

Christological Heresies

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Apollinarianism

Apollinarianism denies the completeness of Christ's humanity. It was taught by Apollinarius of Laodicea (~310-390 A.D.), a supporter of Athanasius and the Alexandrian school in opposition to the Antiochene Christology. The latter taught that in the incarnation Christ *entered* into man close to Adoptionism. Athanasius counter-argued that Christ took his body from Mary and so *became* man or flesh according to John 1:14. Apollinarius then developed this 'Word-flesh Christology' even further and said that God did not conjoin with man but only with flesh.¹

In Platonic terms, Christ had a human body and soul but his mind was Logos.² Since he viewed the human mind or spirit as sinful, he replaced it with the divine Word, because "two separate principles of mind and will cannot dwell together without one striving against the other."³ In effect, Christ was no longer wholly man. He had only one 'flesh-bearing' '*physis*' (→ Monophysitism) without the important

¹ Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 58ff.

² Henry Wace, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography and Literature to the End of the Sixth Century A.D., with an Account of the Principal Sects and Heresies* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 34, s.v. "Apollinaris the Younger"; available from <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wace/>>; Internet (accessed 12 August 2008); Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), vol. 3, § 136; available from <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/>>; Internet (accessed 12 August 2008).

³ Quoted in Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 158.

human element of psychology. Christ became “a new creation and a wondrous mixture: God and flesh have constituted one nature.”⁴

Apollinarius’ logical starting point was that the person (*‘prosopon’*) derives out of his nature, substance (*‘hypostasis’*) or essence (*‘ousia’*), thus one person can only have one nature. And if Christ the Son was of the same divine essence (*‘homoousia’*) with the Father, he could not have possessed the human essence in addition, so he had to be divine at the cost of his humanity.⁵ Besides, he must have been divine to work atonement, possessing a nature not open to the possibility of sinning.⁶ Only in form Christ assumed to be man, but in nature he was God.

The aspect of Christ’s human nature is important in regard to soteriology and the impassibility of God. The divine nature cannot be object of Christ’s suffering. Secondly, whole man including his mind is in need of salvation. Gregory of Nazianzus argued that “what has not been assumed cannot be restored; it is what is united with God that is saved.”⁷ The heresy was condemned first at the Council of Rome in 377 A.D. and then also in Constantinople in 381 A.D.

⁴ H. D. McDonald, “Development and Christology,” *Vox Evangelica* 9 (1975): 16, n. 97.

⁵ Kenneth Paul Wesche, “The Union of God and Man in Jesus Christ in the Thought of Gregory of Nazianzus,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 28 (1984): 85.

⁶ H. D. McDonald, “Development and Christology,” 15.

⁷ Quoted in Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh*, 61; cf. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, § 136.

Arianism

Arianism denies the genuine deity of Jesus Christ. The heresy was introduced in the beginning of the 4th century (~318 A.D.) by Arius (256-336 A.D.), who was educated by Lucian in Antioch and later served as presbyter of the Church of Alexandria. He was eventually condemned at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325.⁸ Following the earlier heresies → Docetism and → Ebionism, the subject of discussion became the integrity of the divine and human nature of Christ.

Preceding school of influence was the Christology of Origen who vaguely introduced the idea of Christ's different essence and subordination to the Father.⁹ The primacy of the Father was taught in defence of the monotheistic teachings of the Old Testament ('Monarchianism').¹⁰ Only the Father was seen as eternal and unbegun, but not the Son who was 'begotten'. Based on this premature understanding of the Trinity and in reference to Scripture passages (Prov 8:22; Col 1:15), Arius concluded that the 'begotten' must have been created. In Arius' own words, and contrary to Origen,¹¹ there was "once when He was not."¹²

⁸ Philip Schaff, ed., *A Religious Encyclopaedia or Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology*, 3d ed., (Toronto, New York & London: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1894), 1:134, s.v. "Arianism"; available from <<http://www.earlychurch.org.uk/>>; Internet (accessed 6 August 2008).

⁹ Ibid.; Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, § 119.

¹⁰ Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh*, 48.

¹¹ Henry Wace, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 42, s.v. "Arius".

¹² Quoted in H. D. McDonald, "Development and Christology", 11, n. 51.

Close to the earlier thought of → Gnosticism, Arius further taught absolute transcendence of the Father who did not create the world directly but only indirectly through action of the Son. The Father made the Son ('out of nothing') who made the world. The heresy thus also threatened Christ's work of atonement and redemption. As Athanasius argued, if the Son is not truly God but only a creature, he cannot redeem and unite him to God ('deification'). Besides, neither can a creature be worshipped, nor can a creature reveal God to man.¹³

It was defended that salvation 'in Christ' is only possible if the Son is truly God. A mere creature cannot redeem just as he cannot create.¹⁴ Therefore the Son must be substantially equal with the Father. At the Council of Nicea, the crucial term '*homoousious*' clarified that the Son and the Father 'are the same in essence'. An anathema was added condemning those who insisted that Christ was created or that he is of another substance ('*hypostasis*') or essence ('*ousia*') of the Father.¹⁵

¹³ Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 123; cf. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, § 124.

¹⁴ H. D. McDonald, "Development and Christology," 12.

¹⁵ Philip Schaff, ed., *A Religious Encyclopaedia*, 1:134, s.v. "Arianism;" Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh*, 55-57; see appendix.

Docetism

Docetism teaches the denial of the humanity of Christ. The word is derived from the Greek word ‘*dokeo*’ which means to ‘appear’ or ‘seem’. Proponents of this heresy taught that Christ only appeared or seemed to be human. It was an element of the larger movement of → Gnosticism and appeared at an early stage in church history. The error thus developed outside the church and does not come from within. Some New Testament books address the heresy. (e.g. Jn 1:14; 1 Jn 4:1-3; 2 Jn 7).

Gnostic starting point of all Docetic theories was a radical dualism between evil matter and good spirit.¹⁶ For the Gnostics, “The word became flesh” (Jn 1:14) could not be taken literally. God could not have taken part in evil matter and therefore Jesus’ humanity must have been apparent. To overcome this difficulty, some Gnostics claimed that Jesus the man was another person than Christ. Docetism refers to the theories that deny the manhood of the one person Jesus Christ.¹⁷

Docetists could not bring together Christ’s divinity and his physical birth. Marcion and his follower Apelles replaced the incarnation doctrine with the idea that Jesus came without birth but directly from heaven.¹⁸ Saturninus said, “the Saviour was without birth, without body, and without figure, and appeared a man in phantasm,

¹⁶ Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh*, 45.

¹⁷ Henry Wace, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 271, s.v. “Docetism”.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 272.

not in truth.”¹⁹ Valentinus theorized that Jesus’ “body passed through Mary as through a channel”²⁰, and said he was “born of the mother ... by a shadow.”²¹

Beside the reality of Jesus’ birth, Docetism also denied the reality of the passion. Marcion acknowledged Jesus’ death for the redemption of human souls (not bodies), yet his docetic Jesus did not suffer in flesh but appeared only in phantasm similar to angels in the Old Testament. He largely omits the teachings on the passion.²² Ptolemy’s innovation was that Christ had a pneumatic and psychic nature, the latter “enabled him to suffer and feel pain, though He possessed nothing grossly material.”²³ Also Valentinus said Jesus suffered but was made of another substance than man.²⁴

The prominent opponents of Docetism were the church fathers Ignatius, Polycarp and later Irenaeus who wrote ‘Adversus Haereses’, Tertullian in his ‘Adversus Marcionem’ and Hippolytus in ‘Philosophoumena.’²⁵

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Docetae” by John Arendzen; available from <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/>>; Internet (accessed 12 August 2008).

²¹ Philip Schaff, *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953), 12:131, s.v. “Valentinus”; available from <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/>>; Internet (accessed 25 August 2008).

²² Peter M. Head, “The Foreign God and the sudden Christ: Theology and Christology in Marcion’s Gospel Redaction,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 44 (1993): 307-321.

²³ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Docetae” by John Arendzen.

²⁴ Henry Wace, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 272, s.v. “Docetism.”

²⁵ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Docetae” by John Arendzen.

Ebionism

Ebionism denies the divinity of Christ and claims that Jesus was merely human.

The term derives from the Hebrew word for ‘poor’, with reference either to material or to spiritual poverty.²⁶ It seems unlikely that a certain man called ‘Ebion’ was the founder of the movement.²⁷ The name ‘Ebionite’ was at first, according to Origen, a general expression for Christians with Jewish background and only later became a designation for the early Christological heretical sect.²⁸ Some Jewish Christians held to their Judaistic heritage of strict monotheism and the observance of the law. For them, the former was irreconcilable with the Trinitarian doctrine of Jesus’ divinity. They denied his birth from a virgin and regarded him as mere man.

Legalistic tendencies within the church can be found in the New Testament. The Council of Jerusalem dealt with the problem of the Law (cf. Acts 15), and Paul in his Galatian epistle contrasted the teachings of the Judaizers with the covenant of grace. During the time after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. until the second century the Jewish sect developed more clearly.²⁹ They upheld the law and harshly rejected Paul

²⁶ Philip Schaff, ed., *A Religious Encyclopaedia*, 2:684, s.v. “Ebionites”; *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Ebionites” by John Arendzen.

²⁷ Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh*, 42; *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Ebionites” by John Arendzen.

²⁸ Philip Schaff, ed., *A Religious Encyclopaedia*, 2:684, s.v. “Ebionites.”

²⁹ *Ibid.*; Henry Wace, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 284, s.v. “Ebionism.”

as apostate.³⁰ Some, though, did not require observance of the law from others. Despite disagreements among themselves, all denied the divinity of Jesus Christ.³¹ For them Christianity was but a continuation, modification or supplement of Judaism and Christ “nothing more than a Solomon or a Jonas.”³²

Ebionism may be classified into the Jewish and Gnostic types. The latter was influenced by the strong current of → Gnosticism. Cerinthus was a prominent scholar regarded as Ebionite whose teachings contained Gnostic elements. His view about Christ was a form of Adoptionism. Christ descended upon Jesus at his baptism but withdrew from him before his death. His theory slightly differs from → Docetism.³³ In common with Cerinthus, Ebionism agreed that Jesus was empowered at his baptism and so became Christ, though he still remained man. Another ebionistic Jewish group called ‘Nazarenes’ disagreed with the Ebionites proper in acknowledging the miraculous virgin birth of Christ.³⁴

The Jewish sect existed outside the church and was not recognized as Christian. Major sources are the works of Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Origen. Gnostic Ebionism can be traced in Epiphanius’ writings and some Ebionite apocryphal gospels.³⁵

³⁰ Ibid., 285.

³¹ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Ebionites” by John Arendzen.

³² Cf. Henry Wace, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 284, s.v. “Ebionism.”

³³ Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh*, 43f.

³⁴ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 2:399.

³⁵ Henry Wace, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 284f., s.v. “Ebionism.”

Eutychianism

Eutychianism denies the distinction of the human and divine nature of Christ. The heresy derives its name from Eutyches, a presbyter in Constantinople, who came to be the representative of the error. It was introduced by the Alexandrian school in response to the earlier teaching of the Antiochians who erred to divide Christ into two separate beings or persons (→ Nestorianism). In the opposite direction Eutychianism “urged the personal unity of Christ at the expense of the distinction of natures.”³⁶ It is closely associated with and anticipates → Monophysitism.

Cyril of Alexandria was first who mentioned the idea of “one nature in Christ” in opposition to his rival Nestorius.³⁷ Whereas Cyril spoke moderately, his successor Dioscurus was passionate to advance his scholarly influence and with such ambitions supported Eutyches. Alongside Cyril and Dioscurus, Eutyches spoke against Nestorius at the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D.³⁸ He taught that Christ had two natures before, but only one nature after the incarnation. The human nature was exalted or lost in the divine like a drop of honey in the ocean.³⁹ In negative terms, he

³⁶ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, § 140.

³⁷ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:402; Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh*, 63.

³⁸ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, § 140.

³⁹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:403; H. D. McDonald, “Development and Christology,” 20.

said that the body of Christ “was not of like substance with ours.”⁴⁰ Despite his strong emphasis on the divine, his theory in result formed a third, hybrid nature of Christ distinct from the heresy of → Docetism.⁴¹

Eutyches misinterpreted and misused the teachings of the Church Fathers. Cyril’s formula “one nature (*physis*) incarnate of God the Word” was adopted by the church but later explained “that by a hypostatic union of the Divine nature and the human, one Christ was effected.”⁴² Cyril used the word *physis* meaning person rather than nature. “His great theme in these words is not the coalescing of the two natures into one, but the error of making two sons.”⁴³ In his letter to John of Antioch in 434 A.D. Cyril explicitly added his view on the two nature’s ‘*unconfused union*’.

Eutyches refused to agree with this creed and claimed that ‘two natures’ are not explicitly taught in the Scriptures.⁴⁴ His persistence led to his condemnation at a local synod of Flavian at Constantinople in 448 A.D. At the Council of Ephesus in 449 A.D. Eutyches was restored to office by force at the interest of Dioscurus who became the leader of the Monophysite sect. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. (see appendix) defined Christology in terms of ‘two natures’ and deposed Dioscurus.

⁴⁰ Henry Wace, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 352, s.v. “Eutychianism.”

⁴¹ Cf. Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh*, 64.

⁴² *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Eutychianism” by John Chapman.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; Henry Wace, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 353, s.v. “Eutychianism.”

Gnosticism

Gnosticism designates the major Near Eastern religious movement that formed the thought world of the gospel age. Its origins can be found in Hellenistic thinking and to some extent also in Judaism even before the Christian period.⁴⁵ The movement then mingled with Christianity and so matured into a heresy. Gnostic teachings can be traced back to the second century A.D. The theory that Christianity grew out of Pre-Christian Gnosticism must be rejected as mere speculation.⁴⁶

Gnosticism derives its name from the Greek word ‘*gnosis*’ meaning knowledge. The most basic features of the movement were (1) a radical dualism between spirit and matter, (2) belief in a Demiurge who created the world and (3) redemption of the inner, spiritual man from matter by way of superior, revealed knowledge. Within this framework Christ was seen as the Redeemer from above who brought this *gnosis*.⁴⁷ Since he is God or spirit, he cannot take part in matter inherently evil (→ Docetism). Thus the doctrine of Christ’s incarnation was rejected and the gospel of his sacrificial

⁴⁵ R. McL. Wilson, *The Gnostic Problem* (London: A.R. Mowbray & Co. Limited, 1958), 68-85; Henry Wace, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 396, s.v. “Gnosticism.”

⁴⁶ “Irenaeus is the first to give any full details,” see *ibid.*; cf. W. Combs, “Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and New Testament Interpretation,” *Grace Theological Journal* 8:2 (Fall 1987): 212.

⁴⁷ Henry Wace, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 398, s.v. “Gnosticism”; cf. W. Combs, “Nag Hammadi,” 206; R.M. Grant, *Gnosticism and early Christianity*, 2d ed., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 15.

death and resurrection likewise had no place in Gnostic thinking. The historical accounts were for the most part interpreted allegorically.⁴⁸

Prominent names commonly associated with Gnosticism are Simon Magus, his successor Menander, Saturninus, Basilides, Valentinus and Cerinthus.⁴⁹ The huge variety of their teachings notwithstanding, they commonly tried to harmonize the Christian tradition about Jesus with their Gnostic philosophies. Basilides proposed that not Christ but Simon of Cyrene (cf. Mt 27:32; Mk 15:21) died on the cross. Simon Magus even taught that he himself suffered at the place of the Redeemer.⁵⁰ Cerinthus taught that Jesus was born and died as man, but at his baptism ‘Christ the spirit’ descended on him until this ‘Christ’ departed again at his suffering.⁵¹

The biblical writers frequently refuted the Gnostic heresy. (e.g. Jn 1:14; 2 Jn 7; Col 2:3; 1 Tim 6:20) Due to the syncretistic character of the movement the rebuttals were diverse and sometimes may have addressed legalistic Judaism that overlaps with the ascetic branch of Gnosticism. (cf. Col 2:16ff.) Correction of such errors shaped part of the biblical writings and so enhanced sound Christian doctrine.

⁴⁸ Henry Wace, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 397, s.v. “Gnosticism”; E.M. Yamauchi, “The Gnostics and History,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 14:1 (Winter 1971): 37f.

⁴⁹ Henry Wace, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 395f., s.v. “Gnosticism”; R.M. Grant, *Gnosticism and early Christianity*, 15.

⁵⁰ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Docetae” by John Arendzen.

⁵¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:400.

Historical Jesus

The *Historical Jesus* is an expression drawn from the field of ‘historical criticism’ that entitles the picture of Jesus of Nazareth as reconstructed from the gospels and extra-biblical sources using historical-critical methods. The subject has its roots in the Enlightenment Era and eventually became a branch of New Testament theology by the work of Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965). He based his teachings on the efforts of Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768) and David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874).⁵² Schweitzer defined the search for the Historical Jesus as “an ally in the struggle against the tyranny of dogma” and in particular against the Chalcedonian creed.⁵³ Combined with its strong anti-supernaturalistic element the area may be described as modern heresy that denies the deity of Jesus Christ.⁵⁴

While the gospels are taken as primary source of historical information about Jesus, its content is seen as partly mythical and insufficient for a bibliographical picture about Jesus.⁵⁵ Miracles were erased as myths since Strauss and further excluded from historical studies by Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976). The latter also

⁵² Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (Great Britain: A. & C. Black, Ltd., 1910), 13, 68; available from <<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/schweitzer/>>; Internet (accessed 21 August 2008).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 3f.

⁵⁴ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 175.

⁵⁵ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 6, 10.

argued that faith cannot depend on historical research.⁵⁶ Overall the biblical Christ was cut from the ‘real’ Historical Jesus and so the Christian faith was divorced from its historical roots. The historicity of the gospel accounts became largely denied and the biblical doctrine of inerrancy likewise abandoned.

Apart from liberal scholarship as defined by its philosophical presuppositions, historical-critical research into the life of the historical Jesus has also caught the attention of evangelical scholars. Unlike Schweitzer, they uphold the divine and human nature of both the gospel writings and the historical Jesus.⁵⁷ Their historical inquiry contributes to the understanding of the biblical record. Besides, the historical-critical method serves to argue for the historical accuracy of the gospels.⁵⁸

Schweitzer’s ‘Quest of the Historical Jesus’ developed into a Second and Third Quest down to the present time. The latter found its place in the ‘Jesus Seminar’ started by Robert Funk in 1985. The group sets priority on the apocryphal writings about Jesus and holds to the antisupernaturalism of its liberal predecessors.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Donald Guthrie, “The Historical and Literary Criticism of the New Testament,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, *Introductory Articles*, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 440.

⁵⁷ Michael Pahl, “Is Jesus Lost? Evangelicals and the Search of the Historical Jesus.” *Themelios* 31: 18; cf. Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh*, 385f.

⁵⁸ Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 115f.; William Lane Craig, “Rediscovering the Historical Jesus: The Evidence for Jesus,” *Faith and Mission* 15 (Spring 1998): 16-25.

⁵⁹ William Lane Craig, “Rediscovering the Historical Jesus: Presuppositions and Pretensions of the Jesus Seminar,” *Faith and Mission* 15 (Spring 1998): 3-13.

Monophysitism

Monophysitism constitutes the denial of the two-nature Christology as defined in the Creed of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. In its premature state the heresy can already be found in elements of → Apollinarianism. When Cyril of Alexandria responded to Nestorius' juxtaposing of the two natures of Christ (→ Nestorianism), Nestorius accused him an Apollinarian.⁶⁰ Cyril's one-nature statement was again debated when misused by → Eutychianism. Though Eutyches and his followers were condemned at Chalcedon, their ideas continued to challenge the creeds of the church.

Dioscurus the successor of Cyril supported and enforced the ideas of Eutyches and so established Monophysitism in its heretical maturity.⁶¹ For the sake of peace, the Chalcedonian creed was condemned in 476 A.D. by emperor Basiliscus and in 482 A.D. emperor Zeno issued the compromising *Henoticon* ('union') law in favour of the Monophysites. Creedal or heretical statements were avoided, the dogma of Chalcedon renounced and Dioscurus not mentioned.⁶² The church schism was complete when the Dyophysites rejected the *Henoticon* in response.⁶³

The controversy centered upon words and the relation between Christ's person

⁶⁰ H. D. McDonald, "Development and Christology," 19.

⁶¹ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Eutychianism" by John Chapman; cf. Henry Wace, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 733ff., s.v. "Monophysitism".

⁶² *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Henoticon" by Adrian Fortescue.

⁶³ Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh*, 68f.

(*prosopon*'), substance (*hypostasis*') and nature (*physis*'). The Chalcedonian creed states that Christ is one person and one substance but two natures in one 'hypostatic union'. Before, Nestorius said that Christ is one person but two substances and two natures. Then the Monophysites departed in the other direction stating that Christ is one person, one substance and therefore also one nature, equating substance with nature like the Nestorians. The words' meanings were defined by the Church Fathers, and so the deviation was classified as heresy on doctrinal grounds.⁶⁴

Nonetheless "there is no heresy in intention, but only a wrong definition: that one hypostasis can have only one nature."⁶⁵ While the Monophysites positively held that Christ had two natures with all its properties and qualities (i.e. he was 'of two natures' but not 'in two natures'), they stated that the divine and human were combined at the incarnation in one hypostasis and so became one nature. The question whether this nature was corruptible or not split the group into two branches.⁶⁶

Prominent advocates of Monophysitism were Timothy Ælurus of Alexandria and after him Julian of Halicarnassus beside Severus of Antioch. Ælurus and Severus also proposed that all actions of Christ were unified in the one God-man. The subject grew into the heretical one-will Christology known as → Monothelitism.

⁶⁴ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Monophysitism" by John Chapman; Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, § 143.

⁶⁵ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Monophysitism" by John Chapman.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*; Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, § 143.

Monothelitism

Monothelitism states that Christ, while he had two natures, had only one will.

About two decades after the Council of Chalcedon that defined the two-nature Christology and established the schism between the orthodox and the monophysite branch of the church, the debate followed as a sequence of the ongoing controversy. The teachings were initiated by emperor Heraclius (610-641 A.D.) and supported by Sergius of Constantinople and Cyrus of Phasis with the intention to reconcile the divided church for political union.⁶⁷

The heresy at first claimed one human-divine ‘energy’ of Christ which developed into the statement that the Logos, i.e. the one person Christ, was the source of each divine and human ‘action’.⁶⁸ In defence of the theory, pope Honorius then added to confess the belief in one ‘will’ of Christ. Sergius joined him in his *Ekthesis* signed by emperor Heraclius and endorsed by the pope in 638 A.D.⁶⁹

That Christ acted as one God-man was introduced by the Church Fathers before in their teachings about the incarnation. They declared that Christ could have no will

⁶⁷ Philip Schaff, *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia*, 7:480f., s.v. “Monothelites”; *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Monothelitism” by John Chapman; William Smith and Henry Wace, ed., *A Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects and Doctrines* (London: John Murray, 1887), 4:320f.; available from <<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/>>; Internet (accessed 27 August 2008).

⁶⁸ Philip Schaff, *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia*, 7:481.

⁶⁹ Ibid.; Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh*, 73; *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Monothelitism” by John Chapman.

contrary to the divine. The Monothelites concluded that Christ could only have one will, as Macarius said: “For it is impossible that there be in one and the same Christ, our God, two wills together and at the same time contrary, even if they are alike.”⁷⁰ Besides, Sergius and his followers argued that two wills would imply two willing persons and therefore fall into the heresy of → Nestorianism.⁷¹

The opponents responded that the dogma of two natures of Christ calls for the complete humanity of Christ including his human will. Without the will, his humanity would be reduced to a dead instrument without soul and reason. Though all agreed that Christ did not have a ‘will of the flesh’ in human depravity, yet the rational, free will was seen an important element of the human nature. The mistake of the heretics was that they simply equalled ‘two wills’ with ‘contrary wills’.⁷²

The process of church discipline started when Sergius’ *Ecthesis* was condemned at a Roman synod in 641 A.D. The bishops of Cyprus followed in 643 A.D. At the Lateran Council in 649 A.D. pope Martin condemned Sergius and Cyrus, but was kidnapped and martyred in response. The heresy was officially condemned at the 6th Ecumenical council at Constantinople in 680 A.D. It was accepted that Christ had two wills not opposed to each other with the human subordinate to the divine will.⁷³

⁷⁰ Quoted in Philip Schaff, *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia*, 7:483.

⁷¹ Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh*, 74.

⁷² *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Monothelitism” by John Chapman.

⁷³ Philip Schaff, *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia*, 7:482; *The Catholic*

Nestorianism

Nestorianism denies the unity of the two natures of Christ in one person. The heresy was formed under the teachings of Nestorius, who was first presbyter of Antioch and in 428 A.D. appointed as patriarch of Constantinople. He was a fervent persecutor of heretics,⁷⁴ but was later condemned himself by his rival Cyril of Alexandria at the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. (→ Eutychianism)

Background of the heresy was the preceding error of → Apollinarianism. Whereas Apollinarius claimed that Christ had one nature without human mind, Nestorius went too far saying that Christ had two natures hence he was two persons. In effect he said that God assumed the human Christ, “distinguished from other men in whom God dwelt, only by the plenitude of the divine presence, and the absolute control of the divine over the human.”⁷⁵ The full deity of Christ was at stake. It is noteworthy that the Nestorian’s Bible replaced ‘God’ with ‘Christ’ in Acts 20:28.⁷⁶

The controversy started when Nestorius defended his presbyter who said that Mary cannot be called Mother of God (*theotokos*) because God could not be born. He accepted the term as orthodox but feared that Mary would be made into a goddess,

Encyclopedia, s.v. “Monothelitism” by John Chapman.

⁷⁴ Henry Wace, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 753, s.v. “Nestorius”; Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, § 137.

⁷⁵ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:401.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:402.

and so he proposed to use the title Mother of Christ (*'christotokos'*) instead.⁷⁷ Besides he publicly insisted against the accusations of his opponents that he never admitted two persons of Christ.⁷⁸ Yet, contrary to his intentions, his theory that Mary was mother of the human but not of the divine inevitably separated the two natures into persons. The relation between the Godhood and Manhood became mechanical and the human only temple and instrument of the divine, forbidding any transfer of attributes (*'communicatio idiomatum'*) at Christ's incarnation or death.⁷⁹

Thus it is hold against Nestorius that he made Mary merely the mother of a nature and not of a personal son.⁸⁰ The difficult question is what constitutes a person and to what extent does the physical act of child-bearing contribute to personality. The dogma on the relation between Christ's person and nature was shaped into its final form not before the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. (cf. appendix) Nestorius contributed to this process but was condemned for his error first by pope Celestine at a Roman council in 430 A.D and then by Cyril in 431 A.D. The accepted formula then used the term *'theotokos'* despite Nestorius' objections.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Henry Wace, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 755, s.v. "Nestorius"; Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, § 137.

⁷⁸ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Nestorius" by John Chapman; Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh*, 63.

⁷⁹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, § 137.

⁸⁰ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Nestorius" by John Chapman.

⁸¹ Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh*, 63; Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 183.

Appendix

Nicene Creed (325 A.D.)

“We believe in one God, the FATHER Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord JESUS CHRIST, the Son of God, begotten of the Father [the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of **one substance** (*‘homoousious’*) **with the Father**; by whom all things were made [both in heaven and on earth]; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the HOLY GHOST.

[But for those who say: “There was a time when he was not;” and “He was not before he was made;” and “He was made out of nothing,” or “He is of another substance (*‘hypostasis’*) or essence (*‘ousia’*),” or “The Son of God is created,” or “changeable,” or “alterable” – they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic church.]”

Chalcedonian Creed (451 A.D.)

“We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhood and also perfect in Manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [coessential] with the Father according to the Godhood, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhood, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in **two natures**, *inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably*; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in **one Person** (*‘prosopon’*) and one Subsistence (*‘hypostasis’*), not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.”

Chronological Chart of Heresies

Heresy	Century	Denial	Opposition
Gnosticism	1 st	Union of flesh and spirit	Apostles, Church Fathers
Docetism	1 st	Christ's humanity	Apostles, Church Fathers
Ebionism	1 st	Christ's divinity	Apostles, Church Fathers
Arianism	4 th	Uncreatedness of Christ	<i>Council of Nicea (325)</i>
Apollinarianism	4 th	Human mind of Christ	Gregory of Nazianzus
Nestorianism	4 th	One person of Christ	Cyril, Eutyches
Eutychianism	4 th	Two natures of Christ	<i>Council of Chalcedon (451)</i>
Monophysitism	5 th	Two natures of Christ	Dyophysites
Monothelitism	7 th	Two wills of Christ	6 th Ecumenical Council (680)
Historical Jesus	19 th	Christ's divinity	Evangelicals

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