

## Jesus Christ: Who is he? – The Mystery of the Beginning, part 2

Growing out of Gospel of John's "Word" – "Logos", the concept of the "Pre-existence" of Jesus Christ stands behind the early Christian struggle to work out the relationship of God and Jesus Christ, in a way faithful with the scriptural witness, and relevant to cultural/philosophical ways of thinking and perceiving

### The Arian Controversy

- Arius 250-336 AD/CE): more literal interpretation of biblical Father/Son imagery – Cf. Colossians 1:15-16, John 14:28
  - Arius a devout follower of Jesus Christ; but concerned to "protect" the oneness and uniqueness of God. So Jesus was literally "the firstborn of creation" – created before everything else
  - The Arian's slogan: "There was when he was not" (*en pote hote ouk en*)
- Council of Nicea, 325 AD/CE
  - Called by emperor Constantine
  - Athanasius: background work
  - Concern is to "protect" human salvation: to carry out his role as our savior, Jesus needs to be God, since only God can save.

Specified the language to be used when talking about Jesus Christ:

- the only Son of God,
- eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made – emphasis on divine identity of Jesus Christ, whose origin in God is uniquely different from everything else's creation.... "the Father eternally generates the Son"
- "of one Being with the Father" – *homoousias* (older English translations: "of one substance;" consubstantial")
  - *homoousias/homoiousias* ◻ – "same" versus "similar – background concept of the time: "being"/ousia
  - "Substance" = "the power to keep on being"
- Council of Nicea sought to "settle" the relationship of God and Jesus Christ – the Father, the Son
- Pulled together trinitarian thinking... a major touchpoint in developing a fullblown doctrine of the Trinity (which eventually became dogma)

Council of Nicea may have "fleshed out" the relation of God and Jesus; but questions (and controversy) continued over the "who" of Jesus Christ: if Jesus is both human and divine, how are those two realities related in the life of the earthly Jesus and in his risen presence among us?

The classic doctrine: "Jesus Christ is **both** truly and fully human **and** truly and fully God, **forever**

- Not: partly God, partly human, or sometimes God, sometimes human; rather: Jesus is *both* God and human *forever*
- Again, the concern to "protect" human salvation:

- To *save* us, Jesus had to be God (only God can save)
- To save *us*, Jesus had to be human – cf. Athanasius: “What he did not assume he could not save”
- Jesus as truly human: the *only* true human – confessed as what God had in mind when creating humans
  - Classic confession based on Hebrews 2:17: “like us in every respect – except sin”

Overemphasizing either the divine or the human becomes problematic. Ways of talking about Jesus that were recognized as “ditches” in early Christianity:

- Ebionites: emphasized the human to exclusion of the divine
- Adoptionists: a “half-way” approach
  - Jesus “adopted” by God when the Spirit descended on him in his baptism; ▣ the “adoption” concluded on the cross: “forsaken”
  - The human who showed us divine intention while he was alive on earth
  - Biblical/hymnic language that speaks of God choosing Jesus assumes the choosing happened at the beginning of Jesus’ life and never concluded
- Docetists: (Greek *dokeo* “seem”)
  - Jesus seemed to be a human, but was really just God in the form of a human
  - cf. Philippians 2: “who, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but humbled himself, taking on the form of a human.”
  - Apollinaris (d. 390): concerned to emphasize Jesus’ divinity .... claimed the Logos replaced “the rational human soul” (*nous*) in Jesus’ human nature, so his body was a glorified and spiritualized form of humanity. = Jesus’ body human, but his “spirit” was divine.
    - Ended up leading to a docetic understanding of who Jesus is
- Nestorius (386-450): Jesus’ divine nature was joined to his human nature at his birth.
  - Mary is the mother of Jesus human nature; the Logos/Word joined his human nature at his birth – the two natures “glued together”
- Monophysitism – reaction to Nestorianism
  - Jesus had only one nature, not two: divine nature absorbed the human nature at his birth

Council of Chalcedon (451) – Who is Jesus Christ? – classic “formula”: One person, two natures – *One undivided life*

- *One*: not two “things,” but one person – “one person with two natures”
  - Using language from John’s Gospel, conceived as follows:  
Human Nature ← Word (Person) → Divine nature
  - Your “Person” is whatever it is (“moving force?”, “soul”) that makes you who you are at the heart of things.
  - Your “Nature”: whatever it is that makes you part of a class of entities sharing common characteristics (“humanness”, “godness”)
  - In Jesus, the Logos/Word/”Second Person of the Trinity” took on human nature, without ceasing to be divine

- **Undivided:** the “four adverbs of Chalcedon” – unconfusedly, inconvertibly, indivisibly, inseparably
  - Christ is God and human in such a way (and Chalcedon made no claim to know “how”) that neither “God-ness” nor “humanness” is diminished or changed by the presence of the other.
  - Not possible for us to differentiate between what is divine and what is human in Jesus. No matter what you look at in Jesus’ birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, you are looking at one person with both divine and human natures.
  - The relations of the divine and the human is permanent
- **Life:** Attempt is to speak of Jesus – human and divine – as a living, dynamic person, who does what God intends him to do with us and with everything
  - Uses philosophical concepts of the time to try to make sense of the biblical witness to Jesus Christ