**Heresies Past: What were they and where are they now?**

by Sandy Simpson, 2/20/19

You might be surprised to find out that many of the heresies of the early centuries are still around today. Many of them have been modified to some degree, but they are mostly the same unbiblical heretical ideas. When you toy around with core doctrines like the Trinity and the Hypostatic Union, you prove yourself to be a heretical false teacher.

*Ecclesiastes 1:9 That which has been is that which will be, And that which has been done is that which will be done. So****there is nothing new under the sun.***

[**Adoptionism**](https://www.gotquestions.org/adoptionism.html) (https://www.gotquestions.org/adoptionism.html) - God granted Jesus powers and then adopted him as a Son.

Adoptionism is a heretical theology that claims Jesus was God’s *adopted* Son. Adoptionism teaches that, because of Jesus’ sinless life, God chose Him and adopted Him. Adoptionism also goes by the name dynamic Monarchianism.

**Recommended Resource:**[The Moody Handbook of Theology by Paul Enns](https://www.christianbook.com/Christian/Books/product?event=AFF&p=1011693&item_no=411981)

Present-day groups teaching a form of Adoptionism: Unitarians, Mormons, Community of Christ, Word of Faith churches

Individuals teaching a form of Adoptionism: [Joseph Priestley](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Priestley), James Strang, Anton Bosch

[**Albigenses or Catharsis**](https://carm.org/albigenses) (https://carm.org/albigenses) - Reincarnation and two gods: one good and other evil.

Albigenses was a heresy during the middle ages that developed in the town Albi in Southern France. This error taught that there were two gods: the good god of light usually referred to as Jesus in the New Testament and the god of darkness and evil usually associated with Satan and the "God of the Old Testament."

Groups that hold to Albignesis: Waldenses

[**Apollinarianism**](https://www.gotquestions.org/Apollinarianism.html) (https://www.gotquestions.org/Apollinarianism.html) - Jesus' divine will overshadowed and replaced the human.

Apollinarianism was the heresy taught by Apollinaris the Younger, bishop of Laodicea in Syria about 361. At the time when the doctrine of the Trinity was being established in an official sense, he taught that the Logos of God, which became the divine nature of Christ, took the place of the rational human soul of Jesus and that the body of Christ was a glorified form of human nature. In other words, though Jesus was a man, He did not have a human mind but that the mind of Christ was solely divine.

Present-day groups that teach Appolinarianism: Eastern Orthodox

[**Arianism**](https://www.gotquestions.org/arianism.html) (https://www.gotquestions.org/arianism.html) - Jesus was a lesser, created being.

It was the greatest of heresies within the early church that developed a significant following. Some say, it almost took over the church. Arius taught that only God the Father was eternal and too pure and infinite to appear on the earth.

Present-day groups that teach a form of Arianism: Jehovah’s Witnesses, Watchtower Bible & Tract Society

[**Docetism**](https://www.gotquestions.org/Docetism.html) (https://www.gotquestions.org/Docetism.html) - Jesus was divine but only seemed to be human.

Docetism was an error with several variations concerning the nature of Christ. Generally, it taught that Jesus only appeared to have a body--that he was not really incarnate (Greek, "dokeo" = "to seem").

Present-day groups that teach Docetism: Gnostics, Jehovah’s Witnesses, George Canty of the Elim movement

[**Donatism**](https://www.gotquestions.org/donatism.html) (https://www.gotquestions.org/donatism.html) - Validity of sacraments depends on character of the minister.

Donatism was the error taught by Donatus, bishop of Casae Nigrae, that the effectiveness of the sacraments depends on the moral character of the minister. In other words, if a minister who was involved in a serious enough sin were to baptize a person, that baptism would be considered invalid.

Present-day groups that teach a form of Donatism: Roman Catholicism, Russian Orthodox, New Apostolic, Third Wave

[**Eutychianism**](https://www.gotquestions.org/monophysitism.html) (https://www.gotquestions.org/monophysitism.html) - Jesus finite human nature is swallowed up in His infinite divine nature.

Monophysitism is an erroneous or heretical view concerning the nature of Jesus Christ. Two monophysite schools of thought are Eutychianism and Apollinarianism. Monophysitism taught that Christ has one nature—a divine one—not two. Eutychianism specifically taught that Christ’s divine nature was so intermixed with His human nature that He was, in fact, not fully human and not fully divine.

Present-day groups that teach a form of Eutychianism: some Oriental Orthodox

[**(Christian) Gnosticism**](https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-gnosticism.html) (https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-gnosticism.html) - Dualism of good and bad and special revelation knowledge for salvation.

Gnosticism traces its roots back just after the beginning of the Christian Church. Some researchers state that evidence of its existence even predates Christianity. Whichever the case, the error of Gnosticism had affected the culture and church of the time and possibly even earned a mention in 1 John 4.

The word "Gnosticism" comes from the Greek word "gnosis" which means "knowledge." There were many groups that were Gnostic and it isn't possible to easily describe the nuances of each variant of Gnostic doctrines. However, generally speaking, Gnosticism taught that salvation is achieved through special knowledge (gnosis).

Individuals that taught Gnosticism: Simon Magus (Simon the Sorcerer)

Present-day groups that teach a form of Gnosticism (particularly secret revelation knowledge): New Apostolic Reformation, Word of Faith, Third Wave

[**Kenosis**](https://www.gotquestions.org/kenosis.html) (https://www.gotquestions.org/kenosis.html) - Jesus gave up some divine attributes while on earth.

The term kenosis comes from the Greek word for the doctrine of Christ’s self-emptying in His incarnation. The kenosis was a self-renunciation, not an emptying Himself of deity nor an exchange of deity for humanity. Philippians 2:7 tells us that Jesus “emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men." Jesus did not cease to be God during His earthly ministry. But He did set aside His heavenly glory of a face-to-face relationship with God. He also set aside His independent authority. During His earthly ministry, Christ completely submitted Himself to the will of the Father.

Present-day groups that teach a form of Kenosis: Bill Johnson (Bethel Church), some Latter Rain/New Apostolic, Word of Faith

[**Marcionism**](https://www.gotquestions.org/marcionism.html) (https://www.gotquestions.org/marcionism.html) - An evil God of the O.T., good God of the N.T. 11, books in the Canon

Marcionism was a religious movement based on the teachings of the 2nd-century heretic Marcion of Sinope. While none of Marcion’s writings have survived to the present, we know of his teachings through several early Christian writers including Justin Martyr (AD 100—165), Irenaeus of Lyons (AD 130—200) and Hippolytus (AD 170—235). These men combated Marcion in defense of the truth. Marcion held to many errant views, but he is primarily known for his belief that the Old Testament Scriptures were not authoritative for a Christian. He denied that the God of the Old Testament was the same God presented in the New Testament. For Marcion, Jesus was the Son of the God of the New Testament but not the Son of the deity described in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Groups that teach a form of Marcionism: Red-letter Christians, John Darby

[**Modalism**](https://www.gotquestions.org/Modalistic-Monarchianism.html)[**(Modalistic Monarchianism)**](https://www.gotquestions.org/Modalistic-Monarchianism.html) (https://www.gotquestions.org/Modalistic-Monarchianism.html) - God is one person in three modes.

Modalism is probably the most common theological error concerning the nature of God.  It is a denial of the Trinity. Modalism states that God is a single person who, throughout biblical history, has revealed Himself in three modes or forms. Thus, God is a single person who first manifested himself in the mode of the Father in Old Testament times. At the incarnation, the mode was the Son; and after Jesus' ascension, the mode is the Holy Spirit. These modes are consecutive and never simultaneous. In other words, this view states that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit never all exist at the same time--only one after another. Modalism denies the distinctiveness of the three persons in the Trinity even though it retains the divinity of Christ. Present-day groups that hold to forms of this Modalism: Oneness Pentecostals, the United Pentecostal and United Apostolic Churches. They deny the Trinity, teach that the name of God is Jesus, and require baptism for salvation. These Modalist churches often accuse Trinitarians of teaching three gods. This is not what the Trinity is. The correct teaching of the Trinity is one God in three eternal coexistent persons: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Groups that teach a form of Modalism: William Branham, Branhamites, United Pentecostals, and others associated with Oneness Pentecostalism who subscribe to the nontrinitarian theological doctrine of Oneness.

[**(Dynamic)**](https://www.gotquestions.org/Dynamic-Monarchianism.html)[**Monarchianism**](https://www.gotquestions.org/Dynamic-Monarchianism.html) (https://www.gotquestions.org/Dynamic-Monarchianism.html) - God is one person.

In the first centuries of the church, there was much debate about the nature of God: was Jesus fully God, fully man, or some mixture of the two? Does God exist as three co-eternal, co-equal Persons, or is He only one Person who manifests Himself in different modes at different times? What is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Father? Part of the debate in the second and third centuries involved a teaching known as Dynamic Monarchianism, a false view of Christ’s nature. Monarchianism taught the indivisible unity of God (the Latin word *monarchia* meant “single rule”). Of course, belief in one God is foundational to Christianity, but Monarchianism pressed monotheism to the point of denying God’s triune nature. Monarchianism inevitably leads to the false doctrine of Patripassianism, the teaching that God the Father suffered on the cross with (or as) the Son.

Groups that hold to Monarchianism: Witness Lee and The Local Church, United Pentecostals, and others associated with Oneness Pentecostalism whom subscribe to the nontrinitarian theological doctrine of Oneness.

[**Monophysitism**](https://www.gotquestions.org/Monophysticism.html) (https://www.gotquestions.org/Monophysticism.html) - Jesus finite human nature is swallowed up in His infinite divine nature.

Monophysitism is an erroneous or heretical view concerning the nature of Jesus Christ. Two monophysite schools of thought are Eutychianism and Apollinarianism. Monophysitism taught that Christ has one nature—a divine one—not two. Eutychianism specifically taught that Christ’s divine nature was so intermixed with His human nature that He was, in fact, not fully human and not fully divine.

Groups that teach a form of Monophysitism: some Oriental Orthodox

[[**Nestorianism**](https://www.gotquestions.org/Nestorianism.html) (https://www.gotquestions.org/Nestorianism.html) - Jesus was two persons.](https://www.gotquestions.org/Monophysticism.html)

Nestorianism is the error that Jesus is two distinct persons. The heresy is named after Nestorius who was born in Syria and died in A.D. 451 and who advocated this doctrine. Nestorius was a monk who became the Patriarch of Constantinople, and he repudiated the Marian title "Mother of God." He held that Mary was the mother of Christ only in respect to His humanity. The council of Ephesus was convened in 431 to address the issue and pronounced that Jesus was one person in two distinct and inseparable natures: divine and human.

Groups that teach a form of Nestorianism: the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Church of the East & Abroad.

[[**Patripassionism**](https://www.gotquestions.org/Patripassianism.html) (https://www.gotquestions.org/Patripassianism.html) - The Father suffered on the cross.](https://www.gotquestions.org/monophysitism.html)

Patripassionism is a theological error dealing with the Godhead which states that the Father became incarnate, was born, suffered, and died on the cross, hence, the Father's (patri) passion (suffer) on the cross. This is an error because we know that Jesus spoke to the person of the Father and that it was Jesus who went to the cross. If the Father and Son are the same person then how is it possible for the Father and Son to speak to one another and have separate wills? It is not. Therefore, the doctrine of Patripassianism is incorrect and heretical.

Groups that teach a form of Patripassionism: The Shack (book and movie)

[**Hyper semi-Pelagianism/Arminianism**](https://www.gotquestions.org/arminianism.html) (https://www.gotquestions.org/arminianism.html) - Man and God cooperate to achieve man's salvation, man did not fall so far as to not be able to exercise his freewill to believe in Jesus Christ. Some may become angry about this but if only one of the five core precepts of Arminianism is wrong, then the concept as a whole is false teaching that can deceive people.

Read my paper on Calvinism/Arminianism [here](http://www.deceptioninthechurch.com/osas2.html) (http://www.deceptioninthechurch.com/osas2.html).

[Denominations that teach this: **American Baptist Churches USA, The United Methodist Church, Wesleyan Churches, Pentecostal Churches and The Church of the Nazarene among others.**](http://www.deceptioninthechurch.com/osas2.html)

[**Hyper-Calvinism**](https://www.gotquestions.org/hyper-calvinism.html) (https://www.gotquestions.org/hyper-calvinism.html) - God predestined people to heaven or hell without the prerequisite of omniscience. People then need not believe in Jesus Christ to be saved. Some may become angry about this but if only one of the five core precepts of Calvinism is wrong, then it is false teaching that can deceive people. Read my paper on Calvinism/Arminianism [here](http://www.deceptioninthechurch.com/osas2.html) (http://www.deceptioninthechurch.com/osas2.html).

Denominations that teach this: Primitive Baptist or Reformed Baptist Churches, Presbyterian Churches, Reformed Churches, The United Church of Christ and The Protestant Reformed Churches in America, Christian Reformed World Mission among others.

[**Socinianism**](https://www.gotquestions.org/Socinianism.html) (https://www.gotquestions.org/Socinianism.html) - Denial of the Trinity. Jesus is a deified man.

Socinianism is an unorthodox form of non-trinitarianism that was developed around the same time as the Protestant Reformation (1517-1648) by Italian humanist Lelio Sozzini and later promulgated by his cousin, Fausto Sozzini. In modern times Socinianism has been referred to as psilanthropism, the view that Jesus was merely human (from the Greek psilo meaning “merely/only” and anthropos meaning “man/human being”), a view rejected by the First Council of Nicaea. The Socinians held to a rationalistic approach to Scripture and to faith. This philosophical approach, especially in regard to biblical doctrine, declares that all religious matters must be fully reconcilable with human reason, and that theological matters pertaining to the nature of God cannot be beyond the finite understanding of the human mind. This idea clearly contradicts the Bible, which affirms the supernatural essence of God and the impossibility of the finite mind fully comprehending the infinite (Job 9:10; Isaiah 55:8-11; Romans 11:33).

Groups that teach Socinianism: William Branham, Branhamites, Unitarians, Christodelphians, but also includes groups like Bio Logos that deny the more supernaturalistic claims of Scripture in subjection to modern scientific theory and have renown modern proponents, like Tim Keller of Redeemer Bible Church.

[**Subordinationism**](https://www.gotquestions.org/subordination-Trinity.html) (https://www.gotquestions.org/subordination-Trinity.html) - The Son is lesser than the Father in essence and or attributes.

Subordinationism is a heresy concerning the Trinity. Subordinationism (Jesus is different in nature than the Father) should not be confused with subordination (the Son submitting to the Father). Subordinationism is a heresy concerning the Father and Son though sometimes the Holy Spirit is included. The error has different forms; but it is primarily the teaching that the Son is not eternal and divine (Arian Subordinationism) and is, therefore, not equal to the Father in being and attributes. This is, of course, wrong; and it is in contrast to the biblical doctrine of the Economic Trinity (the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) which does not deny their equality of nature and attributes. Another form of Subordinationism states that though the Son is divine, he is not equal to the Father in being, attributes, and rank. This error was rejected at the Council of Nicea. Essentially, subordinationism states that the Son is inferior to the Father. Subordinationism is not the same as Christ's subordination to the Father (1 Cor. 15:28) which concerns Jesus' continued state of being a man (1 Tim. 2:5) by which he lives forever to intercede for us as a high priest (Heb. 6:20; 7:25).

Groups that teach Subordinationism: Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses and Iglesia ni Cristo.

[**Tritheism**](https://www.gotquestions.org/Tritheism-Trinity.html) (https://www.gotquestions.org/Tritheism-Trinity.html) - The Trinity is really three separate gods.

Tritheism is the teaching that the Godhead is really three separate beings forming three separate gods. This errant view is often misplaced by the cults for the doctrine of the Trinity which states that there is but one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity is, by definition, monotheistic. That is, it is a doctrine that affirms that there is only one God in the entire universe.

Groups that teach Tritheism: Aloha ke Akua (Io plus 4 other Hawaiian supreme beings), Mormonism, Freemasonry and other associated orders (Freemasonry worships a Tritheistic “god” called Jahbulon made up of Yahweh, Baal and Osiris)