

Early Church Fathers and Adoptionism

Sample statements

Because of the nature of adoptionism its central question inevitably is when did humanity blend with divinity?
(All emphasis added).

Shepherd of Hermas (dated from AD 85-165)

"The Holy Pre-existent Spirit. Which created the whole creation, God made to dwell in flesh that he desired. This flesh, therefore, in which the Holy Spirit dwelt, was subject unto the Spirit, walking honorably in holiness and purity, without in any way defiling the Spirit. *When then it had lived honorably in chastity, and had labored with the Spirit, and had cooperated with it in everything, behaving itself boldly and bravely, he chose it as a partner with the Holy Spirit; for the career of this flesh pleased [the Lord], seeing that, as possessing the Holy Spirit, it was not defiled upon the earth. He therefore took the son as adviser* and the glorious angels also, that this flesh too, having served the Spirit unblamably, might have some place of sojourn, and might not seem to have lost the reward for its service; for all flesh, which is found undefiled and unspotted, wherein the Holy Spirit dwelt, shall receive a reward."

Theodotus via Hippolytus of Rome (d. AD 235)

Refutation of All Heresies, Book VII, Chapter 23. "The Heresy of Theodotus"

"But there was a certain Theodotus, a native of Byzantium, who introduced a novel heresy. He announces tenets concerning the originating cause of the universe, which are partly in keeping with the doctrines of the true Church, in so far as he acknowledges that all things were created by God. Forcibly appropriating, however, (his notions of) Christ from the school of the Gnostics, and of Cerinthus and Ebion, he alleges that (our Lord) appeared in some such manner as I shall now describe. (According to this, Theodotus maintains) that *Jesus was a (mere) man, born of a virgin*, according to the counsel of the Father, and that *after he had lived promiscuously with all men, and had become pre-eminently religious, he subsequently at his baptism in Jordan received Christ, who came from above and descended (upon him) in form of a dove*. And this was the reason, (according to Theodotus,) why (miraculous) powers did not operate within him *prior to the manifestation in him of that Spirit* which descended, (and) which proclaims him to be the Christ. But (among the followers of Theodotus) some are disposed (to think) that never was this man made God, (even) at the descent of the Spirit; whereas others (maintain that he was made God) after the resurrection from the dead."

Paul of Samosata (AD 200-275)

Discourses to Sabinus

"*Having been anointed by the Holy Spirit he received the title of the anointed (i.e. Christos), suffering in accordance with his nature, working wonders in accordance with grace. For in fixity and resoluteness of character he likened himself to God; and having kept himself free from sin was united with God, and was empowered to grasp as it were the power and authority of wonders*. By these he was shown to possess over and above the will, one and the same activity (with God), and won the title of Redeemer and Saviour of our race.

"The Saviour became holy and just; and by struggle and hard work overcame the sins of our forefather. By these means *he succeeded in perfecting himself, and was through his moral excellence united with God*; having attained to unity and sameness of will and energy (i.e. activity) with Him through his advances in the path of good deeds. This will be preserved inseparable (from the Divine), and so inherited the name which is above all names, the prize of love and affection vouchsafed in grace to him.

“We do not award praise to beings which submit merely in virtue of their nature; but we do award high praise to beings which submit because their attitude is one of love; and so submitting because their inspiring motive is one and the same, they are confirmed and strengthened by one and the same indwelling power, of which the force ever grows, so that it never ceases to stir. *It was in virtue of this love that the Saviour coalesced with God, so as to admit of no divorce from Him*, but for all ages to retain one and the same will and activity with Him, an activity perpetually at work in the manifestation of good.

“Wonder not that the Saviour had one will with God. For as nature manifests the substance of the many to subsist as one and the same, so the attitude of love produces in the many a unity and a sameness of will which is manifested by unity and sameness of approval and well-pleasingness.”

Arius (AD 256-336)

“The Logos . . . is only called Logos conceptually, and is not Son of God by nature and in truth, but is merely called Son, he too, *by adoption, as a creature*” (Arius quoted in Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition, A history of the development of doctrine: vol. 1, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, pp. 195, 196).

“The Unbegun made the Son a beginning of things originated; and advanced Him as a Son to Himself by adoption. He has nothing proper to God in proper subsistence. For He is not equal, no, nor one in essence with Him. . .” (Arius via Athanasius, *De syn*, quoted in Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 1, pp. 264, 265).

“If the Father begat the Son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence: and from this it is evident, that *there was a time when the Son was not*. It therefore necessarily follows, that he had his substance from nothing” (Arius via Socrates of Constantinople, *Church History*, Book I, Ch. 5).

“Some of them say that the Son is an eructation, others that he is a production, others that he is also unbegotten. These are impieties to which we cannot listen, even though the heretics threaten us with a thousand deaths. But we say and believe and have taught, and do teach, that *the Son is not unbegotten, nor in any way part of the unbegotten*; and that he does not derive his subsistence from any matter; but that by his own will and counsel he has subsisted before time and before ages as perfect as God, only begotten and unchangeable, and that *before he was begotten, or created, or purposed, or established, he was not. For he was not unbegotten*. We are persecuted, because we say that *the Son has a beginning*, but that God is without beginning” (Theodoret: Arius's Letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia, translated in Peters' *Heresy and Authority in Medieval Europe*, p. 41).

Ulfilas (AD 311-383)

“I believe in only one God the Father, the *unbegotten* and invisible, and in his *only-begotten son*, our Lord/Master and God, the designer and maker of all creation, having none other like him” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arianism>, accessed 2015-04-10).