

Analogous Heresies to the Problem in the Johannine Letters

Although we don't know for sure what the secessionists opposed in the Johannine Letters taught, we are aware of certain movements in early Christianity that may have espoused similar ideas.

Docetists: The docetists taught that Christ was a divine being who only seemed to be human (his humanity was an illusion or a disguise). He appeared to suffer but, being divine, could not really suffer or die. Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 110) writes about the docetists, indicating that they were active in Asia Minor in the early second century.

Gnostics: Christian gnostics claimed that Christ brought spiritual knowledge that would provide salvation from an evil material world. They rejected the notion of anything good being associated with "flesh." Some gnostic writings present the claim that those who are spiritually purified live without sin, regardless of obedience to any external moral code (cf. 1 John 1:8–2:2).

Cerinthians: The followers of a particular teacher named Cerinthus believed that "Jesus" and "the Christ" were two different entities, the one a human figure and the other a divine power. The Christ descended on Jesus at his baptism, and for a time Jesus exhibited the hallmarks of divinity (speaking divine secrets and working

miracles). But the Christ departed from Jesus prior to his crucifixion, such that Jesus's death was merely that of a mortal man, without saving power. We know about Cerinthus from the writings of Irenaeus (ca. 180) and others.