

Controversies in the Early Church

- **Valentinianism (140)** — Valentinus was the most high profile theologian in the Gnostic tradition. He started a school in Rome and was a candidate to be the Bishop of Rome. Gnosticism almost tore the church apart and continued into the 5th century and beyond.
 - Gnostics taught that the spiritual world was of a higher order than the physical world.
 - Gnostics denied either the deity or incarnation because God can't unite with flesh.
 - Gnostics had a well defined hierarchy of beings, secret knowledge, and championed mystical experience (where the soul was free from the body to know God).
 - Their view of the body caused them one of two attitudes: 1) an asceticism due to the corrupt nature of the body or 2) a licentiousness due to a disconnect of body and soul.
 - Some say that parts of the New Testament were written to combat early Gnostics.
 - Christian Scientists are the most clear form of Gnosticism today. The mystical tradition of the Church is rooted in related philosophy & theology.
- **Marcionism (140)** — Marcion was a Gnostic. He was important for provoking the church into defining the Scripture. Until Marcion, the church had a loose consensus regarding Scripture.
 - Marcion was vehemently Pauline and rejected anything that did not conform to his interpretation of Paul. He rejected the Old Testament as the religion of a lesser god and all Jewish aspects of the Gospels.
 - Teachers in the church responded by defending the necessity of the OT and the inclusion of the Gospels and General Epistles; even providing lists of New Testament books.
 - Marcion was excommunicated by the church in 144.
 - Marcion lives on through resemblance with the modern church.
 - Protestantism's prioritization of Paul & Dispensationalism's neglect of the OT.
- **Montanism (156)** — Montanus started a kind of cult-like spinoff to the church that was charismatic in nature, emphasizing ecstatic experience and prophetic revelations. The sect prioritized some women prophetesses that claimed direct inspiration from the Holy Spirit.
 - Montanism is important for two reasons: 1) its argument that inspiration was ongoing provoked to the church to define inspiration and consider it "closed" 2) one of its members was Tertullian who coined the term Trinity and died outside the fellowship of the church.
- **Modalism (215)** — Sabellius became the figurehead of Modalist theology. Modalism taught that God was one individual who simply "showed up" as three different persons. In this view God the Father suffers with God the Son (*patripassianism*).
 - As a Trinitarian heresy it is fundamental to our understanding of God, but its most lingering effect is that Sabellius' opponents reacted with what led to Arianism.
 - The modern offspring of Sabellianism is the Unitarian Church. "The Shack" depends on a Modalistic understanding of the Trinity.
- **Arianism (300)** — Like others, Arius made popular a theology that existed before him. An Alexandrian priest, he advanced a feature of Alexandrian theology that began with Origen.
 - Origen taught a form of Subordinationism that cost him his relationship with the church. Subordination has a variety of faces, but it is essentially that God the Son is not a co-equal with God the Father, that he is of a lower order than the Father.
 - Arius took Subordination a step further. He taught that the Son was a created being and did not share in the substance of the Father.
 - True Trinitarianism teaches that the Persons are distinct and that the Son is generated, but that the two (three) are equal in substance, power, and glory.
 - Arianism is alive today in the form of Islam, Mormonism, and Jehovah's Witnesses.