

BBI Mod. II-D #6

Post-Apostolic Christianity (AD 100-325)

I. Temporal Preexistence of God's Son separated Christians from all Gnostic Cults:

A. All Christian writers agreed on Preexistence of Jesus and two natures.

1. Before AD 150, Christians agreed that **2 natures were sequential**, first divine, then human ("Kenosis" – self-emptying), using the language of Scripture:

γίνομαι (gin-o-mai -**BECAME**) John 1:14; Phil. 2:7 & ὁμοιόω (hom-oi-ah'-O {passive} **MADE LIKE**, changed into conformity with) Heb. 2:17.

2. After AD 150 some Christians abandoned "Kenosis" & accepted **2 natures simultaneously** in Jesus, Platonic Dual-Nature Christ ("Hypostatic Union").

B. All gnostic groups rejected Jesus' Preexistence and "Kenosis."

II. Agreement on Temporal Preexistence of the Son from John onward:

A. Ignatius, (AD 35 - 108) Bishop of Antioch, disciple of John:

1. "... [Y]our deacons, are entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father before the beginning of time, and in the end was revealed."¹

2. "[T]here is one God, who has manifested Himself by Jesus Christ His Son, who is His eternal Word, ..."²

3. "... Jesus Christ, the Son of God who **BECAME** afterwards of the seed of David and Abraham."³

4. "Look for Him who is above all time, eternal and invisible, yet who **BECAME** visible for our sakes; impalpable and impassible, yet who **BECAME** passible on our account; and who in every kind of way suffered for our sakes."⁴

B. Barnabas of Alexandria: (AD 70 - 132)

1. "And further, my brethren: if the Lord endured to suffer for our soul, He being Lord of all the world, to whom God said at the foundation of the world, "Let us make man after our image, and after our likeness," understand how it was that He endured to suffer at the hand of men."⁵

C. Aristides of Athens (AD 125) Apology to the Emperor Hadrian:

1. "Now the Christians trace their origin from the Lord Jesus Christ. And He is acknowledged by the Holy Spirit to be the son of the most high God, who came down from heaven for the salvation of men."⁶

¹ Ignatius, Epistle to the Magnesians, ch. vi (All quotes from Ignatius from the shorter Greek version).

² Ignatius, Epistle to the Magnesians, ch. viii

³ Ignatius, Epistle to the Romans, ch. vii

⁴ Ignatius, Epistle to Polycarp, ch. iii

⁵ Epistle of Barnabas, ch. V

⁶ Aristides, Apology, ch. XV

D. Justin Martyr of Rome: (AD 100 – 165) Christian Apologist:

1. “Jesus Christ is the only proper Son who has been begotten by God, being His Word and first-begotten, and power; and, BECOMING man according to His will, He taught us these things for the conversion and restoration of the human race.”⁷
2. “We have been taught that Christ is the first-born of God, and we have declared above that He is the Word of whom every race of men were partakers; “He was born of a virgin as a man, and was named Jesus, ...”⁸
3. “And His son, who alone is properly called Son, the Word, who also was with him and was begotten before the works, when at first He created and arranged all things by Him, is called Christ, in reference to His being anointed and God’s ordering all things through Him.”⁹
4. “... God begat before all creatures a Beginning, [who was] a certain rational power [proceeding] from Himself, who is called by the Holy Spirit, now the Glory of the Lord, now the Son, again Wisdom, again an Angel [Messenger], then God, and then Lord and Logos [Word]; and on another occasion He calls Himself Captain when He appeared in human form to Joshua the son of Nave (Nun). For He can be called by all those names, since He ministers to the Father’s will, and since He was begotten of the Father by an act of will; ...”¹⁰

E. Theophilus of Antioch (AD ? - 185):

1. “God, then, having His own Word internal within His own bowels, begat Him, emitting Him¹¹ along with His own Wisdom before all things. He had this Word as a helper in the things that were created by Him, and by Him He made all things. He is called “governing principle,” because He rules, and is Lord of all things fashioned by Him. He, then, being Spirit of God, and governing principle, and Wisdom, and Power of the highest, came down upon the prophets, ... Wherefore He speaks thus by the prophet Solomon: “When He prepared the heavens I was there, and when He appointed the foundations of the earth I was by Him as one brought up with Him.”¹²
2. “The God and Father, indeed, of all cannot be contained, and is not found in a place, for there is no place of His rest; but His Word, through whom He made all things, being His Power and His Wisdom, assuming the person of the Father¹³ and Lord of all, went to the garden in the person of God, and conversed with Adam. For the divine writing itself teaches us that Adam said that he had heard the voice. But what else

⁷ Justin, First Apology (to the Emperor), ch. xxiii

⁸ Ibid ch. ilvi

⁹ Justin, 2nd Apology, ch. vi.

¹⁰ Justin, Dialogue, ch. lxi

¹¹ In John 8:42 Jesus said, ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθον (“For I have issued forth out of God.”)

¹² Theophilus, To Autolyclus, Bk. I, ch. x

¹³ Compare to Paul’s statement, “He is the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15 NKJV) and “who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person” (Heb. 1:3 NKJV)

is this voice but the Word of God, who is also His Son? ... But when God wished to make all that He determined on, He begot this Word, uttered, the first-born of all creation, not Himself being emptied of the Word [Reason], but having begotten Reason, and always conversing with His Reason. And hence the holy writings teach us, and all the spirit-hearing [inspired] men, one of whom, John, says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God," showing that at first God was alone, and the Word in Him. Then he says, "The Word was God; all things came into existence through Him; and apart from Him not one thing came into existence." The Word, then, being God, and being naturally produced from God, whenever the Father of the universe wills, He sends Him to any place; and He, coming, is both heard and seen, being sent by Him, and is found in a place."¹⁴

F. Irenaeus of Lyon (AD 130 - 202) Disciple of Polycarp, disciple of John

1. "For when John, proclaiming one God, the Almighty, and one Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten, by whom all things were made, declares that this was the Son of God, this the Only-begotten, this the Former of all things, this the true Light who enlighteneth every man, this the Creator of the world, this He that came to His own, this He that BECAME flesh and dwelt among us."¹⁵

2. "Learn then, ye foolish men, that Jesus who suffered for us, and who dwelt among us, is Himself the Word of God. For if any other of the Aeons had become flesh for our salvation, it would have been probable that the apostle spoke of another. But if the Word of the Father who descended is the same also that ascended,¹⁶ He, namely, the Only-begotten Son of the only God, who, according to the good pleasure of the Father, BECAME flesh for the sake of men, the apostle certainly does not speak regarding any other, or concerning any Ogdoad, but respecting our Lord Jesus Christ. For, according to them [Gnostics], the Word did not originally BECOME flesh. For they [Gnostics] maintain that the Savior assumed an animal body, formed in accordance with a special dispensation by an unspeakable providence, so as to become visible and palpable. But flesh is that which was of old formed for Adam by God out of the dust, and it is this that John has declared the Word of God BECAME."¹⁷

3. "He speaks undoubtedly these words to those who have not received the gift of adoption, but who despise the incarnation of the pure generation of the Word of God, defraud human nature of promotion into God, and prove themselves ungrateful to the Word of God, who BECAME flesh for them. For it was for this end that the Word of God WAS MADE man, and He who was the Son of God BECAME the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God. For by no other means could we have attained to incorruptibility

¹⁴ Theophilus, To Autolycus, Bk. II, ch. xxii

¹⁵ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. I, ch. ix:2

¹⁶ John 3:13

¹⁷ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. I, ch. ix:3

and immortality, unless we had been united to incorruptibility and immortality. But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, **first, incorruptibility and immortality had BECOME that which we also are**, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that might receive the adoption of sons?"¹⁸

4. "Rightly, then, did our Lord bear witness to him, saying, '**Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad.**'¹⁹ For not alone upon Abraham's account did He say these things, but also that He might point out how all who have known God from the beginning, and have foretold the advent of Christ, have **received the revelation from the Son Himself; who also in the last times WAS MADE visible and passable**, and spake with the human race, ..." ²⁰

5. "But according to the opinion of not one of the heretics was **the Word of God MADE flesh**. For if any one carefully examines the systems of them all, he will find that the Word of God is brought in by all of them as **not having BECOME incarnate** (sine carne – without flesh) and impassible, as is also the Christ from above. ... Therefore the Lord's disciple, pointing them all out as false witnesses, says, 'And **the Word WAS MADE flesh**, and dwelt among us'."²¹

7. "[B]ut following the only true and steadfast Teacher, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, **BECOME what we are**, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself. For in no other way could we have learned the things of God, unless **our Master, existing as the Word, had BECOME man**. For no other being had the power of revealing to us the things of the Father, except His own proper Word. ... **[N]or did He truly redeem us by His own blood, if He did not really BECOME man**, restoring to His own handiwork what was said [of it] in the beginning, that man was made after the image and likeness of God; ... **And for this reason it was that He graciously poured Himself out,**²² that He might gather us into the bosom of the Father. ... For blood can only come from veins and flesh, and whatsoever else makes up **the substance of man, such as the Word of God WAS actually MADE.**"²³

III. Celsus, Roman Platonist Philosopher, Antagonist (circa. 175)

A. Wrote a Refutation against Christianity called "The True Logos"

B. Survives only in Origen's 3rd cent. refutation – "Against Celsus"

C. Celsus: "God is good, and beautiful, and blessed, and that in the best and most beautiful degree. But **if he come down among men, he must undergo a CHANGE, and a CHANGE** from good to evil, from virtue to vice, from happiness to misery, and from best to worst. Who,

¹⁸ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. III, xix:1

¹⁹ John 8:56

²⁰ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. ch. vii:1-2

²¹ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. III, ch. xi:3

²² Phil. 2:7

²³ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. V, ch. pref. – ii:2

*then, would make choice of such a change? It is the nature of a mortal, indeed, to undergo change and remolding, **but of an immortal to remain the same and unaltered. God, then, could not admit of such a CHANGE.***"²⁴

*"But Celsus, ... proceeds, accordingly, as follows: '**God either really CHANGES himself, AS THESE [Christians] ASSERT, into a mortal body, and the impossibility of that has been already declared;** or else he does not undergo a **CHANGE**, but only causes the beholders to imagine so, and thus deceives them, and is guilty of falsehood.'*"²⁵

IV. Melito of Sardis (AD 100 – {169 - 180}), Jewish Christian – Greek Philosopher

A. Melito solved the "change" problem by adopting Celsus' Platonism – 2 natures.

1. Melito rejected that the Word "**became flesh**" (Jn. 1:14); "**becoming in the likeness of men**" (Phil. 2:7), that He was "**made like unto His brothers**" (Heb. 2:17), and denied that He was "**rich, but became poor**" (2 Cor. 8:6).
2. Rather, He **ADDED** flesh without **EMPTYING** His divinity
3. Thus the Son remained **UNCHANGED**, undiminished, but **ADDED** flesh.

B. *"On these accounts He came to us; on these accounts, though He was incorporeal, He formed for Himself a body after our fashion, — appearing as a sheep, yet still remaining the Shepherd; being esteemed a servant, yet not renouncing the Sonship; being carried in the womb of Mary, **yet arrayed in the nature of His Father**; treading upon the earth, yet filling heaven; **appearing as an infant, yet not discarding the eternity of His nature; being invested with a body, yet not circumscribing the unmixed simplicity of His Godhead**; being esteemed poor, yet not divested of His riches; needing sustenance inasmuch as He was man, yet not ceasing to feed the entire world inasmuch as He is God; **putting on the likeness of a servant, yet not impairing the likeness of His Father**. He sustained every character belonging to Him in an immutable nature: **He was standing before Pilate, and at the same time was sitting with His Father**; He was nailed upon the tree, and yet was the Lord of all things."*²⁶

V. Other writers follow Melito of Sardis to resolve the philosophical "change" problem, **Platonic Christ, Dual Nature, only the flesh died not the immortal divine Person.**

A. Tertullian of Carthage²⁷ (AD 155-220)

1. Introduced the concept that God's Spirit was a 3rd Person.
2. Claimed that before Day 1 of creation, God was not a "Father" because "Son" (Wisdom/Word) was not yet "begotten," and did not exist as a distinct Person.

B. Novatian²⁸ (AD). Trinitarian.

C. Origen²⁹ (Co-Equal, Co-Eternal Trinitarian)

²⁴ Origen, Against Celsus, Bk. IV, ch. xiv

²⁵ Origen, Against Celsus, Bk. IV, ch. xviii

²⁶ Melito the Philosopher, III

²⁷ Tertullian, Against Hermogenes, ch. xii; Against Praxaes, ch. xxvii; On the Flesh of Christ, ch. III

²⁸ Novatian, On the Trinity, ch. xxv

²⁹ Origen, Against Celsus, Against Celsus, Bk. IV, ch. 16-17

D. Gregory Thaumaturgus (Co-Equal, Co-Eternal Trinitarian)

1. *"There is a perfect Trinity, **in glory and eternity and sovereignty**, neither divided nor estranged. Wherefore there is nothing either created or in servitude in the Trinity; nor anything superinduced, as if at some former period it was non-existent, and at some later period it was introduced. And thus neither was the Son ever wanting to the Father, nor the Spirit to the Son; but without variation and without change, the same Trinity abideth ever."³⁰*

VI. Others maintained the earliest view such as:

A. Eusebius of Caesarea³¹

VI. Arius (AD 256-336) and the Arian Controversy:

A. Arius rejected Trinitarianism.

B. Arius rejected that the Son was eternal, and agreed He was "Wisdom/Word."

C. Arius rejected "Hypostatic Union" (2-nature Platonic Christ)

D. Arius ACCEPTED the philosophical principle concerning the impossibility of the divine nature to undergo change.

E. Arius' solution was to claim that the Son (Word, Wisdom) was CREATED as "the Beginning" (Wisdom), not literally "begotten," thus of a different nature from God which CAN undergo the change described in Phil. 2:6-7 of "self-emptying" to "become in the likeness of men."

F. Arianism was condemned at the Council of Nicaea (AD 325). The Nicene Creed affirmed that the Son was originally begotten of the same essence as God, that He was "begotten not made."

³⁰ Gregory Thaumaturgus, A Declaration of Faith

³¹ Eusebius of Caesarea, Demonstratio Evangelica, Bk. IV, chs. 1-3,16 (Tr. W.J. Ferrar, 1920)