

## Important Creeds and Councils of the Christian Church

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### Class IV: Post-Nicea and The Council of Constantinople (381)

#### After Nicea and the growth of Arianism

- Arius taught that Christ was the first-born of creatures, and the agent in fashioning the world, but He was not eternal. The Son has a beginning but... God is without beginning. "Christ, was indeed, God in a certain sense to Arius, but a lower God (god), in no way one with the Father in essence or eternity. In the incarnation, the Logos entered a human body, taking the place of the human reasoning spirit. To Arius' thinking, Christ was neither fully God nor fully man, but a tertium quid between.
- Athanasius taught that the problem with Arianism was that it gave no basis for real salvation, "only by real Godhead coming into union with full manhood in Christ could the transformation of the human into the divine be accomplished in Him, or be mediated by Him to His disciples." "Christ was made man that we might be made divine." He taught that Christ was homoousios, or one in essence (substance) with the Father, without beginning, possessing the same eternal nature as the Father... not merely "like the Father" as Arius had written. Homoousios- ("of the same substance," "consubstantial": The word indicates the numerical unity of essence in the three divine persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, against the Arian contention of three distinct substances.
- After Nicea, Arius and Eusebius of Nicomedia were sent into exile by Constantine. By 328, Eusebius had returned and gained greater influence over Constantinople than any other ecclesiastic in the East. He used this power to promote the cause of Arius. Eusebius saw Athanasius as the real enemy and directed Arius (who had recently returned from banishment) to present to Constantine supposed retractions that reflected the Nicene decision and positions on the Trinity. It was carefully indefinite on the question at issue and to Constantine's untheological mind this seemed satisfactory and an expression of willingness to make his peace. This plan was successful at overthrowing Athanasius and restoring Arius: Constantine directed Athanasius to restore Arius to his place in Alexandria (presbyter) and Athanasius refused.
- Constantine came to the conclusion that the real problem was Athanasius' stubbornness, and he was banished for the first time (he would be banished 5 times before his death in 373). It is ironic that on the day of the formal ceremony that the Eusebians were to restore Arius, he died (336). Constantine died in the following year (337) and was baptized before his death by Eusebius of Nicomedia. If the persecutions of Christians had ceased and numbers of people added to the Church were growing under imperial favor, doctrinal discussions that earlier would have run their course were now political questions of the first magnitude, and the Emperor had assumed a power in ecclesiastical affairs which was ominous for the future of the Church. By 340, the empire was divided between Constantine in the West, and Constantius in the East. Under their rule, the Nicene controversy extended to an empire-wide contest and the Emperors permitted the exiled bishops to return.
- Athanasius was returned to Alexandria by the end of 337 and Eusebius was the most influential party leader in the East and he was strengthened in power when he was made Bishop of Constantinople. The brothers called the Council of Sardica in 343 to attempt to heal the post-Nicene theological problems. It was unsuccessful because when Athanasius showed from the West, the East in favor of Arianism and seeing that they were outnumbered by the Western teachers, withdrew from the Council. Reading of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (Observe Additions)
- The Deity of the Holy Spirit  
Since the time of Tertullian in the West (died c. 225), Father, Son and Holy Spirit had been regarded as three "persons," of one substance. The East had not reached unanimity. Even Origen (d. 251?) had been uncertain whether the Spirit was "created or uncreated." At a Synod in Alexandria in 362 held by Athanasius (just returning from his 3rd exile), terms of union were drawn up for this doctrine of the Holy Spirit. It would be sufficient "to anathematize the Arian heresy and confess the faith confessed by the holy Fathers of Nicea, and to anathematize also those who say that the Holy Ghost is a creature and separate from the essence of Christ. Athanasius had established the Biblical doctrine and full definition of the Trinity: the Godhead is one essence (substance) and three hypostases (persons). At the death of Athanasius in 373, the leadership of the doctrinal struggle was passed to three Cappadocians: Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa. Theodosius I became Emperor in 379 and was zealously pro-Nicene in his theology. Theodosius made Gregory of Nazianzus Bishop of

Constantinople in 381. To the three Cappadocians, more than to any others, the intellectual victory of the New-Nicene faith was due. In 380, Theodosius issued an edict (Codex Theodosianus) that all should "hold the faith which the Apostle Peter gave to the Romans." This edict constitutes a reckoning point in imperial politics and ecclesiastical development because henceforward there was to be but one religion in the empire, and that was Christianity. Moreover, only that form of Christianity was to exist which taught one divine essence in three hypostases, or as the West would express it in similar terms: one substance in three persons.

- Theodosius held an Eastern Council at Constantinople in 381. It affirmed, with additional doctrines added, the Nicene Creed of 325 and added the Deity of the Holy Spirit against those who did not believe in His being consubstantial with the Father and the Son. Arianism in the empire was officially condemned and defeated, though it was to continue for several centuries among the Germanic invaders, thanks to the missionary work of Ulfila, an Arian heretic.
- Church historian Williston Walker writes about this controversy: "On reviewing this long controversy, it may be said that it was a misfortune that a less disputed phrase was not adopted at Nicea, and doubly a misfortune that imperial interference played so large a part in the ensuing discussions. In the struggle the imperial church came into existence, and a policy of imperial interference was fully developed. Departure from official orthodoxy had become a crime.

#### " The Filioque Controversy - "...and the Son."

Eastern remains on their teaching of "subordinationism" and feeling that the Father is the sole source of all, taught that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone, but Augustine had prepared the way for that filioque, which acknowledged in Spain, at the Third Council of Toledo (589) as a part of the Nicene Creed, spread over the West, and remains to this day a dividing issue between Greek and Latin Churches. Later in 809, Charlemagne (Charles the Great) approved the Spanish addition filioque to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

The triumph of the Trinity in the 4th century (Review the theological terms and doctrines established)

#### **Scriptural basis for the Trinity**

God is One Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one (Deut. 6:4). / Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen (1 Tim 1:17; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; James 2:19).

#### **Three Distinct Persons as Deity**

##### **The Father:**

He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father" (Ps. 2:7) / ... who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father... (1 Peter 1:2; cf. John 1:17; 1 Cor. 8:6; Phil. 2:11).

##### **The Son:**

He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father" (Ps. 2:7; cf. Heb. 1:1-13; Ps. 68:18; Isaiah 6:1-3). / As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:16-17).

##### **The Spirit:**

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters (Gen. 1:1-2; cf. Ex. 31:3; Judges 15:14; Isaiah 11:2). / Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit...? You have not lied to men but to God" (Acts 5:3-4; cf. 2 Cor. 3:17). \

<b>Persons of the Same Essence: Attributes Applied to Each Person</b>			
<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Father</b>	<b>Son</b>	<b>Holy Spirit</b>
<b>Eternal</b>	Ps. 90:2	John 1:2; Rev. 1:8	Heb. 9:14
<b>Omniscience</b>	Jer. 17:10	Rev. 2:23	1 Cor. 2:11
<b>Omnipresence</b>	Jer. 23:24	Matt. 18:20	Ps. 139:7
<b>Holiness</b>	Rev. 15:4	Acts 3:14	Acts 1:8

<b>Equality with Different Roles: Acts involving all Three Persons</b>			
<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Father</b>	<b>Son</b>	<b>Holy Spirit</b>
<b>Creation of the World</b>	Ps. 102:25	Col. 1:16	Gen. 1:2; Job 26:13
<b>Creation of Man</b>	Gen. 2:7	Col. 1:16	Job 33:4
<b>Baptism of Christ</b>	Matt. 3:17	Matt. 3:16	Matt. 3:16
<b>Death of Christ</b>	Heb. 9:14	Heb. 9:14	Heb. 9:14

Think about this:

Has God provided all we need for our salvation and therefore all we need to do is to take the initiative to follow Him?

Does our decision for Christ save us? Are we saved by grace after all we can do on our own? Is there an "island of righteousness" in every person that gives them the ability to have faith if they are just given the right circumstances and reasons for faith? Is our salvation ultimately our own choice?

Next Week: Augustine vs. Pelagius The Athanasian Creed / Augustine and the Pelagian Controversy

Please Read: The Athanasian Creed.