In response to a preliminary study into Cyril of Alexandria’s christology, one scholar wrote that it “largely follows what is becoming the current wisdom.” This remark suggests that gradually a consensus is developing regarding the interpretation of the various terms and expressions that the archbishop of Alexandria uses in his christological writings. This, however, does not seem to be the case. Even if at times there is agreement about Cyril’s understanding of the incarnation, the terminological foundation of that understanding may differ considerably. So, theologians may agree that Cyril taught that in the one person of Christ one can distinguish between divinity and humanity, while one theologian says that Cyril normally uses the word φύσις to denote the one person, and another that he uses φύσις to denote divinity and humanity. It is the aim of the present study, therefore, to investigate in detail what the meaning is that in Cyril’s christological writings is attached to terms and expressions like φύσις, ὑπόστασις, πρόσωπον, Ἴνωσις καθ’ ὑπόστασιν and μία φύσις τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου σεσαρκωμένη.

### 1.1.1. Various Viewpoints

A more detailed discussion of the various viewpoints will be given in the fourth chapter, but in order to refine the aim of this study a broad outline of them needs to be given first. At the beginning of the twentieth century two opposing opinions were published shortly after each other. First, there was the well-known dissertation by Joseph Lebon on

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1 Van Loon (2001). The present study will show that the meaning given to the terms and expressions in this previous volume is not accurate enough. Neither would I call the μία φύσις formula “Cyril of Alexandria’s Formula” any longer.

2 Personal communication.
the ‘Severian Monophysites’ (1909). He claims that the major ‘Monophysite’ theologians in the fifth and sixth centuries, Severus of Antioch (ca 465–538) in particular, followed Cyril of Alexandria’s christology, and that Cyril’s understanding of the terms was the same as that of these anti-Chalcedonians. In Cyril’s own christological language, then, the words φύσις, ὑπόστασις and πρόσωπον are always synonymous, and they designate an individual being, subsisting separately from other beings. Therefore, Cyril could never accept dyophysite language, since ‘two natures’ for him implied two separate persons. After the Council of Ephesus he conceded to the Antiochenes that one could speak of ‘two natures’, but ‘in contemplation only’. And the famous formula μία φύσις τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου σεσαρκωμένη means nothing else than ‘the one incarnate person of the Word of God’.

Three years later, M. Jugie wrote an article criticizing Lebon’s findings, taking up ideas from the seventeenth-century theologian Dionysius Petavius (Denis Pétau, 1583–1652). Jugie cites several examples from Cyril’s writings in which the term φύσις is used for Christ’s human nature. This implies that in these instances the word cannot mean ‘person’, but must be closer to ὑπόστασις. This is not to say that Christ’s human nature is abstract—it is a real, concrete nature, which Cyril also calls ὑπόστασις. The archbishop of Alexandria would never call Christ’s humanity a πρόσωπον, which to him indicates a separate existence, an individual, a person. Thus Lebon’s conclusion that in Cyril’s christology φύσις is always synonymous with πρόσωπον cannot be correct. Jugie emphasizes that Cyril was never opposed to distinguishing the two natures in Christ, but to dividing them, since that would result in two separate persons. But there are instances, according to Jugie, in which the word φύσις is indeed synonymous with πρόσωπον, namely, when it is obvious that such a φύσις is separated from other φύσεις. This is the case when a phrase like ‘of the Word of God’ is added, and, therefore, the word φύσις in the μία φύσις formula means ‘a nature-persom’, a φύσις-πρόσωπον.

These are the two basic positions which, with variations in details, we find throughout the twentieth century, up to the present day. On the one hand, Lebon’s view that in Cyril of Alexandria’s own christological language φύσις is always synonymous with πρόσωπον, so that in reality

3 Lebon (1909).
4 Jugie (1912a).
5 Jugie (1912a), 25.