

# Three Arian arguments against orthodox Christology

## Introduction

Although in the Arian controversies, the church centuries ago refuted from Scripture the following three arguments, they are still advanced today not only by classical Arians, but also by modern theories of kenosis that say Christ in his humiliation laid aside his divine attributes as well as his divine glory. The church's creeds are needed, not to interpret the Scriptures (as if creeds speak more clearly than Christ), but to clarify what it means to be catholic in Christology as opposed to Arian, Docetic, Eutychian, etc. Arians object to the position summarized in [the Athanasian Creed](#):

It is also necessary for eternal salvation that one faithfully believe that our Lord Jesus Christ became man, for this is the right faith, that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at once God and man: he is God, begotten before the ages of the substance of the Father, and he is man, born in the world of the substance of his mother, perfect God and perfect man, with reasonable soul and human flesh, equal to the Father with respect to his Godhead and inferior to the Father with respect to his manhood. Although he is God and man, he is not two Christs but one Christ: one, that is to say, not by changing the Godhead into flesh but by taking on the humanity into God, one, indeed, not by confusion of substance but by unity in one person.

[From Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (The Three Universal or Ecumenical Creeds: III, 1-40). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.]

This excerpt shows how the church affirms both Christ's rational, human soul (denied by the Docetists) and his full equality with the Father with respect to his divinity (denied by the Arians). Arians do not always explicitly deny that Christ is God, but they do so in effect when they deny he had the same divine attributes of his Father or say Christ was subordinate to the Father even in his divine nature.

## ***Arian argument #1: Since Christ did not know the time of his return, he lacked the divine attribute of omniscience***

As seen above, the orthodox doctrine of the incarnation does not mean any change in the deity, but the taking up of the truly human son of Mary into personal union with the true God. The church says with Scripture that Christ saw with human eyes, heard with human ears, and could otherwise learn with a human brain some of what he already knew as God without using the human nature. Of course he did not know by use of his human faculties the date of his return! That has nothing to do with what he knew as God, though he usually concealed his omniscience in his humiliation. No contradiction can be found in that, though there is certainly much beyond human understanding.

## ***Arian argument #2: Since the unbelief of others sometimes prevented Christ from healing, he lacked the divine attribute of omnipotence***

While in the state of humiliation, the Son of God often "veiled in flesh" his omnipotence as well as his omniscience, without any loss of those attributes. At the same time, he did *everything* his Father did (John 5:19). It follows that either the Son was omnipotent and omniscient, or omnipotence and omniscience are not required to do whatever the Father does.

**Arian argument #3: *Since Christ performed his miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit, those miracles did not manifest the divine nature of Christ***

Scripture, followed by the Roman, Lutheran, and Calvinistic churches, teaches that that Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as from the Father: Christ sends the Spirit, and Paul sometimes called him “the Spirit of Christ.” So when Christ healed by the Spirit’s power, he did so as one from whom the Spirit proceeds, not at all as an apostle or other mere man who could heal only in the name of the Son. Thus, the Spirit revealed Christ’s divine nature by working through his human voice and touch without changing his human nature. For example, [the synoptics say his healing by word proved he had the power to forgive sins by word](#), yet another attribute of God he did not lay aside in the incarnation.

**Conclusion**

Arian arguments come not from exegesis of Scripture, but from relying on human inferences from passages teaching Christ’s true humanity even when such inferences directly conflict with Scripture teaching his full deity. Docetic tendencies have the same root, except in reverse. Is it really reasonable to expect human reason to grasp the mystery of the incarnation to the point of explaining all of its apparent contradictions? Both Docetists and Arians seem to think so. To defend their positions, they oppose the plain meaning of contrary Scripture passages either by the ancient tactic of arbitrarily reading them figuratively or by the modern tactic of openly denying their authority.

The brief responses given above can be supplemented by the Scripture citations in [the second volume of Francis Pieper’s \*Christian Dogmatics\*](#) and by “The doctrine of Christ” articles of [Theology of the Cross](#). It is hoped that three of the arguments against orthodox Christology have been refuted to the satisfaction of the Christian who has familiarity with the Scriptures alluded to and who is willing to believe revealed truth even when it contains paradox.