

[\*8] I now know a very great deal about how this thorny God-problem was resolved in the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries by a number of synods and councils assessing the various options for dealing with the presumed divinity of Jesus. The winning formula ended up in the Nicene creed as the words “one in being with the Father,” the implication that Jesus was with the Father God, along with the Holy Spirit (what we called back in my youth the Holy Ghost), always and forever, before there was anything, even time. He was and became what John the gospelist calls the Word, which then became flesh when he was born into our world. He was always fully God and then for a while also fully man, end of story. To give you an idea of how delulu (in the bad way) this process was, here are a few of the other contenders: (1) Arianists argued that Jesus is God but wasn’t there right from the outset. He is made not of the same stuff but similar stuff. The technical terms for this distinction were *homoousios* (literally same being or essence) and *homoiousios* (similar but not identical being or essence), fighting words back in the formative years of the Catholic Church, that one letter substitution, an “i” for and “o,” creating turmoil not only in the church, bishops, like Athanasius, being exiled then restored then re-exiled over and over depending on the favored theory of the moment, but also in the Roman Empire, which vacillated back and forth on this matter emperor to emperor, with one, Julian, seeking to reverse the Empire’s connection with Christianity completely. All of this sometimes resulted in violence and death, as in the brutal murder of Hypatia and her followers in 415 CE at the hands of a Christian mob, mobilized by Bishop Cyril of Alexandria. (2) Docetists (a term that was applied retroactively in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for a fourth century heresy) argued that Jesus’ body was an illusion, not materially human but some sort of spiritual substance, meaning his physical life and death were not “real” but apparent. This belief is evident in some of the gnostic gospels, and is often mistakenly (in my view) attributed to Gnosticism generally, primarily as a means of making that heresy case stronger. (3) The Adoptionists denied the pre-existence of Christ (as integral with God) and therefore denied his full deity. They believed that Jesus was simply a man tested by God who after passing the test was given supernatural powers and adopted as a son (at his baptism). Jesus was then rewarded for all he did (and for his perfect character) with a resurrection and absorption into the Godhead. I personally like this one, even though it is heretical, because it opens a way to consider other great spiritual

leaders as similarly godly in their missions here. (4)

Apollinarianists denied the true and complete humanity of Jesus, asserting that he did not have a human mind, but instead had a mind that was completely divine. This heresy diminished the human nature of Jesus, via that radical dualism, in order to reconcile the manner in which Jesus could be both God and man at the same time.

There were any number of other less influential approaches to this conundrum scattered across the first millennium—e.g. Nestorianism, Eutychianism, Monophysitism, Monothelitism; all of which were declared heresies by various synods and councils, inciting the requisite book bannings and burnings. My brief summaries are just that. Whole books have been written about the ins and outs and minutiae of each of these, fetishizing this problem almost comically to the nth degree. Of course, these -isms would argue that the orthodox explanation was merely the institutionally endorsed heresy of choice. The early Church would have been much saner if it followed my nun's advice: It's a mystery, stop splitting hairs and spilling blood. Just get over it.