

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST? - CHRISTOLOGICAL HERESIES

In Matt.16: 13 Jesus asked His disciples a question: “*Who do people say the Son of Man is?*” and ever since then opinions about the person of our Lord have abounded throughout history. The early church recognized Christ as being both human and divine. His deity was firmly established and He was worshipped as God. The implications of these beliefs, however, were not obvious until controversy and heresy brought them into focus. Basically, these heresies can be divided into two groups: those which deny our Lord’s divinity and those which deny His humanity. We will examine these heresies briefly in order of their historical emergence (see also the attached chart and the paper on *What is Heresy?*).

THE EBONITES: Along with the ALOGI and the DYNAMIC MONARCHIANS, held that Christ was a mere man who was qualified at His baptism to be the Messiah by the descent of the Holy Spirit (or the Christ, or the Logos) upon Him.

THE DOCETISTS and the Gnostics denied our Lord’s humanity, suggesting that His life on earth was largely an illusion - He appeared human but was really divine. Some held that Christ descended upon the man Jesus at His baptism but left Him again before the crucifixion while others believed that He assumed a merely phantasmal body.

THE MODAL MONARCHIANISTS: Along with the SABELLIANS also denied the humanity of Christ seeing in Him merely a mode of the one God in whom they recognized no distinction of persons.

ARIANISM: Held that our Lord was not God in the fullest sense, being subordinate to the Father by having being created by Him and not Himself possessing eternal self-existence. Semi-Arianism declares the Son to be of a *similar* essence as the Father.

APOLLINARISM: Held that our Lord had a true body and an animal soul, but that the place of the human spirit was taken by His divine being or Logos. This meant that He was not fully human and therefore “not tempted in every respect as we are”.

NESTORIANISM: Nestorius and his followers so exaggerated the distinctness of the two natures of Christ as almost to separate them and divide the one Person into two.

EUTYCHISM: Eutychus went to the opposite extreme and declared that the human nature of Christ was absorbed by the divine, or that the two were fused into a single nature – hence there was only one nature in Christ. This error was later perpetuated by the MONOPHYSITES and the MONOTHELITES.

ADOPTIONISM: Felix, bishop of Urgella, regarded Christ as to His divine nature (that is, the *logos*) as the only-begotten Son of God in the natural sense, but considered Christ on His human side as a Son of God merely by adoption. Thus a distinction was made between a natural birth and an adoptive sonship, and the latter did not begin with the

natural birth of Christ, but had its inception at the time of His baptism and was consummated in the resurrection.

The heresies denying the divinity of our Lord were rejected by the Church at the Council of Nicea in 321 where Athanasius insisted on the insertion of the word "*homousios*" ('of one and the same substance' as the Father) in the Creed, which reads 'one Lord Jesus Christ.....very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father'.

As far as the heresies denying the humanity of our Lord are concerned, the final pronouncement of the Church on this subject was given at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 where the doctrine of the two natures united in one Person (the *hypostatic union*) was clearly enunciated as, "*One Lord Jesus Christ, acknowledged in two natures unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly and inseparably.*" This has remained the orthodox Christian teaching and presents the most reliable statement yet attained concerning the two natures of Christ. The Adoptionist view was condemned by the Synod of Frankfort in 794 AD.

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Questions:

1. Heresies about the person of Jesus Christ fall into two categories. What are these?
2. Which heresy teaches that Jesus was a created being?
3. Which Church Council rejected the heresies denying the divinity of Jesus Christ?
4. Which Church Council rejected the heresies denying the humanity of Jesus Christ?