

Trinitarian/Christological Heresies

The term Christology has two meanings in theology. It can be used in the narrow sense of the question as to how the divine and human are related in the person of Jesus Christ, or alternatively of the overall study of his life and work. Here it is used in the restricted, narrow sense.

The orthodox teaching concerning the Trinity, as finally developed and formally agreed at Constantinople in 381, is that God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit were all strictly one being in three hypostases, misleadingly translated as "persons". The christological question then arose as to how Jesus Christ could be both divine and human. This was formally resolved after much debate by the Ecumenical Councils of 431, 451 and 680 (Ephesus, Chalcedon & Constantinople III).

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Orthodox (or-tho-dox) – Right Teaching	Heterodox (het-ero-dox) – Different Teaching	Heresy – False Teaching
<p>Beliefs that conform to what is right and true according to God's word.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus died for our sin • Belief that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ. 	<p>Christian teachings which are not in agreement with our understanding of scripture, but do not rise to the level of heresy.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Lord's Supper – closed vs. open • Women reading Scripture during worship <p>Note: These differences cause divisions. Hence, many different church bodies. Also, some people say that any and all heterodox teaching is heresy.</p>	<p>Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adherence to a religious opinion contrary to church dogma • dissent or deviation from a dominant theory, opinion, or practice <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus is not God • Jesus did not come in the flesh • Jesus did not die • Jesus was not a propitiation for our sin.

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Heresy	Description	Origin	Official condemnation	Other
Adoptionism	Belief that Jesus was born as a mere (non-divine) man, was supremely virtuous and that he was adopted later as "Son of God" by the descent of the Spirit on him.	Propounded by Theodotus of Byzantium, a leather merchant, in Rome c.190, later revived by Paul of Samosata	Theodotus was excommunicated by Pope Victor and Paul was condemned by the Synod of Antioch in 268	Alternative names: Psilanthropism and Dynamic Monarchianism. Later criticized as presupposing Nestorianism (see below)
Apollinarism	Belief that Jesus had a human body and lower soul (the seat of the emotions) but a divine mind. Apollinaris further taught that the souls of men were propagated by other souls, as well as their bodies.	Proposed by Apollinaris of Laodicea (died 390)	Declared to be a heresy in 381 by the First Council of Constantinople	
Arabici	Belief that the soul perished with the body, and that both would be revived on Judgement Day.	Founder unknown, but associated with 3rd-century Christians from Arabia.		Reconciled to the main body of the Church after a council in 250 led by Origen.
Arianism	Denial of the true divinity of Jesus Christ taking various specific forms, but all agreed that Jesus Christ was created by the Father, that he had a beginning in time, and that the title "Son of God" was a courtesy one.	The doctrine is associated with Arius (c. AD 250–336) who lived and taught in Alexandria, Egypt.	Arius was first pronounced a heretic at the First Council of Nicea, he was later exonerated as a result of imperial pressure and finally declared a heretic after his death. The heresy was finally resolved in 381 by the First Council of Constantinople.	All forms denied that Jesus Christ is "consubstantial with the Father" but proposed either "similar in substance", or "similar", or "dissimilar" as the correct alternative.
Docetism	Belief that Jesus' physical body was an illusion, as was his crucifixion; that is, Jesus only seemed to have a physical body and to physically die, but in reality he was incorporeal, a pure spirit, and hence could not physically die.	Tendencies existed in the 1st century, but it was most notably embraced by Gnostics in subsequent centuries.	Docetism was rejected by the ecumenical councils and mainstream Christianity, and largely died out during the first millennium AD.	Gnostic movements that survived past that time, such as Catharism, incorporated docetism into their beliefs, but such movements were destroyed by the Albigensian Crusade (1209–1229).

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Luciferians	Strongly anti-Arian sect in Sardinia	Founded by Lucifer Calaritanus a bishop of Cagliari	Deemed heretical by Jerome in his <i>Altercatio Luciferiani et orthodoxi</i>	
Macedonians or Pneumatomachians("Spirit fighters")	While accepting the divinity of Jesus Christ as affirmed at Nicea in 325, they denied that of the Holy Spirit which they saw as a creation of the Son, and a servant of the Father and the Son.	Allegedly founded in the 4th century by Bishop Macedonius I of Constantinople, Eustathius of Sebaste was their principal theologian.	Opposed by the Cappadocian Fathers and condemned at the First Council of Constantinople.	This is what prompted the addition of "And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who proceedeth from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son is equally worshipped and glorified, Who spake by the Prophets", into the Nicene Creed at the second ecumenical council.
Melchisedechians	Considered Melchisedech an incarnation of the Logos (divine Word) and identified him with the Holy Ghost.		Refuted by Marcus Eremita in his book <i>Eis ton Melchisedek</i> ("Against the Melchisedekites")	It is uncertain whether the sect survived beyond the 9th century. They were probably scattered across Anatolia and the Balkans following the destruction of Tephrike.
Monarchianism	An overemphasis on the indivisibility of God (the Father) at the expense of the other "persons" of the Trinity leading to either Sabellianism(Modalism) or to Adoptionism.			Stressing the "monarchy" of God was in Eastern theology a legitimate way of affirming his oneness, also the Father as the unique source of divinity. It became heretical when pushed to the extremes indicated.
Monophysitism or Eutychianism	Belief that Christ's divinity dominates and overwhelms his humanity, as opposed to the Chalcedonian position which holds that Christ has two natures, one divine and one human or the Miaphysite position which holds that the human nature and pre-incarnate divine nature of Christ were united as one divine human nature from the point of the Incarnation onwards.	After Nestorianism was rejected at the First Council of Ephesus, Eutyches emerged with diametrically opposite views.	Eutyches was excommunicated in 448. Monophysitism and Eutyches were rejected at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Monophysitism is also rejected by the Oriental Orthodox Churches	

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Heresy	Description	Origin	Official condemnation	Other
Monothelitism	Belief that Jesus Christ had two natures but only one will. This is contrary to the orthodox interpretation of Christology, which teaches that Jesus Christ has two wills (human and divine) corresponding to his two natures	Originated in Armenia and Syria in AD 633	Monothelitism was officially condemned at the Third Council of Constantinople (the Sixth Ecumenical Council, 680–681). The churches condemned at Constantinople include the Oriental Orthodox Syriac, Armenian, and Coptic churches as well as the Maronite church, although the latter now deny that they ever held the Monothelite view and are presently in full communion with the Bishop of Rome. Christians in England rejected the Monothelite position at the Council of Hatfield in 680.	
Nestorianism	Belief that Jesus Christ was a natural union between the Flesh and the Word, thus not identical, to the divine Son of God.	Advanced by Nestorius (386–450), Patriarch of Constantinople from 428–431. The doctrine was informed by Nestorius' studies under Theodore of Mopsuestia at the School of Antioch.	Condemned at the First Council of Ephesus in 431 and the Council of Chalcedon in 451, leading to the Nestorian Schism.	Nestorius rejected the title Theotokos for the Virgin Mary, and proposed Christotokos as more suitable. Many of Nestorius' supporters relocated to Sassanid Persia, where they affiliated with the local Christian community, known as the Church of the East. Over the next decades the Church of the East became increasingly Nestorian in doctrine, leading it to be known alternately as the Nestorian Church.
Patripassianism	Belief that the Father and Son are not two distinct persons, and thus God the Father suffered on the cross as Jesus.			similar to Sabellianism
Psilanthropism	Belief that Jesus is "merely human": either that he never became divine, or that he never existed prior to his incarnation as a man.		Rejected by the ecumenical councils, especially in the First Council of Nicaea, which was convened to deal directly with the nature of Christ's divinity.	See Adoptionism

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Heresy	Description	Origin	Official condemnation	Other
Sabellianism	Belief that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three characterizations of one God, rather than three distinct "persons" in one God.	First formally stated by Noetus of Smyrna c. 190, refined by Sabellius c. 210 who applied the names merely to different roles of God in the history and economy of salvation.	Noetus was condemned by the presbyters of Smyrna. Tertullian wrote <i>Adversus Praxeam</i> against this tendency and Sabellius was condemned by Pope Callistus.	Alternative names: Patripassianism, Modalism, Modalistic Monarchianism

Gnosticism

Gnosticism refers to a diverse, syncretistic religious movement consisting of various belief systems generally united in the teaching that humans are divine souls trapped in a material world created by an imperfect god, the demiurge, who is frequently identified with the Abrahamic God. Gnosticism is a rejection (sometimes from an ascetic perspective) and vilification of the human body and of the material world or cosmos. Gnosticism teaches duality in Material (Matter) versus Spiritual or Body (evil) versus Soul (good). Gnosticism teaches that the natural or material world will and should be destroyed (total annihilation) by the true spiritual God in order to free mankind from the reign of the false God or Demiurge.

A common misperception is caused by the fact that, in the past, "Gnostic" had a similar meaning to current usage of the word mystic. There were some Orthodox Christians who as mystics (in the modern sense) taught gnosis (Knowledge of the God or the Good) who could be called gnostics in a positive sense (e.g. Diadochos of Photiki).

Whereas formerly Gnosticism was considered mostly a corruption of Christianity, it now seems clear that traces of Gnostic systems can be discerned some centuries before the Christian Era. Gnosticism may have been earlier than the 1st century, thus predating Jesus Christ. It spread through the Mediterranean and Middle East before and during the 2nd and 3rd centuries, becoming a dualistic heresy to Judaism (see Notzrim), Christianity and Hellenic philosophy in areas controlled by the Roman Empire and Arian Goths (see Huneric), and the Persian Empire. Conversion to Islam and the Albigensian Crusade (1209–1229) greatly reduced the remaining number of Gnostics throughout the Middle Ages, though a few isolated communities continue to exist to the present. Gnostic ideas became influential in the philosophies of various esoteric mystical movements of the late 19th and 20th centuries in Europe and North America, including some that explicitly identify themselves as revivals or even continuations of earlier gnostic groups.

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Manichaeism	A major dualistic religion stating that good and evil are equally powerful, and that material things are evil.	Founded in 210–276 AD by Mani	Condemned by Emperor Theodosius I decree in 382	Thrived between the 3rd and 7th centuries and appears to have died out before the 16th century in southern China.
Paulicianism	A Gnostic and dualistic sect	The founder of the sect is said to have been an Armenian by the name of Constantine, who hailed from Mananalis, a community near Samosata.	Repressed by order of Empress Theodora II in 843	
Priscillianism	A Gnostic and Manichaean sect	Founded in the 4th century by Priscillian, derived from the Gnostic-Manichaean doctrines taught by <i>Marcus</i> . Priscillian was put to death by the emperor Gratian for the crime of magic.	Condemned by synod of Zaragoza in 380.	Increased during the 5th century despite efforts to stop it. In the 6th century, Priscillianism declined and died out soon after the Synod of Braga in 563.
Naassenes	A Gnostic sect from around 100 AD	The Naassenes claimed to have been taught their doctrines by Mariamne, a disciple of James the Just.	Dealt as heresy by Hippolytus of Rome	
Sethian	Belief that the snake in the Garden of Eden (Satan) was an agent of the true God and brought knowledge of truth to man via the fall of man	Syrian sect drawing their origin from the Ophites	Dealt as heresy by Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Philaster	Sect is founded around the Apocalypse of Adam.
Ophites	Belief that the serpent (Satan) who tempted Adam and Eve was a hero, and that the God who forbade Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge is the enemy.		Dealt as heresy by Hippolytus of Rome	
Valentianism	A Gnostic and dualistic sect	Gnostic sect was founded by Ex-Catholic Bishop Valentinus	Considered heresy by Irenaeus and Epiphanius of Salamis	

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Other Early Church heresies

Heresy	Description	Origin	Official condemnation	Other
Antinomianism	Any view which holds that Christians are freed by grace from obligations of any moral law. St Paul had to refute a charge of this type made by opponents because of his attitude to the Mosaic Law (Romans 3:8)	Some gnostics (e.g. Ophites and Nicolaitans) taught that since matter was opposed to the spirit, the body was unimportant. Similar views were found among some anabaptists in the sixteenth century as a consequence of justification by faith and later among some sects in seventeenth century England.	Decree on Justification, chapter XV Council of Trent	Few groups have declared themselves Antinomian, and the term has often been used by one group to criticize another's views.
Audianism	Belief that God has human form (anthropomorphism) and that one ought to celebrate Jesus' death during the Jewish Passover (quartodecimanism).	Named after the leader of the sect, Audius (or Audaeus), a Syrian who lived in the 4th century.	The First Council of Nicaea condemned quartodecimanism in 325. Cyril of Alexandria condemned anthropomorphism at his <i>Adversus Anthropomorphites</i>	
Barallot	Held all things in common, even wives and children			Were also called "compilers" due to their love of sensual pleasures
Circumcellions	A militant subset of Donatism*	<i>See Donatism</i>	Outlawed by Emperor Honorius in 408	Relied on violence.
Donatism*	Donatists were rigorists, holding that the church must be a church of saints, not sinners, and that sacraments administered by <i>traditores</i> were invalid. They also regarded martyrdom as the supreme Christian virtue and regarded those that actively sought martyrdom as saints.	Named for their second leader Donatus Magnus	Condemned by Pope Melchiades	Donatists were a force at the time of Saint Augustine of Hippo and disappeared only after the Arab conquest. ^[19]
Ebionites	A Jewish sect that insisted on the necessity of following Jewish law and rites, ^[20] which they interpreted in light of Jesus' expounding of the	The term <i>Ebionites</i> derives from the Hebrew אַבְיוֹנִים <i>Evionim</i> , meaning "the Poor Ones", ^{[22][23]}	Justin Martyr considered them heretical at <i>Dialogue with Trypho the Jew</i> chapter xlvii	In 375, Epiphanius records the settlement of Ebionites on Cyprus, later Theodoret of Cyrrhus reported that they

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	Law. ^[21] They regarded Jesus as the Messiah but not as divine.			were no longer present there. ^[24]
Euchites / Messalians	<p>Belief that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The essence (ousia) of the Trinity could be perceived by the carnal senses. 2. The Threefold God transformed himself into a single hypostasis(substance) in order to unite with the souls of the perfect. 3. God has taken different forms in order to reveal himself to the senses. 4. Only such sensible revelations of God confer perfection upon the Christian. 5. The state of perfection, freedom from the world and passion, is attained solely by prayer, not through the church or sacraments. ("Euchites" means "Those who pray") 	Originating in Mesopotamia, they spread to Asia Minor and Thrace.	Bishop Flavian of Antioch condemned them about 376	The group might have continued for several centuries, influencing the Bogomils of Bulgaria, the Bosnian church, the Paterenes and Catharism. ^[25]
Iconoclasm	The belief that icons are idols and should be destroyed. ^[26]	From late in the seventh century onwards some parts of the Greek Church reacted against the veneration of icons. In 726 the Emperor Leo III ordered the destruction of all icons and persecuted those who refused. The policy continued under his successors till about 780. Later Leo V launched a second attempt which continued till the death of the emperor Theophilus in 842	Condemned by Nicea II in 787 which regulated the veneration	Leo III may have been motivated by the belief that the veneration of icons, particularly in the excessive form it often took, was the chief obstacle to the conversion of Jews and Muslims
Marcionism	An Early Christian dualist belief system. Marcion affirmed Jesus Christ as the savior sent by God and Paul as his chief apostle, but he rejected the Hebrew Bible and the Hebrew God. Marcionists believed that the wrathful Hebrew God was a separate and lower entity than the all-forgiving God of the New Testament. This belief was in some ways similar to Gnostic Christian theology, but in other ways different.	Originates in the teachings of Marcion of Sinope at Rome around the year 144. ^[27]	Many early apologists, such as Tertullian on his <i>Adversus Marcionem</i> (year 207) condemned Marcionism	Marcionism continued in the West for 300 years, although Marcionistic ideas persisted much longer. ^[28] Marcionism continued in the East for some centuries later.
Montanism	The beliefs of Montanism contrasted with orthodox Christianity in the following ways:	Named for its founder Montanus, Montanism originated at Hierapolis. It spread rapidly to other regions in	The churches of Asia Minor excommunicated Montanists. ^[30] Around 177, Apollinarius, Bishop of Hierapolis, presided over	Although the orthodox mainstream Christian church prevailed against

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief that the prophecies of the Montanists superseded and fulfilled the doctrines proclaimed by the Apostles. • The encouragement of ecstatic prophesying. • The view that Christians who fell from grace could not be redeemed. • A stronger emphasis on the avoidance of sin and church discipline, emphasizing chastity, including forbidding remarriage. • Some of the Montanists were also "Quartodeciman".^[29] 	the Roman Empire during the period before Christianity was generally tolerated or legal.	a synod which condemned the New Prophecy. ^[31] The leaders of the churches of Lyon and Vienne in Gaul responded to the New Prophecy in 177	Montanism within a few generations, labeling it a heresy, the sect persisted in some isolated places into the 8th century.
Pelagianism	Belief that original sin did not taint human nature and that mortal will is still capable of choosing good or evil without Divine aid.	Named after Pelagius (354–420/440). The theology was later developed by C(a)elestius and Julian of Eclanum into a complete system. ^[32] and refuted by Augustine of Hippo (who had for a time (385–395) held similar opinions ^[33]) but his final position never gained general acceptance in the East.	Pelagianism was attacked in the Council of Diospolis ^[34] and condemned in 418 at the Council of Carthage ^[35] and the decision confirmed at the Council of Ephesus in 431.	
Semipelagianism	A rejection of Pelagianism which held that Augustine had gone too far to the other extreme and taught that grace aided free-will rather than replacing it.	Such views were advanced by Prosper and Hilary of Aquitaine, John Cassian and Vincent of Lérins in the west.	Condemned by the Council of Orange in 529 which slightly weakened some of Augustine's more extreme statements. ^[36]	The label "Semipelagianism" dates from the seventeenth century.