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Table of Contents

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The Doctrine of Christ and Its Relation to the Concept of Son of God: A Brief study on the Nature of Isa a.s. as Understood by Indonesia Churches

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Abstract

"Son of God" is a common term in the Bible, both in the Jewish Scriptures and the New Testament. This term is used to refer to different things: the nation of Israel, the King of Israel, Prophet Adam a.s. or humankind in general, the Messiah (*al-Masih*), and also Jesus. When the term "son of God" is used to refer to humankind or to Israel, for example, there is no doubt that the term is used figuratively. Nevertheless, when the term is used to refer to Jesus, there is much confusion and misunderstanding among Christians including Indonesian Christians. The Christian community, especially the early Church fathers, made some speculations about the person of Jesus. Unfortunately, the misunderstanding of Christians affects the understanding of Muslims about the term "son of God." Christianity in Indonesia which was introduced by Europeans adopts most of its theology from the West. So, the form of Christianity in Indonesia is similar to the Western or European forms of Christianity, both Protestant and Catholic. According to the Christian doctrine of Christ, Indonesian Christians generally and the Indonesian Reformed Church specifically believe that Christ or Messiah (*al-Masih*) is God who became a man because only God can save human beings on the Day of Judgment.
Keywords: Son of God, Christ, Indonesia, Church.

Introduction

Indonesian church history cannot be separated from that of the Europeans, especially the Portuguese and the Dutch, because Christianity in Indonesia, both Catholicism and Protestantism, was introduced by them. Portugal is the first nation to have brought Catholicism to Indonesia in the 16th century, while the Netherlands established Protestantism.[1] In fact, in a historical account in Egypt in the 11th century, it was recorded there were some church buildings in Fansur, which according to Indonesian Christian historians, is

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[1] Kenneth Scott. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, 4th ed., vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974), p.300.

located in North Sumatra. The churches, however, were not sustainable, so they were not recorded in official Indonesian church history.[1]

In this article, the researcher will only examine Protestantism which was introduced by the Netherlands, because Dutch Protestantism, especially Calvinism, was the embryo of the Indonesian Protestant churches.[2] However, the doctrine of Christ held by the Indonesian Protestant churches is also shared by most Indonesian churches. So, the researcher will focus on the theology of Protestant churches, especially Reformed theology as a representative of the theology of Indonesian churches.

Reformation in Europe did not only develop in Germany, the home country of Martin Luther, but also in countries such as France, Switzerland, England and the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, reformation in Calvinistic form became the dominant religion.[3] The strong growth in Calvinism was influenced by a strong teaching about discipline. In Calvinism, discipline was the important qualifier of the true Church of Christ.[4] For example, Calvin always criticized the community of Geneva for not having enough discipline even though they had enough desire to accept true doctrine.[5] Later, when the Dutch brought Calvinism to Indonesia, discipline was applied strictly in restructuring the Church's organization.[6]

In terms of Christian teaching, the Dutch brought the same teaching of their "mother church" in the Netherlands, which was reformed (Calvinism). It can be seen from the sermons in the Sunday services that they were always taken from the Heidelberg Catechism one of the most important teachings in Reformed churches. In addition, the anthems that they sang were taken from the anthems composed in Geneva during

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[1] Th. van den End, *Ragi Carita 1: Sejarah Gereja Di Indonesia 1500-1860 (Fermented Story 1: Church History in Indonesia 1500-1860)*, 13th ed. (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2007), p. 20.

[2] Theodor Müller-Krüger, *Sedjarah Geredja Di Indonesia* (Djakarta: Badan Penerbit Kristen, 1966), p. 29.

[3] Guido Marnef, "Chapter 20, The Netherlands," in *The Reformation World by Adrew Pettegree*, N. ed. (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 344.

[4] Robert M. Kingdon, "Chapter 39: Calvin and The Establishment of Consistory Discipline in Geneva: The Institution and The Men Who Directed It," in *The Reformation: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies Edited by Andrew Pettegree*, N. ed., vol. 3 (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 58.

[5] Ibid., 61.

[6] Muller Kruger, *Sedjarah Geredja Di Indonesia*, 42. See also Th. Van den End, *Ragi Carita 1*, 121.

John Calvin's time.[1]   As a result, reformed teaching became the foundation of Protestant churches' teaching in Nusantara.

The Doctrine of Christ in the Indonesian Churches

The doctrine of Christ is one of the most important branches in Christian theology. This doctrine is the body of teaching about Jesus, who is the one to whom the title of Christ is given. In this section the researcher explains about Jesus Christ, especially about his person,[2] function and title. The researcher will highlight, in particular, the unique title of "the son of God" that is attributed to Christ. The three aspects of person, function and title will be analyzed because they are very important facets in Christianity. The person of Jesus is exalted by Christians because he is considered the second person of the Trinity. In relation to his function, Christians claim that through Jesus everything was created. Stephen Tong, an Indonesia theologian, even says that God worked together with Jesus in creating the heaven and the earth;[3] the title of "Son of God"[4] is a very important title to be given to Jesus because it is through this title that once again Christians consider him as the second person of the Trinity. The three aspects mentioned are explained from the understanding of Indonesian Reformed churches and their roots.

As mentioned above, Indonesian Reformed churches inherited their doctrine from the Reformed churches of the Netherlands of the past; therefore, it is natural that the doctrine of Christ in Indonesian Reformed churches in particular, and Christian churches in Nusantara in general, would be in line with such classical and reformed doctrine. In other words, the doctrine of Christ, which was developed by Reformed churches in Europe, was handed down to Indonesian Reformed churches, with or without the effort of contextualization.[5] This can be seen, obiter, in the confession of faith which is recited faithfully every week in the Sunday service in Indonesian Reformed churches, or in catechism which is taught to the congregation, especially to new believers who will take part in the ritual of baptism.

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[1] Ibid. P. 116.

[2] In this case, the explanation about his nature is highlighted, because the interpretation about his nature determines whether he is God or not.

[3] Stephen Tong, *Siapakah Kristus? Sifat & Karya (Who Is Christ? Characteristic & Works of Christ)*, N. ed. (Surabaya: Momentum, 2009), p. 28.

[4] The researcher puts capital S for the term "Son" when it refers to Christian understanding, to maintain the objectivity of the study.

[5] Th. Sumarthana, *Mission at the Cross Roads*, N. ed. (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1993), p. 324.

Nature of Christ

The dispute about the nature of Christ has been happening since the early days of Christianity, in other words since the early church fathers started to understand who Jesus was. Some questions emerged about Jesus, as to whether he was an ordinary human being, whether he was God, or whether he was both God and human elements in one person. Ebionites, an early Jewish Christian group concluded that Jesus was an ordinary human being, the son of Mary and Joseph, so this community rejected the divinity of Jesus.[1] This conclusion was quickly rejected and regarded as a heresy. On the other hand, the opposite opinion called Docetism, claims that Jesus is totally divine, and that his visible body is an "appearance" only.[2] This conclusion was also rejected and regarded as a heresy, due to the fact that Jesus was born to a human being, namely Mary.

Later, some church fathers such as Irenaeus and his disciple named Hippolytus, as well as Tertullian conducted an exegesis of the Gospel of John. The beginning of this gospel mentions that the *Logos* (Word) being of divine nature, became flesh through a virgin. Through this process, the divine nature of Christ also had a human nature, so that in the one person of Jesus, there were two natures, divine and human.[3] It seemed that this approach could be accepted by the majority Christians at that time. Nevertheless, it did not mean that this approach was accepted as a final conclusion about the nature of Christ. This conclusion actually created a new problem, because by saying that Jesus had a divine nature, it indirectly showed that there are two gods with the same nature or essence.

Arius, a presbyter (elder) in Alexandria, disputed the theology of two beings that have the same nature, namely God and Christ. This is often called the *Arian Controversy*. Arius argued that God is the only source; He has existed before everything, including the *Logos*. In other words, there was a time when God was alone, and had not become "Father" yet; and then He "begat" the "son" (*Logos*), and became "Father". Therefore, the nature of *Logos* and the nature of God are similar, but not exactly the same (*homoiousious* in Greek).[4] Furthermore, Arius explains that God's Word (*Logos*) who became a human was a creature. Nevertheless, Arius did not reject what is mentioned in the Gospel of John, that *Logos* is an agent of God

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[1] J. D. N Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, N. ed. (New York, N. Y: Harper San Francisco, 1978), p.139.

[2] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford & Cambridge: Blackwell Publisher, 1997), p. 331.

[3] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 149.

[4] Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology*, p. 332-333.

in creation which means that everything was created through the *Logos*. Therefore, the *Logos* has different status with other creations. Moreover, Arius explains that the *Logos* is covered by divinity because the *Logos* obeys God perfectly. Thus, *Logos* is not God by nature, but exalted by God to the divine status. In other words, the divinity of *Logos* is conferred by God.[1] Furthermore, Kelly (1993) summarized that Arius stressed four conclusions which are always reiterated in every occasion; the first, that the Word was a creature, whom the Father had brought into existence by His fiat; second, the Word must have had a beginning, because only the Father is without beginning; third, the son could not have comprehended the infinite God; fourth, the son was liable to change and sin.[2]

The opinion of Arius was contrary to the opinion of other church fathers such as Origen and Athanasius who claimed that Jesus and God have the same nature or essence (*homoousious*).[3] Origen explains that the very *Logos* of Father, the wisdom of God Himself, which means having the same essence with God, entered into the womb of a woman and was born. In that situation the *Logos* was enclosed within the limits of a man.[4] Athanasius adopts the approach that the relationship between the Son and the Father for God is different with the relationship between a son and a father for human beings, because God cannot be separated from His word. Therefore, God and His word exist from all eternity and both have the same essence. Nevertheless, Athanasius agreed that the Son must be distinct with the Father and certainly that the distinction is also eternal and cannot be understood by human beings.[5]

The conflict between Arius with Athanasius drew the first council held in Nicaea (325 CE). An interesting aspect of this council is that the council was initiated by Constantine who was an emperor who tried to resolve controversial matters of Christian doctrine and practice.[6] The council primarily discussed the teaching of Arius, which according to some church fathers such as Alexander and Athanasius, was distorted. While, Alexander considered that Arius' teaching was distorted, he allowed Arius to present

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[1] John Henry. Newman, *The Arians of the Fourth Century*, 3rd ed. (London: Lumley, 1871), pp. 210-2012.
[2] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, pp. 227-229.
[3] Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, N. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Combined edn, 1996), p. 306.
[4] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, p. 154-155.
[5] Ibid, p. 244.
[6] Morwenna Ludlow, *The Early Church*, N. ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), p. 97.

his thoughts in the council.[1] Eventually the Nicaea Council decided that Arius was to be excommunicated from the church.[2] In addition, they composed a confession of faith named the Nicene Creed. The following is the translation of the creed listed in Kelly (1972),

> We believe in one God, the Father, almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is from the substance of the Father, God of God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through Whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth, Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascend to the heavens, will come to judge living and dead; And in the Holy Spirit. But as for those who say, There was when He was not, and that He came in existence out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is of a different hypostasis or substance, or is subject to alteration or change-these the Catholic and apostolic Church anathematizes.[3]

Looking at the second part of the confession which is about Jesus Christ, it is obvious that the Nicaea Council determined that the Christ is the son who is begotten, not made; he is true God, not secondary to God, from the substance of the Father and of one substance with the Father (*homoousious*). Thus, essentially, they proposed that Christ is God himself. According to the researcher's views, this conclusion does not reflect a unanimous and truly representative decision because of the fact that the teaching of Arius was not stopped due to the creed; Arius kept continuing his doctrine secretly.[4]

There was actually another council after Nicaea to muffle the teaching of Arius. It was held in Constantinople (381_{CE}), but did not contribute a meaningful decision about the doctrine of Christ. An important council which did examine the doctrine of Christ was held 70 years later in Chalcedon (451_{CE}). This council was conducted to respond

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[1] John Henry Newman, *The Arians of the Fourth Century*, p. 244.

[2] Morwenna, *The Early Church*, p. 114.

[3] J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, (Essex & New York: Longman, 3rd edn., 1972), p. 215-216.

[4] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 237.

to some doctrines that had emerged and the council actually came out against the decision of the Nicaea council, especially various theories about the two natures of Christ, namely the divine and human nature.[1] The council finally composed a crucial confession about the two natures united in one person of Christ and it was named the Creed of Chalcedon.

As mentioned, the council was held as a response to some understandings about Christ. Firstly, the phrase "consisting also of a rational soul" is a response to the opinion of Appolinaris who denied that the Christ had a rational soul (*anima rationalis*) and reduced the incarnation to the assumption of a human body with an animal soul, inhabited by divine *Logos*.[2] Secondly, the creed is a response to the matter of the two natures of Christ as mentioned by Philip Schaff who says that "Christ's consubstantial (*homoousia*) with the Father implies numerical unity, or identity of essence (God being one in being, or *monoousios*); Christ's consubstantial (*homoousia*) with humanity means only generic unity, or equality of nature."[3] Thirdly, the predicate God-bearer (*theotokos*) was a resistance against Nestorius who said that Mary was not a God-bearer, because it is impossible for a creature to give birth to the Creator. Furthermore, Nestorius said that the term *theotokos* should not be used at all because it is a provocative term. To the contrary, Nestorius proposed that Mary should only be called the Christ-bearer (*kristotokos*) because essentially Mary gave birth to the Christ as a human being.[4] This understanding is based on the notion that in the body of Christ there are two persons, a human person and a divine person.[5] Fourthly, the inclusion of the phrase "two natures" was a reaction against a monk called Eutyches who said that Christ is one person with only one nature, known as monophysitism. Monophysitism denies that Christ's human nature abided when it united with divine nature, rather on the contrary, the human nature was absorbed by the divine nature, so the Christ had only one nature.[6] Fifthly, the terms, "without confusion, without conversion or change" are also directed against Eutychianism, which mixes and confounds the human and the divine natures in Christ, and teaches

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[1] Ibid. P.339.

[2] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 291-292.

[3] Philip Schaff, "Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes. Volume II. The History of Creeds."Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed May 14, 2011, http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds2.html.

[4] Morwenna, *The Early Church*, pp. 194-196.

[5] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction To Biblical Doctrine*, N. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), p. 555.

[6] Ralph J. Tapia, *The Theology of Christ: Commentary; Readings in Christology*, N. ed. (New York: Bruce Pub., 1971), p. 159-161.

absorption of the human into the divine.[1] Sixthly, the statements "without division, without separation", are both in opposition to Nestorius, who so emphasized the duality of natures, and the continued distinction between the human and the divine in Christ.[2]

In addition, the creed contains some principles of the doctrine of Christ which reinforce the doctrine mentioned in the Nicene Creed. The principles can be explained briefly as follows: (1) Christ was the perfect God, consubstantial with the Father; (2) Christ was a perfect human, consubstantial with humanity; (3) These two natures were not to be confused, such that they lose the characteristic of each and they did not make a new nature; (4) These two natures were not to be divided, so as to lose the unity of Christ.

The discussion about the doctrine of Christ in early Christianity did not stop at the council of Chalcedon, even though this council established a confession of faith, but it was ongoing. The doctrine of Christ was further addressed in the Athanasian Creed. Moreover, this creed does not only examine the relationship between the Son and the Father, but also addresses the Holy Spirit specifically. Therefore, the term Trinity is used in this creed. The creed comprises of 44 articles. The first section (the first twenty-six articles) focuses on the doctrine of the Trinity, especially about the sameness of substance of the three persons of the Trinity, who are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The second section (articles twenty-seven to the forty-four) centres on the doctrine of Christ which is the divinity and humanity of the person of Christ. It is apparent that the doctrine of Christ in Athanasian Creed does not differ much with the creed of Chalcedon, and in actual fact, can be said to be a confirmation of the latter. The researcher proposes it to be a conformation because articles bear a similarity with the Chalcedon Creed. Therefore, there is a possibility that the creed illustrates continuing opposition to some teachings which were considered as heresy such as Apollinarianism who said that the manhood of Christ is incomplete[3] and Eutychianism who mentioned that humanity of Christ was totally absorbed by his divinity.[4]

The creeds mentioned above have become established Christian creeds, and even today some Catholic and Protestant churches still use them. While they were written centuries ago, it is natural for the creeds to still be used by churches because the main points about the person of Jesus, who is the centre of Christian faith, are discussed in the creeds and it seems that creeds become

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[1] Ibid.
[2] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 314-315.
[3] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 311.
[4] Ibid., p. 331.

an expression of the life of Christian communities.[1] Even though the classical creeds are still used nowadays, it does not mean that there were no other confessions or proposals about the nature of Christ, especially in the reformed tradition. In the Sixteenth and Seventeenth century, after the Reformation in Europe, Reformed churches compiled some confessions of faith that distinguish the Reformed faith from the Roman Catholic Church and other Protestant churches. There were three influential confessions composed, namely the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canon of Dordt, which are often called the Three Forms of Unity.[2] The Three Forms of Unity became the core teaching in the Dutch Reformed Church, which became the "mother church" of the Indonesian Reformed churches, as mentioned in the previous section.

The Belgic Confession, historically is the first (composed in 1561) of the Three Forms of Unity, and is the one that mentions most about the nature of Christ. It is often called the Belgic Confession because it was written in the southern Lowlands, now known as Belgium. The confession was written primarily as a testimony to the king of Spain that Reformed believers were not rebelling, but they were confessing the doctrines taught in the Holy Scripture. Furthermore, the confession was adopted by several national synods in the sixteenth century, and then was adopted by the Synod of Dordrecht, in 1618-1619.[3] The following are two parts taken from two articles in the Belgic Confession which relate to the nature of Christ.

Article 10: the Deity of Christ
We believe that Jesus Christ, according to His divine nature, is the only begotten Son of God, begotten from eternity, not made nor created (for then He should be a creature), but coessential and coeternal with the Father, the express image of His person, and the brightness of His glory, equal unto Him in all things. He is the Son of God, not only from the time that He assumed our nature, but from all eternity, as these testimonies, when compared

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[1] John H. Leith, "Chapter 1: A Brief History of the Creedal Task: The Role of Creeds in Reformed Churches," in *To Confess the Faith Today. Edited by Jack L. Stotts, E. Jane Dempsey Douglass*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990).

[2] N.A. Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA), *The Confession and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, N. ed. (Grandville: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), http://www.prca.org/PRC_Confessions_and_Church_Order.pdf.

[3] PRCA, n.38 at 22.

together, teach us…He therefore is that true, eternal, and almighty God, whom we invoke, worship, and serve.[1]

Article 19: The Two Natures of Christ

We believe that by this conception the person of the Son is inseparably united and connected with the human nature, so that there are not two Sons of God, nor two persons, but two natures united in one single person; yet that each nature retains its own distinct properties…Wherefore we confess that He is very God, and very man: very God by His power to conquer death; and very man that He might die for us according to the infirmity of His flesh.[2]

It seems that the composer of Belgic Confession endeavoured to preserve the classical creeds such as the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedon Creed. This can be seen through some phrases in the Belgic Confession which look similar to some phrases in the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedon Creed, although they are not exactly the same. For example, "begotten from eternity" is similar to "begotten before all ages," and "coessential and coeternal with the Father" is akin to "consubstantial with the Father," the latter of both these expressions coming from the Chalcedon Creed. In addition, the phrase, "He therefore is that true, eternal, and almighty God" is parallel to "God of God and very God of very God" which is in the Nicene Creed. Thus, the purpose of composing this confession was explicitly to prove to the king of Spain that the reformers were not rebels, and implicitly they were preserving the teaching of the classical doctrine.

The second of the Three Forms of Unity which became the principal symbolical book of the German and Dutch branches of the Reformed Church is the Heidelberg Catechism.[3] It was written by Zacharias Ursinus, a professor at Heidelberg University, and Caspar Olevianus, a court preacher, and was published for the first time in 1563. They were both commissioned by Elector Frederick III in order that the Reformed faith might be maintained in his domain. The name Heidelberg was taken from the capital of the German Electorate of the Palatinate, the place of its origin. In the Netherlands, this catechism was soon to be known and

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[1] Ibid. P. 31-32.

[2] Ibid. P. 45-46.

[3] Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 3rd edn, 1995), vol. VIII, p. 669.

favorably accepted throughout the country, as early as 1566, when it was translated into the Dutch language, it was widely loved and used by some churches. Later, it was authorized by the great Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) and embraced by Reformed Churches in many different countries.[1]

The researcher observes that the Heidelberg Catechism is more a devotional book, taught every Sunday, rather than a theological book. Nevertheless, it does not mean that Heidelberg Catechism does not have theological aspects. From the portion of the Catechism quoted above, it is obvious that every question and answer leads the readers to the understanding of who Jesus is, what the nature of Christ is, and what is his connection to God.

The last of the Three Forms of Unity is The Canon of Dordrecht. This document was composed by an ecclesiastical assembly in a great synod held in the city of Dordrecht in 1618-1619. The document was made due to an internal controversy within the body of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, which is the emergence of Arminianism. Arminianism, known as the Five Points of the Remonstrance, was considered against the teaching of Reformed Church which was influenced by Calvin's theology. Calvin's theology taught the truths of sovereign predestination, particular atonement, total depravity, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. Therefore, the Canon of Dordrecht was divided into 5 chapters in accordance with the five principles of Calvin. The following is the passage of the Canon of Dordrecht which mentions about the nature of Christ.

> ### Article 4 of chapter 2:
> This death derives its infinite value and dignity from these considerations, because the person who submitted to it was not only really man and perfectly holy, but also the only begotten Son of God, of the same eternal and infinite essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit, which qualifications were necessary to constitute Him a Savior for us; and because it was attended with a sense of the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin.[2]

The phrase "of the same eternal and infinite essence with the Father" illustrates how the Canon of Dordrecht obviously preserves the divinity of Christ, thereby being in no way different with mainstream

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[1] PRCA, n. 38 at 82.
[2] Ibit, at 163.

doctrine which is considered the most correct teaching by the majority of Christians. In addition, the document also maintains the Christology of Calvin which adopts the Chalcedonian doctrine of the union of the two natures in Christ with emphasis on the oneness of the God-Man.[1]

In the context of Indonesian churches, Christ is believed to be God himself. One of the most conspicuous aspects which show that Christ is God is the translation of the term, Lord Jesus Christ as "*Tuhan Yesus Kristus*" which means God Jesus Christ.[2] The reason this title developed could be due to various causes; firstly the, mistranslation of the word Lord (*kurios* in Greek) to "*Tuhan*" which should be "*Tuan*";[3] for example, in Ephesians 6: 23.[4] By saying that Jesus is God, it implies that the nature of Christ is both divine and human because he was born by a woman.

Secondly, the theological teaching of the Indonesian Churches itself, states that Christ is God. Stephen Tong in explaining John 1: 1-3,[5] states that the Word is Christ; therefore, Christ is divine. He explains that the understanding of "Christ is God and is with God" does not mean that there are two Gods, but one essential God in two persons. Further, he states that God and His Word are different persons, but they have the same essence, hence, both are essentially the same.[6] Another view comes from Hamran Ambrie, a Muslim converted to Christianity. Ambrie compares John 1:1 with Sura Al-Maida 39[7] and concludes that the Christ came from the Word

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[1] Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Reformation*, 5th ed. (London & New York: Longman, 1989), p. 194.

[2] In Indonesian "*Tuhan*" is used only for God; so, "*Tuhan Yesus*" can be meant also as God Jesus.

[3] "*Tuan*" means lord, master or sir. In Greek the term *kurios* means master, sir, lord, and also owner, see William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament And Other Early Christian Literature, A: A Translation And Adaptation Of The Fourth Revised And Augmented Edition Of Walter Bauers Griechisch-deutsches W©ærterbuch Zu Den Schriften Des Neuen Testaments Und Der ©oʹbrigen Urchristlichen Literatu*, 2nd ed. (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 458-459.

[4] Indonesian New Translation, published by Indonesian Bible Society, translates this verse as "*Damai sejahtera dan kasih dengan iman dari Allah, Bapa dan dari Tuhan Yesus Kristus menyertai sekalian saudara.*" (Peace and love with faith from God, the Father and from Lord/God Jesus Christ be with you), whereas an English translation uses "Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (NIV translation).

[5] John 1: 1-3, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (NIV translation).

[6] Stephen Tong, *Allah Tritunggal*, N. ed. (Surabaya: Momentum, 2009), p. 63-64.

[7] While he was standing in prayer in the chamber, the angels called unto him: "Allah doth give thee glad tidings of Yahya, witnessing the truth of a Word from Allah, and

of God which was given to Mary; the Word of God is clearly from the essence of God Himself.[1] Both Tong as a reformed theologian and Ambrie as a Muslim converted to Christianity and a disciple of an Indonesian Church, believe that Christ is God and at the same time is man. In other words, Christ has two natures which are God and man.

Thirdly, Indonesian Reformed churches still continue the confessions of faith and catechisms, which come directly or indirectly, from the early era of Christian reformation. For example, *Gereja Kristen Indonesia* (Indonesian Christian Church/GKI) in its confession of faith states.

> GKI confesses its faith that Jesus Christ is:
> 1.The Lord and the saviour of the world, the resource of truth and life.
> 2.Head of Church who established church and called the church to live in his faith and mission.
>
> GKI confesses that Bible, both the Old and New Testaments are the words of God, which become the foundation and the only norm for the life of church. In fellowship with the Church of the Lord/God Jesus Christ in all centuries and places, GKI accepts the Apostle's Creed, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed and the Athanasian Creed. GKI in ties with Reformed tradition, accepts Heidelberg Catechism.[2]

In conclusion, the understanding of the Indonesian Reformed churches about Christ is not different with the understanding of Reformed churches from other countries. The understanding is based on the classical confessions of faith such as Nicene Creed and also the three Forms of Unity which developed during the reformation era in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Essentially, the Indonesian Churches recognizes that Christ is truly God and truly man; as God, of the substance of the Father, and, as man, of the substance of his mother. It holds to the belief that Christ has two natures while being only one person.

(be besides) noble, chaste, and a prophet- of the (goodly) company of the righteous" (Yusuf Ali translation).

[1] Yohanes D. Mansur, *To Give an Answer to Every Man:Trinitarian and Christological Views in the Apologetic of Hamran Ambrie of Indonesia*, N. ed. (Th.M. thesis. Biola University: Talbot School of Theology, 1990), p.92.

[2] N.A, "Selamat Datang Di Media SinodeGKI," Gereja Kristen Indonesia – Situs Arsip, accessed May 21, 2011, https://www.gki.or.id/. Translated by the researcher from "The confession of faith of GKI."

Christ as Creator

It is not so obvious when the teaching about Christ as the Creator started. One document, however, that can be used as a reference is the Belgic Confession, as quoted above. A passage in the article states, "and John saith that all things were made by that Word, which he calleth God and the apostle saith that God made the worlds by His Son; likewise, that God created all things by Jesus Christ."[1] The meaning of the word "by" in the above statements is not absolutely clear. It could mean either, that all things were created through the Word, which means that the Word is only a means or tool to create something, or, that the Word is the subject in creation, which means that the Word is the Creator.

These two responses have been made by different Reformed theologians when trying to explain the meaning of John 1:1 and 3 or other verses in the Bible, such as Colossians 1: 16[2] which relate to the issue of the creation. In Wayne Grudem's response,[3] he says that the word *by* in this case should be understood as an agent in the creation, or it can be said that the Word was involved in the creation but it was not the primary subject in the creation.

Grudem translates John 1:3 as "All things were made through him"[4] In contrast, there are other translations such as the King James which translate this verse as, "All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made."

The second response is the opinion of Indonesian reformed theologians such as Stephen Tong and Yakub Susabda, who state that *by* in this context, should be interpreted as the person responsible for a creative work. Tong says that Christ (the Word) created the world and all things; therefore, Christ is the Creator and God.[5] Tong translates John 1: 3 and Colossians 1:6 similarly to the King James Version.   Yakub Susabda states that the Word essentially is God Himself and the Word is the action of God who is creative in creation and working.[6]

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[1] PRCA, n. 38 at 32.

[2] Colossians 1: 16, "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him" (King James Version).

[3] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 266.

[4] Grudem's translation for this verse is similar to American Standard Version translation which translates this verse as "All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made."

[5] Stephen Tong, *Allah Tritunggal*, pp. 64-65.

[6] Yakub B. Susabda, *Mengenal Dan Bergaul Dengan Allah*, N. ed. (Yogyakarta: Andi, 2010), p. 103.

The distinction between Grudem, and Tong and Susabda, is due to the different ways of interpreting the verses in the Bible. Grudem translates (*dia* in Greek) as through, whereas, Tong and Susabda are influenced by the Indonesian Translation (Published by the Indonesian Bible Society) which translates that the Word is the creator.[1] The researcher is of the opinion that a more accurate translation is the one used by Grudem, because *dia* in this verse is followed by genitive case, so it should be translated as *through*. On the other hand, there is the possibility that Indonesian theologians have different ways of interpreting theology, and that some Indonesian theologians have forms the presupposition that Christ is the creator.

Incarnation of God

For someone researching Christianity, it is important to understand the teaching of the incarnation of God. Failure to comprehend the meaning of this term will cause the researcher to fail in his endeavour, because this teaching is central to Christianity. Even though the notion is also owned by Hinduism, the teaching of God's incarnation is integral to Christianity, because of the following reasons: Firstly, to believe in the incarnation means to maintain conventional Christian faith. Secondly, rejection of the incarnation means rejection of Christianity and lastly, separation of incarnation from its historicity means separation of Christianity from history.[2] The incarnation is derived from the Latin word *incarnare* which means "in flesh" or "became flesh." Even though the word incarnation does not exist in the Bible, its components do. For example, "in" or "became" and "flesh" are found in John 1:14.[3] In fact, the Incarnation has become a hot theological and philosophical controversy.[4] The debate over whether God became a human or not is controversial because if God did indeed become a human, then there begs the question, "why did God become

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[1] John 1: 3, "*Segala sesuatu dijadikan oleh Dia dan tanpa Dia tidak ada suatupun yang telah jadi dari segala yang telah dijadikan*." (Terjemahan Baru, Lembaga Alkitab Indonesia)(All things were created by Him and without Him was nothing created that was created), researcher's translation.

[2] C. Stephen. Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith the Incarnational Narrative as History*, N. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), p. 27.

[3] John 1: 14, "14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (NIV Translation).

[4] Thomas V. Morris, "The Metaphysics of God Incarnate," in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays, Edited by Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Platinga, Jr.*, N. ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), p. 110.

human" as mentioned by Anselm "*Cur Deus Homo*?"[1] On the other hand, if God did not become a human, what does the apostle John mean by writing "the Word was God;[2] the Word became flesh?"[3]

Controversy over the topic of incarnation cannot be separated from the struggle to understand about the nature of Christ: both are difficult to understand so debate has been ongoing for a very long time;[4] in fact the debate may never be settled. The issue concerning God's incarnation started when the early Christians attempted to interpret John 1: 1, 14 and Philippians 2: 6-11.[5] Naturally, their understanding about Christ influenced their theory of God's incarnation.[6] Some theologians such as Athanasius who examined John 1:1, 14 believed that the Word was God Himself. He believed that God became a man, not only that He entered a man, but rather, God incarnated to become a man.[7] On the contrary, some modern theologians such as John Macquarrie argue that the phrase, "the Word became flesh", cannot be interpreted literally, but it should be understood as metaphorical language. Macquarrie states that, "John has indicated that he is using a theological style of language that calls for its own theological hermeneutic."[8]

Regarding Philippians 2: 6-11, this passage is often considered as a hymn about Jesus and is the foundation of the idea of kenosis theory. Kenosis theory is the theory about a pre-existent Jesus Christ, who in the form of God, emptied himself, was incarnated to become a human, and then died, on the cross.[9] This theory was debated in the early seventeenth century, as to whether Christ repudiated all his divine attributes or only partly

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[1] Brian Hebblethwaite, *Philosophical Theology and Christian Doctrine*, N. ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 70.

[2] John 1: 1.

[3] John 1: 14.

[4] John Macquarrie, "Incarnation," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, *edited by Allister E. McGrath* , (Oxford & Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 268-272.

[5] Philippians 2: 6-11, "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death- even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (NIV Translation).

[6] Brian Hebblethwaite, *Philosophical Theology*, p. 57-58.

[7] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 284.

[8] *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, "Incarnation".

[9] Roger Haight, *The Future of Christology*, N. ed. (New York & London: Continuum, 2005), p. 98-99.

renounced them.[1] In all of these debates, however, every party supported the theory that Jesus was God who incarnated himself to become a human.

A much later approach is proposed by James Dunn who mentions that Philippians 2:6-11 should be seen from the perspective of "Adam Christology." By this he means that these verses about Jesus should be compared to the creation of Adam because Adam was similarly created in the image and the form of God. Adam, in his case, tried to attain to the image of God, when the devil tempted him. On the contrary, however, Jesus did not hold onto the image of God, but humbled himself like other human beings.[2]

According to the understanding of Indonesian reformed theologians, Jesus is believed to be God who incarnated himself thereby becoming a human. Yakub Susabda says that the Word is the person of God who incarnated in the form of a human being; God, who essentially is incomprehensible, became God who is knowable because of the Word's incarnation.[3] Stephen Tong proposes a similar argument when he states that Christ is the eternal glory of God who can be seen by human beings.[4] Moreover, Tong claims that God who has created all things visited His creation; He came into the world, among us through the act of incarnation.[5]

In conclusion, even though there are some slightly different interpretations about the incarnation of God among Indonesian theologians, it seems they are in one accord in believing that God was incarnated in Christ. This is evident in their Bible translation which always translates Lord, as a synonym for God, when referring to Jesus, even though the exact meaning is lord or master or sir.[6] It is also apparent in their calling Jesus, God in their daily life.

Indonesian Reformed Churches Understanding of the term "Son of God"
The term, son of God is often found in the Bible, both in singular and plural form. In Jewish scripture, the term can be identified explicitly in plural form, such as in Genesis 6:2. In this context, the term means pious men who

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[1] McGrath, *Christian Theology*, p. 354-355.
[2] James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2nd ed. (Wm. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1996), pp. 114-117. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, N. ed. (Grand Rapids & Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmanns, 1998), pp. 281-288.
[3] Yakub susabda, *Mengenal dan Bergaul dengan Allah*, p. 104.
[4] Tong, *Siapakah Kristus*, p. 36.
[5] Ibid.
[6] For example John 4: 19 (New Translation, Indonesian Bible Society, 2002).

inherit the attribute of God as their "father."[1] While in the singular form, the term son of God is not found explicitly, the term is used implicitly in Psalm 2: 7[2] that is when God calls a king, His son. In the New Testament the title "Son of God" is also used in both singular and plural form. In plural form, the term is applied to peacemakers,[3] those who are led by the Spirit of God,[4] the believers who have faith through Jesus Christ.[5] Meanwhile, in singular form, the term is addressed generally to Jesus Christ, but also to Adam[6] and to Israel[7] in a few instances.

It is interesting that the term "Son of God," when used to point to Jesus, is often used together with the term Messiah or Christ. This can be seen in Matthew 16:16[8] which is Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ; and then Caiaphas' query whether Jesus is Christ or not, in Matthew 26:63.[9] In Luke 4:41[10] the evil spirit recognized that Jesus is Christ; whereas in John 11:27[11] Martha confessed that Jesus is the Christ who is the one coming into the world, and John 20:31[12] is John's declaration that his purpose in writing was so the readers might believe that Jesus is Christ, the Son of God. The unification of the term Son of God and Messiah could be an indication that the authors of the letters realized that logical implication of the Son of God, was Messiah or Christ,[13] and the title Son of God is not consequently a claim to transcendental status.[14]

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[1] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 414

[2] Psalm 2: 7: "I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father'" (NIV Translation).

[3] Matthew 5:9; "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (NIV Translation).

[4] Romans 8: 14: "Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (NIV Translation).

[5] Galatians 3: 26: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (NIV Translation).

[6] Luke 3: 38: "the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God" (NIV Translation).

[7] Matthew 2:15: "where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'"

[8] "Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'" (NIV Translation).

[9] "But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, 'I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God'" (NIV Translation).

[10] "Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, 'You are the Son of God!' But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Christ" (NIV Translation).

[11] "Yes, Lord", she told him, 'I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" (NIV Translation).

[12] "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (NIV Translation).

[13] Richard N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 94.

[14] C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 28.

There is another opinion as mentioned by Paula Frederiksen who states that the Son of God denotes something far greater than Messiah, which is a unique, pre-existent, and divine entity.[1] The Bible, however, never definitely states that the title, "Son of God" as it relates to Jesus carries with it the sense of divinity. On the contrary, Jesus shows that he is someone who has limitations, (as written in Mark 13: 32)[2] when he declares that no-one knows about the coming of the Son of Man. It indicates that Jesus himself admits that he is not the omniscient God. Nevertheless, most of interpretations since the early church fathers' era up until now, dictate that the Son of God, is God, when it refers to Jesus.

Clement of Rome, one of the apostolic fathers who lived in the 1st century, related Christ with the pre-existent Son of God.[3] This means that he did not only examine "*who* is Son of God", but also "*what* is Son of God" in the sense that he began to discover the substance or nature of the Son of God. This examination of the pre-existent Son of God was followed up by Ignatius of Antioch (35/50- ca.110 C.E) who lived in the same era with Clement. Ignatius' research was influenced by John, the author of Gospel of John, and focused on the *Logos* who become human.[4] Ignatius was of the opinion that the Son of God was God Himself incarnate.[5]

In the next century of early church fathers, the understanding about the Son of God was modified in accordance to Irenaeus's views. Irenaeus (c. 140-c. 202 C.E.) planted the seed of the doctrine of the Trinity, even though it had not been taught widely at that stage.[6] Origen (c.184/5 – c. 253/4 C.E.) is the next scholar to show that the understanding of the Son of God had shifted and that the term was now associated with the teaching about the *Logos*.

Origen explains that the Son is the *Logos* which incarnated to become a mediator between God and humans. He professed that God who is transcendent can be revealed to human beings through the Son who incarnated.[7] It is the researcher's opinion that the concept of *Logos* and the Son are not to be equated formally.[8] Nevertheless, the belief was evolving that to recognize Jesus as the Son of God meant to confess his divinity and to

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[1] Paula Frederiksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus*, (New York & London: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 140.
[2] "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."
[3] Alois Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition (Translated from Germany by John Bowden)*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), p. 86.
[4] Ibid, p. 88.
[5] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 92.
[6] Ibid, p. 107.
[7] Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, pp. 140-143.
[8] Ibid, p. 28.

admit that Jesus was pre-existent and that he was incarnated.[1] Moreover, the understanding that the Son of God is God Himself eventually was confirmed in the Nicene Creed(declared for the first time in 325 C.E.), namely in the statement, "the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is from the substance of the Father, God of God, light from light, true God from true God." Thus, the teaching about the Son of God that developed in the era of church fathers has changed from "biblical son of God" to "philosophical son of God" which was influenced by Greek neo-Platonism.[2]

Moving to the Reformation era, the title of the Son of God appears to have remained the same as the understanding of the early church fathers. It is seen in the confessions of faith that became the foundation of Reformed churches, which recognizes that the Son of God is God Himself and it is based on the concept that the Son is equal to the Word. For example, in the Belgic Confession, Article 10, as quoted previously, it states that Jesus is the Son of God, begotten from the eternity, coessential and coeternal with the Father; and that God created the world by His Son. This means that the Son is concluded to be the Word and God. In answer number 33 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which also has been quoted, it says that the Son of God is a term for Christ as natural Son of God and it is different with Christians who become children of God through adoption based on the grace of God. Similarly the Canon of Dordrecht mentions that the Son of God has the same eternal and infinite essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Hence, the Son of God is inferred as God Himself in the formula of the Trinity by the reformation fathers.

In the Indonesian Reformed churches, the understanding about the Son of God can be seen through the perspective of some of their members. These members, even though from different denominations, mention about the Son of God in their writings. For example, Yakub Susabda explains that the Son of God is the Word incarnate, who is God who became human in the person of Jesus. Susabda's arguments are, firstly, that the incarnation took place through the event of "begetting" as the firstborn; secondly, the incarnate Word was born from God; and lastly, the incarnation of the Word was truly through the event of being begotten by the Virgin Mary. So, the Son of God is the term which is used to explain an eternal relationship that cannot be separated, between Jesus as the Word of God and God Himself, the Word came out from God which is called "begotten by God."[3]

Another explanation comes from Stephen Tong. Tong begins his

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[1] Dunn, *Theology in the Making*, p. 13.

[2] Anthony F. Buzzard and Charles F. Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound*, N.ed (Lanham: International Scholars Publications, 1998), p. 177.

[3] Yakub Susabda, *Mengenal & Bergaul dengan Allah*, p. 115.

interpretation on the Son of God by quoting Isaiah 9:6,[1] that mentions about a baby who will be given divine attributes. The 5 reasons why Tong says that the baby is divine are as follows: firstly, the baby is called "wonderful" which means he is different from normal human beings; secondly, the baby is entitled "counsellor" which means an all-wise person; thirdly, the baby is named "a mighty God" which means he is God who has authority, but his authority is limited when he becomes human; fourthly, the baby is labelled "the everlasting father" which means he is the source who created all things; and lastly, the baby is called "the prince of peace" which means he is the source of eternal peace.[2] Tong also mentions Psalm 2:7 which says that the Son of God is begotten, not created by God from eternity.[3] Furthermore, Tong uses the illustration that a son who was born by human is a human because the son has the same essence with his mother; therefore the son who was born by God is God because he has the same essence with God.[4] In this case, even though Tong uses the Bible as his base, his interpretation seems to use a more philosophical approach.

Somewhat different with Susabda and Tong, Hambran Ambrie clarifies the term Son of God by an analogy from Arabic, which is *walada* and *ibn*. Ambrie says that *walada* is used only for a physical son, whereas on the contrary *ibn* can be utilized as a figurative expression. Hence, the term Son of God for Jesus should be seen as *ibn* in Arabic to avoid confusion. From this perspective, the Son of God is not equal to God because it is only an analogy and Jesus is not God's son physically. Nevertheless, it does not mean that Jesus is not deity, because the term Son of God for Jesus should be observed from the perspective of the Word which shows that Jesus is God.[5] It seems that Ambrie distinguishes the term "Son of God" as an explanation to non-Christians with the statement of his faith.

Conclusion
In conclusion, the understanding of the term "Son of God" in Indonesian Reformed Churches is not different with the teaching of reformed churches generally, or with the early church fathers who believed that the Son of God is God Himself, even though they may use a different approach to describe

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[1] "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."
[2] Tong, *Allah Tritunggal*, pp. 48-51.
[3] Ibid, p. 52-53.
[4] Ibid, p. 68.
[5] Yohanes D. Mansur, "To give an Answer...," pp. 97-99.

the term. It could be said that some of their conclusions are not entirely established on biblical foundations, but are also based on philosophical hypotheses. It can be recognized that their interpretation always relates the Son of God with the Word as stated in the Gospel of John. It can be understood, because in the Gospel of John, that the Word textually is called God, even though the meaning of the phrase should be exegeted in greater depth, to determine whether the term "God" in this context has literal meaning or figurative meaning.

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