

## **CHRISTOLOGY**

The study of the person of Christ with special reference to the union of the divine and human natures in the one person. From the New Testament we know that the early Christians regarded Christ as both God and man, but it was the task of later Christology to express this coherently in precise theological terms. The controversies of the early Christian centuries reflect divergent approaches to this problem.

Those who started from His humanity included EBIONITES and Cerinthians, who regarded Jesus as a man especially [endowed](#) by God for His mission; [Adoptionists](#) and Dynamic Monarchians, who held that Jesus was especially endowed by the Holy Spirit at His baptism; and later Nestorians (although perhaps not [NESTORIUS](#) himself) who believed in a prosopic rather than a real union of the two natures in the one person, which tended to keep the two natures separate. All of these failed to do justice to Jesus as God.

On the other side were those who started from the godhead. Among these were the Docetists, who regarded Jesus' coming in the flesh as a mere phantom appearance; Modalist Monarchians, who saw Christ as a mode of appearance of the Father; and the Apollinarians, who held that in Jesus there was a human body and soul (*psyche*) but no human spirit (*nous*), the latter being replaced by the divine Logos. All of these failed to do justice to the manhood of Christ.

Another controversy, which had important ramifications, was begun by the Alexandrian presbyter ARIUS (256-336) who, in a desire to guard the unity of the godhead, denied that the Son was truly God. Although Arius did not exclude soteriology (the doctrine of salvation), his views tended to make the Son into a demigod— neither fully God nor fully man. The Council of NICAEA (325) replied by asserting that Jesus was “of one substance with the Father,” which excluded Arianism proper.

Christological speculation, however, continued unabated and continued to be dominated by the division between those who approached Christ's person from His manhood and from His godhead. Theologians in Antioch (e.g., [THEODORUS OF MOPSUESTIA](#), and Nestorius' followers) almost separated Christ into two persons, so concerned were they to preserve Jesus' human experience, while the Alexandrians (e.g., CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA) were concerned to emphasize His divinity.

The Council of EPHEBUS (431) asserted that the one born from [Mary](#) was God. The orthodoxy of the term *Theotokos* was accepted, but fifteen years later EUTYCHES maintained that although there were two natures in Christ before the Incarnation, there was only one nature after. Against these views the Council of CHALCEDON (451) stated in its definition that Christ was "truly God and truly Man. . . . One and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation."

However, this statement was unacceptable to many Christians, who continued to hold that in the person of the incarnate Christ there was one single divine nature (see MONOPHYSITISM). Many variant forms of monophysitism soon developed—for instance, that of the followers of JULIAN of Halicarnassus, who taught the incorruptibility and immortality of the body of Jesus from the first moment of the Incarnation.

During the fifth and sixth centuries many efforts were made, without avail, to reconcile the Monophysites to the main body of Christians. However, by the sixth century monophysitism had consolidated itself into three great churches: (1) the Coptic (the ancient church of Egypt) and the Ethiopian branches (the latter strongly influenced by Judaism); (2) the Syrian Jacobites; and (3) the Armenians. All of these churches accept the doctrine of the [church fathers](#) prior to the Council of Chalcedon while rejecting the definition of that council. Today, with a less pronounced monophysitism, they are closer to the Orthodox churches.

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