

Early Christological Heresies

Introduction

When a Bible student reads some of the history of the early church regarding the theological debates about the Trinity and the natures of Christ, he can be easily overwhelmed with detail and thrown into complete confusion. Doctrines such as Apollinarianism or Monothelism just flummox him. Sadly some of the books and dictionary articles on these subjects are technical, full of jargon and confusing. Indeed, it is not easy even for students who have studied this for some time. Well, this paper is written to try to make this complex web of theology a little bit easier to understand.

The reason for this difficulty is the complexity of the wonderful person of Christ. The theological statements are so difficult because they are trying to evaluate the depths and glory of something that is too high for us to grasp; we can only seek to encapsulate this glory in human terms as best as we can. Consequently, as a clearer doctrinal statement arose, heretics quickly appeared to countermand that because they felt that the former teaching denied or contradicted something else about Christ; thus the church went back and forth in a pendulum effect either overstating Christ's deity or his humanity (see Appendix One).

Another factor is that in post-apostolic early church there was no single orthodox party. As new ideas arose, there would be a number of parties vying for support. For instance, as Docetism became a threat, some Christians confronted it with a type of Adoptionist doctrine, others with more Biblical teachings; but at the same time there were people with Modalistic theology. At the same time that theologians were confronting Arianism (Christ is not God), they also had to contend against Apollinarianism (Christ is not a proper man). To fight against a certain heresy, one could end up laying the groundwork for another. Thus some confused heretics were convinced they were defending true Christianity.¹ We must be grateful for the champions of truth that continued fighting for hundreds of years until all was made more clear.

The subsequent debates led to a clarification of doctrine and more careful statements. Over more than 400 years the church ended up with pretty clear and precise statements about Christological doctrine in the Chalcedonian formulation of 451 and the further decisions of the Council of Constantinople in 680. Until this point there was little unification of theology.

The studies here are summaries and cannot delve into the theological intricacies of the heresies, or their complex histories. A bibliography is supplied for further reading, in addition to that found in any systematic theology.

The 'modern equivalents' in the following evaluations refer just to the Christological teaching and not subsidiary teachings. Thus Christian Science is similar to Ebionism in its Christology but not in its teaching on law-keeping.

¹ Such as Adoptionist Theodotus the Tanner who was excommunicated by Pope Victor (189-198), though he still professed the rule of faith.

The various heresies examined in chronological order

Gnosticism

- **THE NAME:** comes from the Greek *gnosis*, meaning 'to know'.
- **CHRISTOLOGICAL TEACHING:** Christ is not the Supreme Being. Docetism.
- **OTHER TEACHING:** a complex syncretism of paganism, Oriental mysticism, occultism (astrology, magic), Christianity, Platonic dualism and other religions. Basic premise is that matter is evil, the spirit is good (dualism). The Supreme Being has a feminine side and is the 'Mother-Father'. There are a series of divine emanations. Sophia (i.e. wisdom, sometimes identified as the Spirit) is the youngest of the divine beings and is female. Jesus was a product of Sophia and the Supreme Being, and is called an aeon. Sophia alone produced the Demiurge, equivalent to the OT Yahweh, who is imperfect and created the world, which is evil. Jesus was incarnated to teach the mysteries (secret knowledge, *Gnosis*) to Gnostics. Salvation is by knowing the mysteries (*Gnosis*). Some teach that Sophia is one of the 30 aeons and that these are finite beings, like angels. Some Gnostics (Marcion, Valentinus) taught that salvation comes from Christ who is an aeon who brought knowledge to men. Some Gnostics were ascetics while others were libertarians.
- **WORKS:** *Nag Hammadi* codices discovered in 1945 plus other fragments and quotes in the fathers.
- **MAIN PROPONENTS:** Originator said to be Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-24); i.e. the first to propagate these ideas in Christian circles in Rome. He deified himself and also produced miracles by magic power. Basilides formed the Alexandrian cult. He combined Christianity with pagan mysteries, such as Egyptian Hermetism², Oriental occultism, Chaldean astrology, and Persian philosophy. Valentinus took over from Basilides; both developed the idea of the 'pleroma' or the heavenly world consisting of a descending series of 30 'aeons', or spiritual powers (angels),³ each creating a new heaven. Other angels also create a heaven until there are 365 of them. The descending series of aeons serves to distance the Supreme Being ('Autopater' or 'self-father') from the material creation which is evil. Other leaders include: Saturnilus, Marcion; Cerinthus, Menander; Ptolemaeus; Mani (Manichaeism⁴). The different sources developed separate traditions and a wide variety of contradictory teachings; all this makes evaluation of Gnosticism difficult.
- **TIMESCALE:** a significant problem from the time of the apostles to the third century (though remnants continued later than this). Hegesippus says that Gnosticism predated Christ and was based upon seven Jewish heresies.
- **COMBATED BY:** Irenaeus (130-200), '*Against Heresies*'. Hippolytus (170-236), '*The Refutation of all Heresies*'. Tertullian (160-225); Epiphanius (310-403).
- **MODERN EQUIVALENT:** New Age teachings. William Blake. Christian Science. Theosophy and Anthroposophy. Many modern Gnostic type cults, one has a magazine called 'Gnosis'. There is a sense in which any religious movement that is founded upon a syncretism of false religion with Christianity and which emphasises a secret knowledge for the initiated is Gnostic.

² Hermetism is Egyptian occultism based upon alchemy involving the Egyptian god Thoth and the Greek god Hermes (Hermes Trismegistus). It has similarities with Theosophy and Rosicrucianism (which were based upon it). It combines Greek thought (particularly Platonic dualism) with Eastern religion.

³ Such as Phronesis (Prudence), Sophia (Wisdom) & Dynamis (Power).

⁴ 'Manicheism' in the USA.

Docetism

This was a facet of many Gnostics. Since matter is evil, then Christ could not have become flesh. Therefore, his body was only an appearance of human flesh, or a phantom. Christ did not die on the cross but exchanged places with Simon of Cyrene at the last minute.

Marcionism

Gnostic dualism. Chief emphasis was that the OT God is not the same as the NT God. Taught by Marcion (d. 160). Being a Docetist he denied Jesus' human nature, but he also denied Jesus' deity. Marcion was anti OT and anti-Semitic. He was opposed by Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna (70-155) and Irenaeus. Marcion is famous for creating his own canon (centred on Paul's writings) and forcing the church to consider a formal canon.

Manichaeism

A 3rd century form of dualistic Gnosticism propounded by Mani (216-276), or Manes, which became a world religion reaching as far as China by the 8th century. It became the state religion of the Turkic Uigurs in the late 8th century. Certain Christian groups (the Bogomils in the Balkans and Cathari in southern France) have been accused of being Gnostic and Manichaean but a true historical connection is doubtful and more likely to be Romanist propaganda utilised in its persecutions.

Mani's view of Christ was Gnostic and denied his resurrection, though Mani claimed to be Christ's successor. Christ was called 'the Brilliant Light' and the story Jesus in the Gospels is but an instance of the suffering of imprisoned eternal Light in matter (battle of dualism). Disciples were ascetics (abstaining from meat and sex) seeking gradual liberation. He also taught a millennial reign of Jesus after which the elect are reunited with the Light. His deeply mythological teaching managed to absorb many Marcionites.

Ebionism

- **THE NAME:** means 'poor' (Hebrew / Aramaic *Ebion*, *ebyonim*).
- **CHRISTOLOGICAL TEACHING:** Christ is just a man, though he is a prophet.
- **OTHER TEACHING:** Christian Judaisers who lived an ascetic life and celebrated a Saturday Sabbath; salvation was by keeping the Jewish law. They rejected most of the Bible, especially Paul's letters; though they did use Matthew's Gospel. They also rejected the virgin birth. They also wrote their own scriptures, such as '*The Gospel according to the Hebrews*'.
- **WORKS:** *The Gospel according to the Hebrews*; *The Ascension of Isaiah*; *The Odes of Solomon*.
- **MAIN PROPONENT:** Most leaders are lost in history but Eusebius and Jerome confirm Symmachus as a late 2nd century Ebionite.
- **TIMESCALE:** from early church times to the 5th century.
- **COMBATED BY:** Epiphanius.
- **MODERN EQUIVALENT:** radical Jewish Root teachings; also a modern form of Ebionism in the USA. Christian Science, International Church of Ageless Wisdom, Religious Science, Unity School of Christianity.

Dynamic Monarchianism or Adoptionism

- **THE NAME:** 'One ruler'. 'Monarchianism' is used to denote the primacy of God the Father. A defence of the unity (monarchy) of the Godhead.
- **CHRISTOLOGICAL TEACHING:** Jesus was a 'mere man' (*psilos anthropos*) until he was adopted by God to be his Son. Christ was only a man under the influence of God.

- **OTHER TEACHING:** Chief doctrine is that there is only one God (monotheism) in an effort to reject the polytheism of Gnosticism, which taught that Christ was an immaterial aeon.
- **MAIN PROPONENTS:** Theodotus the Tanner of Byzantium & Theodotus the Money Changer taught that Jesus became divine at his baptism. Paul of Samosata (200-275) taught that from eternity the Logos was an impersonal spiritual force active, for example, in Moses. When Jesus (born of a virgin) was baptised he was anointed by this force. He also taught a Gnostic Sophia Spirit in God. Both the Logos and Sophia were impersonal.
- **TIMESCALE:** Arose about 190 in Rome; developed in 3rd century.
- **COMBATED BY:** Epiphanius.
- **MODERN EQUIVALENT:** some Unitarians. Also Liberal theologians Friedrich Schleiermacher, Albrecht Ritschl, Adolph von Harnack, John AT Robinson.

Modalistic Monarchianism or Modalism or Patripassianism or Sabellianism

- **THE NAME:** Patripassianism means, 'the father suffers'. This is because what happens to the Son happens to the Father also, since they are one and the same.
- **CHRISTOLOGICAL TEACHING:** Christ is simply a mode of the one God with no personal existence of his own.
- **OTHER TEACHING:** God is one; the Father, Son and Spirit are modes of working (or expressions) of the one God.
- **MAIN PROPONENTS:** Noetus; Epigonus; Praxeas; Sabellius.
- **TIMESCALE:** 3rd century.
- **COMBATED BY:** Hippolytus; Tertullian, '*Against Praxeas*'.
- **MODERN EQUIVALENT:** Oneness Pentecostals; Unitarianism. Branhamism (Oneness Theology of William Branham), Swedenborgianism.

Arianism

- **THE NAME:** derives from its founder, Arius.
- **CHRISTOLOGICAL TEACHING:** The Son was created by God the Father, before time and from nothing, therefore, the Son cannot be pre-existent or eternal; he is a creature but not one of the creatures. It denied that the Son was of one essence with the Father. Arius: '*If the Father begat the Son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence ... there was a time when the Son was not.*'⁵
- **OTHER TEACHINGS:**
 - The Logos is a created, divine manifestation ('reason'), not Christ, and is a different substance from the Father.
 - Two parties developed: the first taught that Christ was created of like substance (*homoiousios*) to the Father (led by Arius); the other that Christ was made of a substance unlike (*anomoios*) that of the Father (led by Aetius & Eunomius in the 350s; i.e. 'Eunomianism' and 'Anomoeans').
 - The Spirit is a created being.
 - Despite this Arius called for prayer and worship to the Son and the Spirit and Arians baptised in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
 - Intentions: to preserve monotheism and God's transcendence.
- **WORKS:** none extant; sections found in quotes in other writings.
- **MAIN PROPONENTS:** Arius (256-336) a presbyter (pastor) at Alexandria. Lucian of Antioch was the teacher of Arius (and many other Arians) and taught adoptionist and

⁵ Quoting Socrates Scholasticus.

subordinationist heresies before him ('Lucianism'). Note that Arius claimed to be a Biblical Christian.

- **TIMESCALE:** The period of the main controversy was 318-381 but the problems caused by Arianism continued for centuries. Initially Arius was disciplined by Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, in a synod of 100 bishops from Egypt and Libya. Alexander was the first to use the term '*homoousios*' in the debate, a key moment in theological history declaring that the Father and the Son are one substance (*homoousios*). After being excommunicated, Arius was supported by Eusebius of Nicomedia and Eusebius the historian. The Council of Antioch (325) condemned Arianism. The Council of Nicaea (325) condemned Arianism; stating that Christ, from eternity, is of one substance with the Father. Attempts were made to compromise in a difficult political situation in 357 at Sirmium suggesting the blander *homoiousios* ('of similar nature'). Athanasius refused to compromise, hence the saying, '*Athanasius contra mundum*' (Athanasius against the world). The western world compromised for a time and Arianism waxed and waned. After much complicated politics involving emperors, the Council of Constantinople (381) reaffirmed the Nicene position. In the 360s a new group known as the Macedonians, or the Pneumatomachi ('Spirit fighters'), emerged. They accepted the Son as one substance with the Father but denied this of the Holy Spirit. Athanasius saw this as another form of Arianism and launched a successful attack, causing Constantinople to also affirm the divinity of the Spirit. After Arianism was put down within the empire, it flourished outside it amongst the Goths since Ulfilas (the missionary to the Goths) was an Arian.⁶
- **COMBATED BY:** Alexander of Alexandria. After Nicaea, Alexander's deacon Athanasius continued the fight.
- **MODERN EQUIVALENT:** Jehovah's Witnesses conform exactly; a similar position exists in Christadelphians and extreme Unitarians. Children of God, International Church of Ageless Wisdom, Way International.
- **COMPARISON:** Simple heresy: Paul of Samosata taught that Christ was adopted by the Father at his baptism. Complex heresy: Arius taught that Christ is not eternally begotten but is the first begotten of the Father and pre-existent.
- **COMPARISON:** Modalists taught that the Logos is identical to the Father. Adoptionists dispensed with the Logos altogether. Arianism (and Lucianism): the Logos is categorically different from the Father.
- **CONCLUSION:** Arianism was really a bridge between polytheism and monotheism. Athanasius cynically summed it up as (sic): '*a Son who is no Son; a Logos who is no Logos; a monotheism that does not exclude polytheism. Two or three essences to be worshipped; although only one is really distinct from that of creatures. An indefinable being that becomes God only in that it becomes man, and that is neither God nor man.*'⁷

Apollinarianism

- **THE NAME:** comes from its founder, Apollinaris.
- **CHRISTOLOGICAL TEACHING:** The two natures of Christ could not exist within one person, therefore, the human nature had to be diminished; Christ cannot be fully God and fully man at the same time. Therefore, Christ had one active principle alone, the divine Logos. Christ's human flesh had no independent mind or will; the Logos replaced

⁶ Ulfilas was converted as a slave in Constantinople when it was Arian.

⁷ Adapted from Harnack; *Dogmengeschichte*, II, 220.

Christ's human spirit. This denies that Christ had a human personality.⁸ The result is that Christ is neither God nor man.

- OTHER TEACHING: Apollinaris claimed to uphold the creed of Nicaea.
- WORKS: fragments remain and some are quoted in other writer's works.
- MAIN PROPONENTS: Apollinaris, or Apollinarius, the Younger; bishop of Laodicea (310-382).
- TIMESCALE: Apollinaris came to prominence after the middle of the 4th century and was at first respected. After the Council of Rome in 376 his heresy became clear. Further councils at Rome in the west (377, 381) and others in the east, plus Constantinople (381) denounced his views. Apollinarianism gradually faded away after this.
- COMBATED BY: Diodore of Tarsus, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzen and various orthodox bishops. Note that if Christ did not have a human soul he was not a real man and could not have died for men.
- MODERN EQUIVALENT: no movements known, but held by some individuals. The idea of Christ having a kind of divine or heavenly flesh, rather than a real human nature, reappeared in some radical Anabaptists in the Reformation and was condemned by Calvin.

Nestorianism

- THE NAME: comes from Nestorius, Patriarch (Archbishop) of Constantinople; a former pupil of Theodore of Mopsuestia.
- THE CHIEF ANTAGONISTS: Nestorius was originally an ascetic, cloistered monk in Antioch who was a popular preacher. On his promotion to Patriarch by the Emperor Theodosius II (the most powerful church office in the east) he became a pedantic heresy hunter where his inflammatory speeches led to riots and harsh treatment of heretics. He was opposed by Cyril of Alexandria, the next most powerful office in the east. Cyril was more clever, ruthless and more politically able. Cyril, though claiming orthodoxy, tended towards Monophysitism and desired the highest church office.
- CHRISTOLOGICAL TEACHING: The heresy attributed (falsely) to Nestorius is that Jesus is two persons. The heresy fails to do justice to the union of Christ's two natures in one person and the union of the logos with a human nature in Christ. There are two natures but not a real union between the two.
- HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: In the 3rd century the Alexandrian theological tradition emphasised the divinity of Christ while the Antiochene (Syrian) theological tradition stressed the humanity of Christ. The head of the Alexandrian school was Pantaenus, but Origen was its most famous theologian. The originator of the Antiochene school was Diodore, bishop of Tarsus, the teacher of John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia. In Biblical theology, Antioch was more rational, historical and literal; Alexandrian methodology was more allegorical and mystical. Philosophically, Antioch was more Aristotelian and empirical, while Alexandria was more Platonic and mystical.
- OTHER TEACHING: Nestorius taught against the prevailing use of the title '*Theotokos*' for Mary as the 'Mother of God'⁹ as being loose thinking,¹⁰ and thus entered into controversy with powerful leaders. He suggested a better title was 'Christ-bearing' (*Christotokos*). The vehement way he expressed this upset Cyril of Alexandria. Many Syrian theologians thought that Alexandrian theology was still tainted with Apollinarianism, where the Logos overwhelmed Christ's humanity and thus Antiochene

⁸ Apollinaris was a trichotomist. Note that dichotomists state that the Logos replaced Christ's human rational or intellectual soul, but not the soul as the principle of animal life. In denying a human spirit, they still have to separate the soul into two functions.

⁹ Actually *Theotokos* means 'God-bearing One', not 'Mother of God' as frequently claimed.

¹⁰ Implying that Jesus was not really a man, something the Antiochene school sought to affirm.

Christology stressed that Christ was a true man. Thus Nestorius taught that Christ's human and divine natures were clearly distinct but in union. Syrians used the term 'united natures' to imply compositeness but Alexandrian theologians interpreted 'union' to mean 'oneness'.¹¹ Nestorius' presentation of Syrian Christology worried many in the church, being more stark, clinical and rigid than his predecessors. To some it sounded like Adoptionism. This led to the controversy with Cyril of Alexandria who represented Nestorius as saying that Mary gave birth to a man who was accompanied by the Logos. Theodoret of Cyr later better explained the Antiochene Christological tradition.

- **THE CHIEF ISSUE FOR NESTORIUS:** The salvation of men requires both the human and divine natures of Christ. This also protects the divine Logos from the assertion that God could suffer. Thus he taught that Jesus is one Lord, indivisible in his person (*prosopon*) but containing two natures (*ousiai*) – the divine and the human. The union and the separation exist in two distinct spheres of existence, just as in the Trinity – there is one nature (*ousia*) in three persons (*prosopa*). This is orthodox. Nestorius considered that the decision made at Chalcedon in 451 vindicated his position totally; the Monophysites agreed.
- **WORKS:** *Bazaar (Book) of Heracleides of Damascus*, (a mistranslation) rediscovered in 1910, gave a better resource on this subject than was previously available. Note that his statement there, '*the same One is twofold*', is a similar expression to that found in the formulation of Chalcedon (451).
- **MAIN PROPONENTS:** Said to be Nestorius (d. 451). However, many scholars believe that he has been misrepresented to history and was orthodox¹² but the heresy bore his name. His real doctrine was the same as leading theologians of the Syrian church (Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyr). Nestorius suffered for his precise, but provocative, pedantry in theological explanation and political ineptness. 'Nestorianism' properly refers to three separate things: 1) the heretical doctrine of two persons in Christ; 2) the actual doctrine taught by Nestorius; 3) the Christian church developed independently from Byzantium which flourished in the Persian Empire, condemned by Nestorius.
- **TIMESCALE:** Condemned by the Council of Ephesus in 431 where many eastern bishops arrived too late.¹³ Emperor Theodosius II ordered his writings burned. The bishops refusing to accept the council's decision eventually formed a separate Nestorian church. The teaching spread widely throughout Persia and elsewhere. A Syrian bishop took Nestorian Christianity to China in 635 where it waxed and waned until the 13th century but dwindled in the 14th century.
- **COMBATED BY:** Cyril of Alexandria, who used his greater political experience to outwit Nestorius. He drew out extreme misinterpretations of Nestorius' theology to mean that Christ was two persons ('two sons'), something Nestorius did not believe. Nestorius lost

¹¹ Nestorius stated that the two natures of Christ exist in one *prosopon*. The problem was that this word is ambiguous; Nestorius meant by it – 'one person'; Alexandrians interpreted it as 'one appearance', thus speaking of only an apparent unity between the divine and human in Christ. Nestorius held that the Logos was indissolubly united with the human personality from the moment of conception; but there was no transformation or mixture of the natures (i.e. only the humanity is born, suffers and dies). Though there are two natures, there is only a single Son. Thus Nestorius was orthodox. The heresy of 'Nestorianism' (two persons) was a misinterpretation deliberately made by Alexandrians for political reasons (Cyril sought prominence in the east).

¹² For example: Milton V Anastos, 'Nestorius was Orthodox', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 16 (1962), p119-140. Also JF Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and His Teaching*, Cambridge UP, 1908.

¹³ Cyril opened this council with only 60 bishops present. Neither the Syrian bishops, supporting Nestorius, or the bishops from Rome were present. When the Syrian bishops arrived they held a rival synod where Cyril was excommunicated; however the papal legates (and therefore the emperor) subsequently endorsed the first council meeting led by Cyril.

his temper at the Council of Ephesus due to the lack of theological clarity used by his accusers and left early. This did not help his case. In exile (from 436), first in Antioch and then in Egypt, Nestorius continued to claim that he had been misrepresented.

- MODERN EQUIVALENTS: Children of God, Christadelphianism, Church Universal & Triumphant, International Church of Ageless Wisdom, Swedenborgianism, Unification Church, Way International. The Nestorian Church ('Assyrian Christians') still exists.

Eutychianism

- THE NAME: derives from its founder, Eutyches of Constantinople (378-454).
- CHRISTOLOGICAL TEACHING: Jesus had neither a divine nature, nor a human nature, but a composite new sort of nature that was part human – part divine. It is an early type of Monophysitism (Jesus only had one nature).
- MAIN PROPONENTS: Eutyches, a priest, who was first deposed from his monastery and then exiled at the Council of Chalcedon in 451.
- TIMESCALE: Politics were involved in the treatment of Eutyches. First he was deposed at a synod in Constantinople in 448 chaired by Flavian. However, in 449 in Ephesus a large number of Egyptian monks attended this council, Dioscorus of Alexandria, reinstated Eutyches and deposed Flavian (who was subsequently beaten to death). The west (especially the papacy) and the Antiochene supporters were incensed. After the death of Emperor Theodosius, the fourth plenary council at Chalcedon in 451 wrote off the 449 synod of Ephesus calling it a 'robber synod'; nullifying its decisions. The Chalcedonian formula gave a clear and precise statement of Christology: the two natures were united in Christ without any alteration, absorption, division or confusion. Jesus is fully God and fully man. After 451 Eutychianism made inroads into Syria. In the 6th century Eutychianism united with existing Monophysites to create the Syrian Orthodox Church.
- MODERN EQUIVALENT: The Syrian Orthodox Church continues in Armenia, Ethiopia and Egypt.

Monophysitism

- THE NAME: means 'one-nature' in Greek (*monos, physis*); compare Dyophysitism ('two natures').
- CHRISTOLOGICAL TEACHING: Christ only has one nature. This was emphasised to protect the unity of Christ's person. Christ's human nature is diminished.
- OTHER TEACHING: To ascribe two natures to Christ meant, they believed, that man could not attain oneness with God, which was the goal of salvation.
- TIMESCALE: The declaration of Chalcedon did not fix the political problem and a dispute arose which lasted two hundred years, which nearly tore the empire apart. The roots of Monophysitism went back to monastic ideas in Egypt and Syria, where self-denial of human faculties was strongly affirmed to gain spiritual power. For Christ to have a similar human nature was unthinkable. It was also a reaction to Nestorianism (two separate natures) and the opposition to '*Theotokos*'. The mob popularity of Monophysitism led to violence in Alexandria, Antioch and elsewhere and eventually led to a new denomination of Monophysite churches. In many ways Monophysitism was more of a church schism based on a misunderstanding than a raging heresy.
- DISCUSSIONS: A problem in the development of theology about the natures of Christ was the lack of sufficient terminology to express ideas in the beginning. This led to confusion and errors. Gradually more complex vision, science and terminology arose to express the mystery of Christ. Various models about mixture were considered: Aristotelian distinctions of *juxtaposition* (e.g. beans mixed with wheat), *confusion* (the

flowing together of wine overcome by water), and *mixture* (two entities blend to make a third different entity). To this were added models of fire penetrating iron where there is no confusion; penetration of air by a scent; and the action of light in the air (interpenetrating of two solids). So the contemporary physics had a bearing on how to understand the two natures. These models are static, but a more dynamic model was required, something purposeful. The language of *kenosis* (self-emptying) began to be used. Some theologians sought to define detailed aspects of Christ's nature even further (e.g. Leontius of Byzantium) but it is dangerous to attempt to define something as difficult to conceive as this and we will not discuss them here.

- **VARIETIES:** Monophysitism covers a broad spectrum including heretics and some important theologians. Arianism, Apollinarianism and Eutychianism are essentially Monophysite. But other Monophysites included Cyril of Alexandria [*'one nature in the Word made flesh'*; though he accepted Chalcedon] and Severus of Antioch. It later manifested itself as Monothelitism.
- **MODERN EQUIVALENT:** The Syrian Orthodox Church continues in Armenia, Ethiopia and Egypt. Worldwide Church of God under Armstrong.

Monothelitism

- **THE NAME:** means 'one will' in Greek (*hen thelema*).
- **CHRISTOLOGICAL TEACHING:** Monothelites were Monophysites who particularly opposed the idea of two wills in Christ, as well as two natures. They taught that Christ only had one will.
- **OTHER TEACHING:** Some held to a fusion of the divine and human will, creating a third type of will; others that the human will was absorbed into the divine will. They held that 'nature' and 'person' are synonymous.
- **MAIN PROPONENTS:** followers of Cyril of Alexandria who felt that the Chalcedonian statement of two natures led to a Nestorian duality.
- **TIMESCALE:** The Council of Constantinople in 680 stated that Christ had two natures and therefore two wills, divine and human (Dyothelitism). The human will is always subordinate to the divine will but also in harmony with it, though it did not cease to be human.
- **MODERN EQUIVALENT:** no significant movement but held by certain individuals.

The Council of Chalcedon 451

- **PLACE:** Chalcedon in Asia Minor, near Constantinople, the location of the 4th Ecumenical Council in 451. [The other ecumenical (general) councils were Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381) and Ephesus (431).]
- **ATTENDED BY:** bishops from the civil dioceses of Oriens, Asia, Pontus, Thrace, Egypt, and Illyricum. Legates represented Leo of Rome [fear of the Huns prevented many from travelling too far east.] There were 450 subscriptions but no more than 340 attended each session.
- **PURPOSE:** Required to discuss how to deal with the opposing Antiochene and Alexandrian theological traditions, and particularly to formulate a better statement regarding the two natures of Christ. It was called by the new Emperor Marcian in the east and Emperor Valentinian in the west, to bring religious unity to the empire. Nineteen imperial commissioners controlled the agenda.
- **POLITICAL BACKGROUND:** Rome, in the west, had become increasingly the centre of religious political power but Constantinople had also grown in influence. This angered the Alexandrian bishops who sought for pre-eminence in the east. There were many other metropolitan sees (archbishop over other bishops in a province); wider

jurisdiction applied to the cities of Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem; the head being called a 'Patriarch'.

- THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND: The Nicene Creed had settled the matter that Christ was fully God, of one substance with the Father, and that the Son, eternally begotten of God the Father, had become incarnate; that is, had entered fully into human nature. It had not really explained how this was to be expressed. This led to both the Nestorian (two persons) and Monophysite (one nature and person) extremes.
- PROBLEM: Many eastern bishops insisted that Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus and Cyril of Alexandria had taught a Christology in which the divine dominated the human so that there was only one nature of the incarnate Logos. However, in fact, these did not exclude the humanity of Jesus. [The 'one-nature' formula thought to be from Athanasius was an Apollinarian forgery.]
- DECISION 1: The Chalcedonian Creed. Monophysitism excluded. '*In two natures*' affirmed. Chalcedon's vital adverbs: *Asyglytos* (unconfusedly), *Adiatretos* (indivisibly), *Achoristos* (inseparably), *Atreptos* (unchangeably).
- DECISION 2: The council deposed and excommunicated the bishop of Alexandria, Dioscorus, angering the Egyptian church, and condemned the 'Robber Council'. It stated that Constantinople was second only to Rome. There were many other practical decisions on various issues.
- DECISION 3: The council repudiated Eutychianism (the two natures become a mixed third) which was based upon an earlier Alexandrian formulation. Theodoret of Cyr and Ibas of Edessa (Antiochenes) were reinstated after being deposed at the 'Robber Council'.
- REPERCUSSIONS: Feelings ran so high in Alexandria, after the decision, that the pro-Chalcedonian bishop, Proterius, appointed after Dioscorus' deposition, was lynched by a mob.
- EFFECT: Efforts made to reconcile the opposing parties afterward all failed. Monophysites (by early 6th c.) eventually started their own church. The Armenians were not present at Chalcedon, or involved in the later disputes, but they later rejected Chalcedon and are considered Monophysites. In some areas, notably Upper Egypt (Coptic speakers) and Syria, Monophysites were the only type of Christianity.

The Chalcedonian Creed

Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable (rational) soul and body; of one substance [consubstantial, *homoousios*] with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance [*homoousios*] with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer [*Theotokos*]; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognised in two natures [*physein*], without confusion [*asygchytos*], without change [*atreptos*], without division [*adiairetos*], without separation [*achoristos*]; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person [*prosopon*] and subsistence, [*hypostasis*]¹⁴ not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.

¹⁴ Compare, '*They run together into a single hypostasis and prosopon*', Gregory Nazianzen, *Orat.* 37.2.

Note 1: Various versions of this exist with slight differences in translation. The details rely upon the Greek original words used.

Note 2: *Homoousios* is used with a shade of difference. Christ's *homoousia* with the Father implies numerical unity, or identity of essence (God being one in being, or *monoousios*); Christ's *homoousia* with men means only generic unity, or equality of nature.

Important Greek theological words in the Christological debate

- *Homoiousios* = 'of similar nature', of like substance'. The term used by the Arian party to describe the relation of the Son to the Father.
- *Homoousios* = 'of one substance', 'of the same substance', 'consubstantial'. The orthodox term used to identify the unity of essence of the persons of the Trinity. A central motif for Athanasius against Arius.
- *Hypostasis* = person, or more accurately, subsistence, 'concrete reality', 'individual reality'. *Physis* and *hypostasis* were differentiated for the first time in Christology at Chalcedon.
- *Ousia* = essence, substance.
- *Physis* = 'nature'.
- *Prosopon* = person, more accurately, 'that which can be seen'.
- *Theotokos* = 'God-bearer'.

Lessons to learn

- Many heretics previously had good standing in the church before they declared their false teachings; most were bishops. Some continued to affirm that they followed orthodoxy despite their excommunication. Examples: Apollinarius or Theodotus the Tanner.
- Many heretics meant well and worshipped Christ despite preaching cardinal errors about his person, which led to their excommunication. Example: Arius.
- Some theologians were great crusaders against one heresy but blind to another. Example: Athanasius who contended earnestly against Arianism but was slow to challenge his friend Apollinarius sufficiently.
- It took hundreds of years to finally affirm a sufficiently clear statement about the doctrine of Christ (Chalcedon in 451).
- The clarification of orthodoxy usually resulted from a prior heretical challenge. The heresies worked together for good.
- Often only a few theologians stood for the truth and fought hard to convince others; for a time the balance sometimes rested on one man, such as Athanasius in the Arian controversy.
- The earlier heresies (e.g. Gnosticism, Docetism, Arianism) threatened Christianity and separated believers from unbelievers. By the end of the 4th century, all accepted that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all God, and that God is one. The deity of Christ was no longer questioned. However, disputes arose about the way in which Christ could be united with humanity. These divided believers from other believers and required more detailed theological statements.
- Since these errors exist today it behoves believers to have, at least, a basic understanding of the issues involved.

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Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version
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¹⁵ For example on page 60, he confuses the Council of Ephesus of 431 (Third Ecumenical or General) dealing with Nestorianism with the 'Robber Synod' of Ephesus in 449 dealing with Eutychianism.

¹⁶ For example he calls the Gnostic *aeons* 'worlds', which is a possible literal Greek rendering but is not the technical sense used by Gnostics themselves. Another example is a statement (p29) that the Mongols ('Mongolian regime') advanced Nestorianism when the Mongol invasions (under Tamerlane) persecuted Nestorians.

Appendix One

Early Christological Heresies Chart

OVERSTATED HUMANITY

Ebionism

Jesus was just a man

Dynamic Monarchianism

Jesus was adopted as God's Son

Arianism

Jesus created subordinate to the Father

OVERSTATED DEITY

Gnosticism

Jesus was an aeon (angel)

Docetism

Jesus was not a real human

Modal Monarchianism

Jesus was a mode of the one God

Council of Nicaea 325Rejects Arianism. Adopts '*homoousios*'.**Apollinarianism**

The Logos took the place of Jesus' human spirit

Council of Constantinople 381

Rejects Arianism & Apollinarianism

Nestorianism

Jesus is two persons

Eutychianism

Jesus has one compound nature

Council of Ephesus 431

Rejects Nestorianism

Monophysitism

Jesus is one nature

Council of Chalcedon 451

Final Christological formulation.

Monothelitism

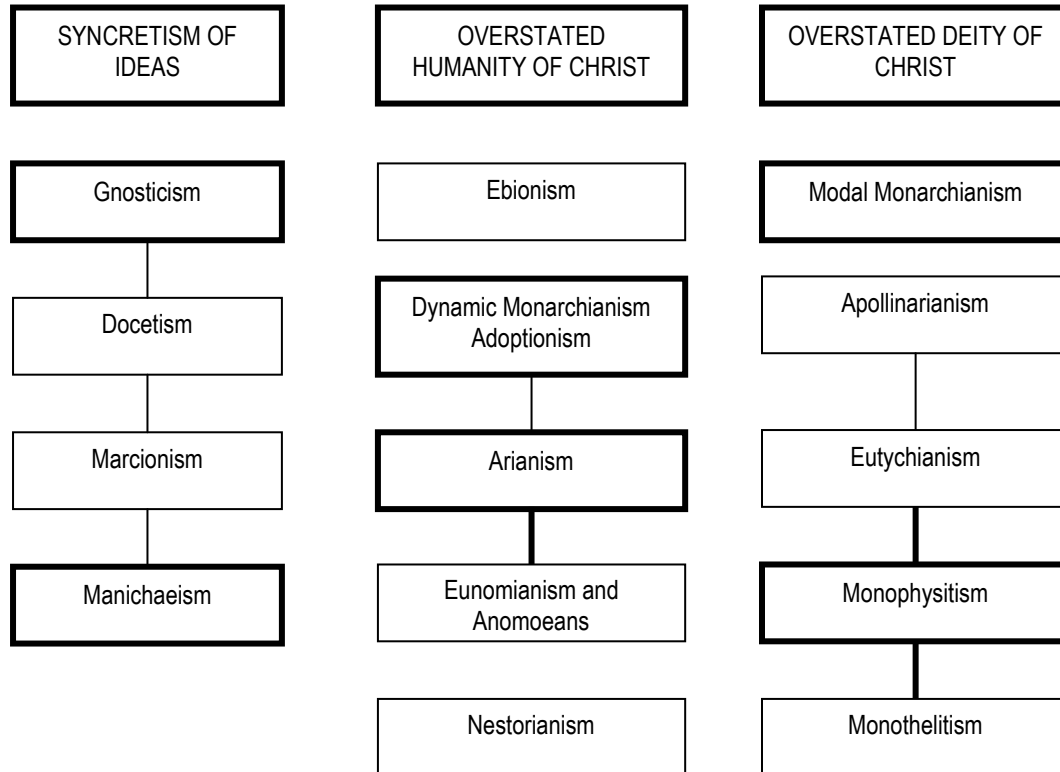
Jesus has one will

Council of Constantinople 680

Clarification: Christ has two natures and two wills.

Appendix Two

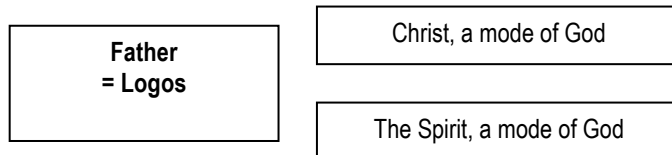
Flow Chart of various heresies



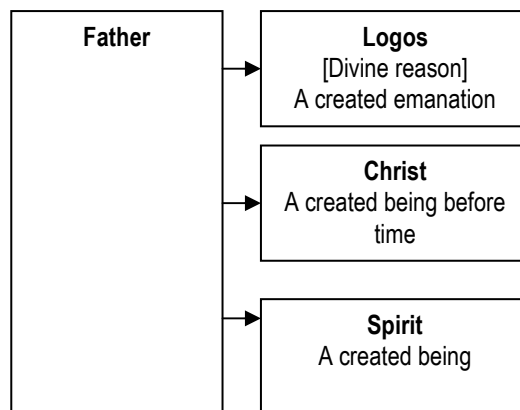
Appendix Three

The Place of the Logos

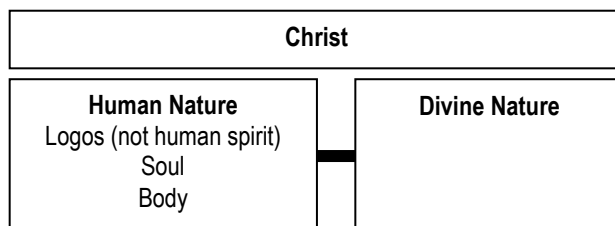
Modalism: the Logos is part of the Father



Arianism: emphasised monotheism and transcendence



Apollinarianism: Christ not fully human.



Appendix Four

Glossary of sects & cults mentioned

Blake, William

Blake was an artistic genius but with eccentric qualities. He was an artist, illustrator and print maker who lived in relatively poor circumstances without fame in his time. He was also a poet who penned some very famous verses and hymns ('Tyger, tyger burning bright'; 'Jerusalem'). He was deeply mystical and inspired many New Age writers.

Anthroposophy

The Anthroposophical Society was founded by Rudolph Steiner (1861-1925) in 1913. It is a branch of Theosophy, which Steiner became disenchanted with due to its reliance upon eastern ideas. He called his movement, 'spiritual science' and was heavily dependent upon past great thinkers, such as, Goethe, Nietzsche, Haeckel, Darwin and Hegel. It is a syncretism of Christianity with spiritualism and eastern mysticism. Spiritual ascent is an evolutionary process. Steiner established a number of liberal schools for children.

Branhamism, Oneness Theology

This is an anti-Trinitarian heresy that is based upon the thinking of heretical Pentecostal preacher William Marion Branham (1909-65). Branham relied upon occult spiritualism to conduct his healings, which he attributed to an angel. He taught many false doctrines, chief of which was his denial of the Trinity as a novelty brought in by the Council of Nicaea. He taught a modalistic view of the oneness of God. This 'Oneness Theology' was taken up by various Pentecostal churches that are together known as 'Oneness Pentecostals'.

Children of God

Also known as 'The Family of Love' or 'Heaven's Magic'. Formed by Moses David (originally David Berg) in 1972 in Oakland, California. The sect was birthed in the Jesus People revival of the early 70s, which affected America dramatically, but also parts of Europe. The sect used brainwashing and 'love-bombing' techniques and was guilty of hedonism, polygamy and immorality (including orgies); sex was used by girls to attract disciples ('flirty-fishing'). Communism of goods was practised and money was demanded leading to federal charges of tax evasion, kidnapping, assault and immorality being brought against Berg in 1973-4. Frequently, parents would gather into groups to rescue their children. Despite all the obvious faults, the sect has continued to this day, mostly in Brazil and the Philippines.

Christadelphianism, 'Brothers of Christ'

This is a Christian sect that was founded by John Thomas in 1848 who was originally a member of the 'Disciples of Christ' ('Campbellites'), founded by Thomas Campbell and Alexander Campbell. He denied the Trinity and claimed that all other churches were apostates. The church split after Thomas' death, both continuing to this day. Church meetings are simple and without clergy. Its chief errors are the denial of the divinity of Christ and the personality of the Holy Spirit, plus rejection of the atonement of Christ as satisfaction of divine wrath.

Christian Science

Founded by Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910). She adapted PP Quimby's syncretistic ideas and use of Mesmerism (hypnotism). In fact, Eddy plagiarised much of Quimby's works. After his death she produced '*Science and Health with a Key to the Scriptures*' in 1875 which

became the foundation for her new church, 'The Church of Christ, Scientist' in Boston, begun in 1879. Despite her denial of pain and death she died in great pain. Central to her thought is a Gnostic dualism, matter is evil; the world is illusory, reality is in the mind. Sickness results from the wrong beliefs. All this was central to Quimby's teaching. The movement has been in decline since 1960 and denies many Biblical doctrines.

Church Universal & Triumphant

A false church which grew out of the 'I Am Ascended Masters', which has its roots in a syncretism of Gnosticism, mysticism, Theosophy and Christianity. The 'I Am' movement began with Guy Ballard in the 1930s. The Church Universal & Triumphant was founded by Mark L Prophet (1918-73), a Theosophist, and was originally known as 'The Summit Lighthouse'. It is an utterly pagan sect.

International Church of Ageless Wisdom

Was founded by Beth R Hand (1903-77). It is a false church based upon spiritualism, Buddhism, astrology, yoga and Hindu ideas.

New Thought

Originated by Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802-1866), who was known as the 'Guru of the Mind Sciences'. Quimby not only influenced Christian Science but the later Word Faith Movement through Kenneth Hagin and EW Kenyon. He relied heavily upon Mesmerism and taught that sin, sickness and disease are illusions that are solely in the mind. His followers rejected the authoritarian dogmatism of Mary Baker Eddy and developed into various movements: Unity School, Divine Science, Religious Science and, chiefly, New Thought. Chief early leaders in New Thought were Warren Felt Evans, plus Julius and Horatio Dresser. Evans was also influenced by Swedenborg and brought in more occult ideas, based upon a Platonic dualism. The term 'New Thought' came into being in 1890.

Religious Science

Founded by Ernest Holmes (1887-1960). A mystical, monist movement, similar to Christian Science, which emphasises 'positive thinking' and 'the mind sciences'. Teachings deny many doctrines and are based upon pagan mysticism, especially Hinduism. There are now two branches of this movement.

Swedenborgianism

Church of the New Jerusalem, founded by Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), a brilliant Swedish scientist. After receiving visions of God he dedicated himself to theology and was a Lutheran; his errors stem from preferring mystical visions to Scripture. He denied the Trinity (teaching a form of modalism), the resurrection, salvation by grace and taught many other false doctrines. Some claim that his mysticism paved the way for modern spiritualism. In 1745 he received a revelation about the New Jerusalem Church and his followers became known as the Church of the New Jerusalem after this. His most famous disciple was Helen Keller, though Thomas Carlyle was heavily influenced by him also.

Theosophy

The Theosophical Society was co-founded by Madame Helena Blavatsky (1831-91) and Henry Olcott (1832-1907) in New York in 1875. After Blavatsky's death Annie Besant became the main leader and her writings comprise the chief teachings of the movement. It is a universal philosophy of all religions, much like New Age ideas. It has many similarities with ancient Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism. It is Pantheism based upon Hindu roots.

Unification Church

Better known as the 'Moonies'. A false church founded by Korean Sun Myung Moon. His goal was to unify all Christian religions. He claims that Jesus did not finish his mission due to being crucified and failing to marry. A Third Adam was needed to do this; Moon is this messiah. Thus Moon denies all the doctrines about Jesus Christ (as well as denying the Trinity) and claims to be the Christ. The church grew furiously in the 70s where it preyed upon young people at college; it has now decreased but has significant political influence in the USA.

Unity School of Christianity

Founded by Charles Fillmore in 1889, a convert to Christian Science. The school he and his wife, Myrtle, founded was a syncretism of occultism, spiritualism, eastern religions (especially Hindu reincarnation), Christian Science and importantly, 'New Thought'. It has a confused doctrine of sin, pain, disease, poverty, death and sickness. On the one hand these are not real, to be affirmed through self-denial; on the other hand that they are real. They become 'not real' within the mind when they are denied. By 1922 Unity had overtaken both Christian Science and New Thought in members. Today it poses not as a religion but as an educational system, though it has all the trappings of a religion (e.g. prayer, ministers, credal statements etc.).

Way International

Founded by Victor Paul Wierwille (1916-85). He claimed to hear from God directly and averred that all other churches were apostates. He published the series, '*Power for Abundant Living*', which became a powerful evangelisation programme and was later made into effective films. The courses cost \$200. Having begun in the Evangelical Reformed Church in the US, he was expelled and began his new church in 1958. Many from the Jesus People Movement of the 60s found their way into his sect. The publishing arm is called, 'The American Christian Press'. Essentially this is a mind-control cult ruled by fear, like Scientology; thus critical thinking is stated to be devilish. Currently there are over 100,000 members worldwide. It denies the Trinity and holds many other false doctrines.

Worldwide Church of God (Armstrongism)

Founded by Herbert W Armstrong (1892-1986). In 1934 he began a radio ministry and 'The Plain Truth' magazine. His ideas spread like wildfire through slick presentations. In the 70s Armstrong's son, Garner Ted Armstrong, was removed from leadership after a sex scandal and modernising tendencies. Thousands left the church and the movement split. Garner opened the 'Church of God International' which grew rapidly taking many from the WCOG. Armstrong was beset by problems including charges of tax evasion, fraud, incest and mental incompetence until his death in 1986. Leadership passed to others who made many changes to move the church closer to evangelicalism. False doctrines held by Armstrong include: Adventist ideas; Mormon ideas about God; denial of the Trinity; Monophysitism; denial of the personality of the Spirit; denial of hell; legal salvation and much more.

Appendix Five

The chief schools of 3rd - 5th century theological development

Alexandria	Antioch
Less consistent.	More consistent.
More mystical.	More logical, historical and rational.
More Platonic.	More Aristotelian and empirical.
More allegorical in Biblical interpretation.	More literal and grammatical in Biblical interpretation.
Speculative.	Hostile to speculation and more rational.
Emphasis upon Jesus as divine.	Emphasis upon Jesus as a real man.
Emphasised the unity of the two natures in the person of Christ.	Emphasised a rigid separation between the two natures of Christ.
Focus on speculation about Jesus' natures.	Focus on the historic Jesus and what he did.
More ontological (concerned about metaphysics & 'being').	More psychological and ethical.
'Nature' interpreted as the 2 nd person of the Trinity; the Logos a concrete and complete entity (Cyril). Talk of two natures is confusing and implies two persons.	'Nature' interpreted as a quality or character not a concrete entity. Human nature was the quality of being human, not an individual person.
Tendency to Apollinarianism and Monophysitism. The Logos <u>became flesh</u> ; the Word of God became Jesus.	Tendency to Nestorianism. The Logos <u>entered man</u> (as the Spirit entered the prophets, but more full, as a Son). The Logos took on a human person. An indwelling of the Son in Christ which imparts his full glory (Theodore of Mopsuestia).
Theologians include: head: Pantaenus, Athanasius , Cyril, Origen .	Head: Diodore, bishop of Tarsus, the teacher of John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia . Nestorius. Theodoret of Cyrrhus .
Source of the modern eclectic Bible manuscripts. Thus modern Bible Versions.	Source of the Byzantine textual family, the Textus Receptus and the Majority Text. Thus the AV and the NKJV.

The main 4th century tradition

The Cappadocian School

Basil the Great [329-379]

Gregory of Nazianzus (friend of Basil) [330-389]

Gregory of Nyssa (brother of Basil) [330-395]

Difficult Christological Questions

Was God born of Mary, or only a man?

Did God die on the cross, or only a man?

Should the human nature of Christ be worshipped?