew, and Greek since he was young. He studied Orthodox theology at Aristotle University in Thessaloniki. He later went to Rome to continue his postgraduate studies at the Pontificio Istituto Orientale (PIO), where he wrote a dissertation focusing on the Trinitology and Christology of three prominent Arabic theologians in the 10th and 11th centuries who were representatives of three Christian denominations and who knew each other or reacted to one another in writing. The dissertation was successfully defended and published in an exceptional edition by Edizioni Orientalia Christiana, the publishing body of PIO.

Fr. Massimo Pampaloni SJ, supervisor of the thesis and dean of the Faculty of Eastern Church Sciences of the PIO, wrote the introduction (pp. 7—13). In addition to the content, the system of Arabic transliteration and the list of abbreviations of frequently quoted works, the author presents the motives of his work when he subscribes to very lively studies of the legacy of Arab Christianity (pp. 27—33).

Ebeid divided his work into four parts, with a total division of seventeen chapters.

The introductory first chapter outlines the context of Arab theology, namely, the theology of Christian thinkers who have historically expressed themselves and written in Arabic (“Teologia in lingua araba: Storia e letteratura”, pp. 35—81).

What follows is the book's Part One (*Sa'īd Ibn Batrīq e la sua dottrina*, pp. 83—215), consisting of four chapters. First, in the second chapter, the author presents in detail the life and work of the Melchite Patriarch and theologian, originally from Cairo, Sa'īd Ibn Batrīq (877—940). The analysis proper begins in the third chapter, where he precisely conveys Batrīq's interpretation of the history of Melkite theology on the basis of the Trinitology and Christology of the first six councils. In the fourth chapter the author presents an analysis of Batrīq's Trinitology and in the fifth chapter he analyzes Batrīq's Christology.

Part Two (*Sawīrus Ibn al-Muqaffa' e la sua dottrina*, pp. 217—404), which also consists of four chapters, is devoted to the famous Coptic theologian Sawīrus Ibn al-Muqaffa' (910/915—987). This famous author was introduced in Czech monographically by Mlada Mikulicová (see Bishop Severus of Asmúnajn, Karolinum 2012). Ebeid's approach is, of course, more detailed. The sixth chapter is devoted to the presentation of the said theologian's life and work. Very interestingly, in the seventh chapter, the author synthetically elaborates on the Jacobite interpretation of dogmatic development, noting al-Muqaffa's reaction to Batrīq's version of the history of dogma. In the eighth chapter he presents a trinitological analysis and in the ninth a Christological analysis of al-Muqaffa's thinking and work.

The book's Part Three (*Elia di Nisibi e la sua dottrina*, pp. 405—571) is dedicated by Bishara Ebeid to the Nestorian theologian Elijah of Nisibis (975—1046). In the tenth chapter, he presents Elijah's life and work. In the eleventh chapter, he presents a Nestorian view of dogmatic development. In particular, the author presents Elijah's response to Batrīq's Melchite interpretation of the history of dogma. Of course, he pays more attention to the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon. In the twelfth chapter, Bishara Ebeid works on a trinitological analysis of Elijah's work, and in the thirteenth chapter, he presents a very comprehensive Christological analysis.

After the analytical part, Bishara Ebeid approaches an admirable synthesis, so Part Four (*I tre autori in comparazione: verso una proposta inclusiva*, pp. 573—672) is devoted to a comparison of the theology of all three theologians. First, in the fourteenth chapter, he compares three expositions of the history of dogma: Melkite, Jacobite, and Nestorian. He does the same (in chapter fifteen) on the basis of Trinitology. There he notes the used Trinitarian models, terminological issues and the relationship to non-Christian rejections of the trinitarian mystery. The following sixteenth chapter compares Christologies. He notes “when” and “where” the two natures of Jesus Christ were united, “what” was the “result” and “what kind of unification” we can speak of. He answers all the questions from the point of view of Melkite, Jacobite, and Nestorian theology.

In the last (seventeenth) chapter, the author offers an audacious proposal in the form of so-called inclusive theology. First, he discusses the peculiarity of the Christology and Trinitology of each particular author. Each of them usurped the “historical truth”. Ebeid adds that with the advancement of historical science, it often turns out that each of the interpretations has its part of the truth. However, all these interpretations must be taken into account for the real truth. “No one can represent the absolute historical truth. Only together can one come to a picture that encompasses all statements and is, in fact, very close to the real truth.” (p. 641)

Ebeid notes what all three denominations have in common: the Trinitarian faith, the first two councils, and an anti-Marian narrative. According to Ebeid, the problems arise with the Christological conflict between Cyril of Alexandria and Nestorius. In Trinitarian theology, he first asks what can be said about a mystery that is inherently incomprehensible in words? He gives the example of the Cappadocian fathers there, who are the basis for his proposed inclusive theology. After all, the theology of all three denominations is based on their conclusions.

In the Christological part, he summarizes in great detail the terminology of not only the three theologians, but also notes the various Christological declarations and confessions. The solution is that each of the three Christologies is based on certain philosophical terms and certain semantic content. Thus, from certain points of view, all three Christologies are right, because each of them, from different angles, with different terms and different emphases, underlines the truth of the incarnation of the Son of God. We will only reach the actual truth if we reject all *a priori* rejections and ideological battles against other traditions. On the contrary, it is necessary to open up oneself to the other and include his statement because, in the end, his statement will complement one’s own. Only all three views together will help to look at the clear truth.

The beautifully written monograph also includes an extensive bibliography (pp. 673—716) and a very practical Appendix. Therein, the author presents a schematic expression of Trinitarian and Christological thinking of all three authors, including his inclusive proposal (pp. 719—722). This is followed by indexes of both, names (pp. 725—727), and subject one, where first Arabic terms are introduced (pp. 728—731), and later Greek and Syrian (pp. 732—733) ones, and finally Latin and Italian ones (pp. 734—737).

I dare say that the monograph is a cornerstone of future Arab-Christian studies. It gives a very deep insight into the three key Christian denominations and gives an understanding of their mutual theological controversies. However, the monograph deals not only with the history


of theology, but secondarily proves how important the studies of Arabic Christian literature are even today, which — especially in the epoch encompassing centuries from 9th to 13th — certainly did not rest on its laurels and tried to constantly reinterpret dogma. For this reason, this monograph is a necessary aid for historians of Christian thought. In the Western world in particular, the disregard for the history of Christianity in the Middle East pertained to the centuries between 7th and 12th. This monograph shows how wrong this disregard has been.

Also I would highly recommend that the author present his concept of inclusive theology in a comprehensive study or book. His perspective is unique and very modern and topical for ecumenism or interfaith dialogue. Based on the impossibility of usurping historical truth, the author's concept connects very closely with the possibility of human knowledge. Friedrich Nietzsche and his notion of perspectivism could certainly be invited here. So it would be very interesting to contextualize inclusive theology in gnoseology, philosophy, and the history of theology. As the author presented it in the monograph in question, it is fully sufficient, but I think the intuition is much more fundamental and it would really be advisable to treat it in a monographic way.

At the beginning of the review, I indicated that Bishara Ebeid belongs to the rising generation of Christian experts in the Middle East. Maybe I should adjust my opinion: Bishara Ebeid is already rightfully one of the top experts in the history of Arabic theology.

In conclusion, I should add that in his monograph Ebeid is ultimately concerned with the unity of the Christian churches, which is so much wanted and so much needed. However, this is not a cheap ecumenical fraternity. It is indeed a comparative historical theology par excellence.

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