

Church Heresies

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Heresies of the Catholic Church. When looking into Church history, it can be difficult to keep all the heresies straight. Following is a list of ten of the major heresies that rose up in the Catholic church:

1. **Gnosticism** (1st to 5th Century)

The word Gnostic comes from the Greek word 'gnosis', which means knowledge. It arose from a group of evil workers who claimed to have higher light, or "secret wisdom". This movement began in the later days of the Apostle John, and continued into the 5th century. Gnosticism is responsible for not just one heresy, but seven or eight. What is it? In this evil system, the Greek tendency to spiritualize and allegorize took over. To them, the spiritual was good, and matter was evil. Thus, they rejected the incarnation, because it connects the human with the divine. The Gnostics would try to separate "Jesus" from "Christ", by making Christ an emanation (a shining out from a source) from God that was united to a mere man named Jesus at his baptism, but returned to God before Jesus' death on the cross. In doing so, this evil system annulled the *incarnation* and the *atonement*. Gnosticism made Jesus a mere man, and even made their false-Christ less than God, because an emanation is less than its source. They taught that Christ was sent to make known the good God of heaven, and to expose the mischievous Demiurge (or, Jehovah of the Old Testament), who made the "evil world of matter". The doctrine of the New Testament anticipates this irreverent and wicked system of doctrine by stating the simple truth of Christ's Person and work. Church fathers who defended against Gnosticism were Ignatius of Antioch ('*Seven Epistles*'), and Irenaeus of Lyons ('*Against Heresies*'). [Read more...](#)

1. **Montanism** (2nd Century)

Essentially, Montanism is the belief in new prophetic revelations from God that supplement the inspired writings of scripture. It was called "the New Prophecy", and adherents such as Tertullian believed that these modern revelations were reliable and cleared up the ambiguities of scripture. It is very similar to modern Pentecostalism. According to Eusebius, the founder of Montanism had ecstatic revelations similar to charismatic experiences today; Montanus "... became beside himself, and being suddenly

in a sort of frenzy and ecstasy, he raved, and began to babble and utter strange things, prophesying in a manner contrary to the constant custom of the Church..."

1. **Docetism or Marcionism** (2nd to 3rd Century)

Docetism is the wicked doctrine that Christ was only a phenomenon, not reality. Docetists hold that the historical existence and bodily form of Jesus was mere semblance or apparition. Marcionism was a notable version of Docetism, named after Marcion, son of a Bishop of Rome. Marcionism is a form of dualism that is closely related to Gnosticism, the over-emphasis on the spiritual to the point of denying the physical. He taught that Christ was "revealed as a man, though not actually a man". They believed that Jesus appeared as a man, could be physically touched, and made physical footprints, etc., but that He was not really a man. Marcionism was denounced forcibly by Tertullian in his five-part work titled '*Adversus Marcionem*'.

1. **Sabellianism** (3rd Century)

Sabellianism began around A.D. 210, and lasted less than a century. Essentially, this false doctrine viewed Father, Son, and Holy Ghost as three different modes or aspects of the same person, rather than three distinct persons. Perhaps they viewed the "aspects" as similar to how water can exist as solid, liquid, and gas. This led to the belief that the Father was Christ, the the Father suffered, died, and rose again. This is a non-Trinitarian belief, and was later rejected as evil doctrine by the Church.

1. **Origenism** (3rd Century)

Origenism is essentially the teachings of Origen of Alexandria. Much of Origen's teachings were good, but he held two things that were wrong; one error, the other evil. The error was that of *allegorism* in the interpretation of scripture. The evil was the doctrine of the *subordination* of the Divine Persons. The subordination doctrine is that the Person of the Son is subordinate to the Father. This is perhaps drawn from verses such as John 14:28, where Jesus said: "my Father is greater than I." This comes from trying to rationalize the manhood and deity of Christ, rather than accepting both in faith. The statement in John 14:28 is spoken of Christ in manhood, who took the place of a servant. It in no way denies the equality of the Son with the Father as Divine Persons.

1. **Arianism** (3rd to 5th Century)

Arianism begin in the late third century through a man named Arius, arising from the

school in Antioch, with a strong Judaizing focus.

Arius said, "If the Father begat the Son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence: and from this it is evident, that there was a time when the Son was not. It therefore necessarily follows, that he had his substance from nothing"... thus denying the eternal existence of the Son of God, and the Trinity. It was based on a human, experiential view of the Father-Son relationship, rather than a scriptural view. Arius taught that the Father "begat" or gave being to another god, called God's Son, who in turn created everything else, including the Holy Spirit. Arianism spread quickly, and soon Christendom was divided.

God raised up Athanasius of Alexandria, another young man, to counter this attack. It all came to a head at the first ecumenical council in Nicaea in A.D. 325. Through the faithfulness of Athanasius, the council produced the Nicene Creed which, for all its flaws, affirmed that Jesus Christ was *homoousios* (same substance) as the Father, and affirmed [the Trinity](#) as one God, with three co-eternal, co-equal Persons. It also anathematized Arius and his followers. Arianism continues to be a snare to the Church for years to come. Athanasius wrote several defenses against Arianism, including '*The Incarnation of the Word*' and '*Four Discourses Against the Arians*'. [Read more...](#)

1. **Apollinarianism** (4th Century)

Apollinarism or Apollinarianism was proposed by Apollinaris of Laodicea who lived in the 4th Century. The false teaching was that Christ had a human body and human life, but not a human spirit. They held that the deity of Christ filled the function of the immaterial part of Christ's humanity. In other words, denial of the human soul or the human spirit of Christ. Apollinarianism was condemned as heresy in the First Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D. This error has been picked up by other evil workers over the centuries, including F.E. Raven in the later 19th century.

1. **Pelagianism** (4th to 6th Century)

Pelagianism is a system of theology which began in the late 4th century through the teachings of Pelagius. This evil doctrine pertains to the doctrine of sin and salvation of the Christian. A watered-down version of Pelagianism has later come to be known as Semi-Pelagianism. Pelagianism essentially teaches the following: Adam's sin did not effect the human race, therefore children do not have an evil nature. Keeping the Mosaic Law can bring a person to heaven. Christ is not the only sinless man. The work of Christ is not necessary for salvation. Pelagianism was condemned at the Council of Carthage in

418 A.D. and condemned again at the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. Augustine of Hippo defended against this heresy in numerous writings, including *'On the Grace of Christ, and on Original Sin,' 'On the Proceedings of Pelagius,'* and *'Against Two Letters of the Pelagians'*.

1. **Nestorianism** (5th Century)

Nestorianism began in the mid fifth century following the teachings of Nestorius, who taught that since Christ had two natures, He must also be two persons. He taught that the human and divine persons of Christ are separate. Scripture teaches that Christ has a human nature and a divine nature, but that those two natures have been united through the incarnation into one Divine Person. Furthermore, the Person of the Son is inscrutable, that is, no man can discern or separate Christ's Person so as to dislodge either His humanity or His deity. The Father only knows the Son in this way. The evil doctrine was condemned by the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431, but resulted in a schism which formed the Assyrian Church of the East.

1. **Monophysitism or Eutychianism** (5th Century)

Monophysitism began in the mid fifth century. Proponents taught that the human and divine natures of Christ were fused into one new single nature in the incarnation. They hold that Christ's divinity dominates and overwhelms his humanity; that His human nature was "dissolved like a drop of honey in the sea". This is essentially a clever way of denying the humanity of Christ. Eutychianism was condemned by the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451, but resulted in a schism which later formed the Oriental Orthodox communion.