Imperial Church: Controversies and Councils

The Church Clarifies Creeds About Christ

Randy Broberg
Grace Bible Church
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"Christ Jesus... being in very nature God, [was] made in human likeness... and become obedient to death.... Every tongue [should] confess Jesus Christ is Lord."

Philippians 2:5-11

"For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him."
Colossians 1:19

◆"I and the Father are one."
John 10:30
Controversial Bible Texts About Jesus

- "You shall have no other gods before me"  Exodus 20:3
- "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ."  1 Tim 2:5
- "and [Christ] being found in appearance as a man..."  Phil 2:8
- "You are my beloved Son, today I have begotten you."  Luke 3:22
- "The Word became flesh"  John 1:14
- "The Word [is] the only-begotten of the Father."  John 1:14
- "Destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days"  John 2:19
Ecumenical Council: Whole church gathered together, called by an emperor or pope to discuss a specific issue in the church.

**The Major Councils of the Early Church**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Council</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Issue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NICAEA</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>ARIANISM</td>
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<tr>
<td>CONSTANTINOPLE</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>ARIANISM APOLLINARIANISM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPHESUS</td>
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<td>CHALCEDON</td>
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<td>CONSTANTINOPLE</td>
<td>553</td>
<td>MONOPHYSITISM</td>
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<tr>
<td>CONSTANTINOPLE</td>
<td>680–681</td>
<td>MONOTHELETISM</td>
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<tr>
<td>NICAEA</td>
<td>787</td>
<td>ICONOCLASM</td>
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The Heresy: Arianism
The Councils: Nicaea and Constantinople

The Controversy Over the Divinity of Christ
Adoptionists

- God "adopted" the human Jesus as his special son at birth (not conception) or baptism
- God gave him an extra measure of divine power (dynamis)

Adoptionism: An Attempt to Explain Christ

Eternity Past

TIME

Eternity Future

God

Man

Christ

Chart 58
Modalists

- God's names change with his roles or "modes of being"
- When God is the Son, he is not the Father
- There is no permanent distinction between the three "persons" of the Trinity

Modalism: An Attempt to Explain Christ

Chart 59
## Adoptionism and Modalism Compared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADOPTIONISM (Dynamic Modalism)</th>
<th>MODALISM (Modalistic Monarchianism, Sabellianism, Patrpassionism)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stress Oneness of God</td>
<td>Stress Oneness of God</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deny Deity of Christ</td>
<td>Affirm Deity of Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirm Humanity of Christ</td>
<td>Deny Humanity of Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holy Spirit = a power</td>
<td>Holy Spirit = a mode of God’s existence</td>
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Chart 60
Arius
(250-336 AD)

• Arius was a presbyter in Alexandria under bishop Alexander.
• Arius believed that the uniqueness of God was compromised by the doctrine of the Trinity, because as God his nature could not be divided.
• Arius’ teachings grew popular and the bishop of Alexandria, Alexander, removed him from office. He composed jingles and set his doctrines to music.
The Teachings of Arianism: Jesus a Created Being

• The Son was the highest of the creations of God. He maintained his rank by his obedience and love for the Father, but he indeed was a creation and could, hypothetically, fall from obedience.

• He is not eternal or perfect like God, though he was God's agent in creating everything else.

• Insisted on the uniqueness of God
  – Moving toward Neo-Platonism
  – God is perfect, immutable, utterly unlike our existence.

• Was it pure monotheism because there was no Trinity or was it polytheism because God and Christ were both divine but separate beings?
The Controversy Begins

- Constantine sent a letter to Alexander and Arius, glossing over the differences and exhorting them to harmony. When this did not work, he decided to summon a general council of the church to meet at Nicaea. This was a first in Christian history. An emperor summoned the church. He also addressed the council, and participated in the debates.
Council of Nicaea 325 AD

- Called and Chaired by Emperor Constantine
- Purpose was church unity, not purity
- 318 bishops + presbyters and deacons = over 2,000; 18 Arian Bishops
- 41 days
- Preceded by minor council where Arius was excommunicated

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<tr>
<td>325</td>
<td>Nicaea</td>
<td>Constantine I</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISSUES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Hetero-ousions – different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>Homo-ousios – same</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Homoi-ousius - similar</td>
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Chosen by council: Nicene Creed
Athanasius (293-373)

- Antagonist on the other side from Arius and the Arians.
- Deacon in the church of Alexandria, and a theological advisor to the bishop, Alexander. In time he himself became bishop of Alexandria.
- Banished as a heretic 5 times, restored as orthodox 5 times.

If the whole world is against Athanasius, then Athanasius is against the whole world.
• **Nicaea: The “iota” Debate**

  - **Hetro-ousis** – difference: Logos not co-eternal, co-essential, or co-equal with Father. Son begotten, has beginning. Arius, Eusebius of Nicomedia.

  - **Homo-ousios** – same substance: Logos is co-eternal with Father, never to change. Heb. 13:8, 1 Cor. 1:24. Alexander of Alexandria, Hosius, and Athanasius (who was young and not allowed to speak)

  - **Homoi-ousios** – similar substance. Logos is of like substance with Father. Subordinate Trinity, Christ’s nature not divine, eternal. Eusebius of Caesarea, Pamphili (now Eastern Church). Position of most bishops, but they moved to orthodox Homousios position.
• Emperor wavered, leaned toward compromise position “i” or “similar substance” statement offered by Eusebius.
• Tradition that Constantine himself suggested *homoousious* be used.
• Council passed creed with same substance (no iota), but leaned to Eusebius’ comprise – iota position
• Arius and two others (Eusebius of Nicomedia) who did not sign were banished, their books burned
• Emperor Constantine later changed his mind and unbanished Arians, made the Arian Eusebius of Nicomedia his personal bishop and was baptized on his death bed by him.
• Constantine’s sons were all Arians who reversed Nicaea’s decisions!
The Nicene Creed

- “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of his Father, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.”

- Jesus is “one in being” (*homoousios*) with the Father
- Did not address Holy Spirit
- Many “orthodox” still had reservations, thought it was “modalist” and denied the distinctiveness of the Son
The Nicene Anathemas

- “And whosoever shall say that there was a time when the Son of God was not, or that before he was begotten he was not, or that he was made of things that were not, or that he is of a different substance or essence [from the Father] or that he is a creature, or subject to change or conversion—all that so say, the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes them.”
Other, Lesser Known, Rulings of the Council of Nicaea

• Declared that certain occupations were not suitable for Christians: magic, idolatry, eroticism and being in the games in the amphitheater
• Forbade lending of money at rates exceeding 12%
• Adopted first Christian calendar, based on the Julian Calendar
• Declares Easter to be on the first full moon after the Vernal Equinox
• Three Bishops of Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria called “Metropolitans” as sort of super duper archbishops over other bishops.
Nicaea Doesn’t End Arianism

- 337-350 Two Arian sons of Constantine shared the empire
  - Constans in the West preferred the Orthodox Christians
  - Constantius II in the East preferred the Arians
- 350 Constantius II becomes sole Emperor
- Orthodox, Nicaean Christians crushed in the West
- Arians first declared that Jesus was *anomoios* (“unlike”) God

The Resurgence of Arianism

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resurgence of Arianism</th>
<th>Labor of Three Cappadocians</th>
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<tr>
<td>Arius versus Athanasius</td>
<td>Basil of Caesarea</td>
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<td>Gregory of Nyssa</td>
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<td>Gregory of Nazianzus</td>
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325 Council of Nicaea

381 Council of Constantinople
Popularity of Arianism

- Arianism grew in importance for many years. It was instrumental in the "conversion" of many of the barbarian tribes. Many of the barbarian tribes remained Arian for centuries.
Subsequent Arian Victories

- 341: Council in Antioch (in the East) victory for Arians
  - Omitted the *homoousion* reference
- 360 Arian Council of Constantinople
  - Later moderated to Jesus is like God in the way that a son is like his father.
  - References to “substance” were omitted
  - Rejected Nicene Creed!
- Hence, the “official orthodox” position at this time was Arian!
- Athanasias banished Five separate times! Orthodox are outlaws.

Cyril of Alexandria and Athanasias
The Three Cappadocians

Basil “the Great”
Council of Constantinople 381

- Called by Emperor Theodosius I
- 150 Bishops present
- affirmed one God in three persons
- A reassertion of the original Nicene Creed.
- Adds third article to creed: Holy Spirit

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<td>381</td>
<td>Constantinople I</td>
<td>Theodosius I</td>
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<th>ISSUES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Arian – denied deity</td>
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<td>2. Apollanarianism – no human nature</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Orthodox (Cappadoccian) – two natures</td>
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Other Important Aspects of the Council of Constantinople

• The council of Constantinople only called the eastern bishops, ignoring the bishop of Rome, but asked the bishop of Constantinople to preside, as the bishop of the “New Rome”.

• Later the bishop of Rome called his own synod of western bishops and claimed to be the successor of Peter and “Upon this rock I will build my church”, first time this verse was used to support the papacy.
The Creed of Constantinople (381)

We believe in one God, the Father All Governing [pantokratora], creator [poieten] of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all time [pro panton ton aionon], Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not created [poiethenta], of the same essence [reality] as the Father [homoousion to patri], through Whom all things came into being, Who for us men and because of our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became human [enantropesanta]. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose on the third day, according to the Scriptures, and ascended to heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father, and will come again with glory to judge the living and dead. His Kingdom shall have no end [telos].

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver, Who proceeds from the Father, Who is worshiped and glorified together with the Father and Son, Who spoke through the prophets; and in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. We confess one baptism for the remission of sins. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.
The Forgotten Council of Carthage 418

1. New-born children must be baptized on account of original sin.
2. Justifying grace not only avails for the forgiveness of past sins, but also gives assistance for the avoidance of future sins.
3. Children dying without baptism do not go to a "middle place" (medius locus), since the non-reception of baptism excludes both from the "kingdom of heaven" and from "eternal life."
The Heresies: Nestorianism and Monophysitism
The Councils: Ephesus and Chalcedon
The Controversy over the Unity of Christ
The humanity and divinity of Jesus

- (Alexandria) *logos-sarx*: logos combines with “flesh”
  - preserves unity
  - but divinity overshadows humanity (Apollinarius)
- (Antioch) *logos-anthropos*:
  - preserves distinctiveness of the two natures
  - but treats Jesus like two separate beings
  - Example: Nestorius: Mary the mother of Christ (*Christotokos*) but not God (*theotokos*)
Nestorians

- Jesus has two natures and also two persons
- The divine Christ and the human Christ lived together in Jesus, whose body is like a Temple in which the Spirit of God dwells

Armenian Priests in Jerusalem
Monophysites

- Jesus cannot have two natures
- Ancestors of Today’s Syrian and Egyptian Coptic Churches

“His divinity swallows up his humanity like a drop of wine in the sea.”
Apollinarians

- one person with one nature
- divine mind and will in Jesus' human flesh
- no human mind or spirit
- divinity controlled or sanctified Jesus’ humanity
Mary as “God Bearer”—*Theotokos*

Nature of Christ and Nature Of Mary Intertwined.

Did Mary bear a mere man?
Did she bear God?
Did she bear a God-Man?
Did she bear a Man indwelt by God?

Other Mary mythology such as her Sinless life and perpetual virginity and being the “Queen of Heaven” Also flourish during this period.

“*Theotokos*” doctrine central today in Eastern Orthodox churches
Ephesus 431

- under Theodosius II
- 200 bishops present
- condemned Nestorius
- decreed unity of Christ divine and human nature
- declared Mary *Theotokos*
- affirmed Nicene creed
- Western bishops largely absent. Leo of Rome calls it the “Robber Council”!

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<td>431</td>
<td>Ephesus “sham council”</td>
<td>Theodosius II</td>
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**ISSUES**

1. Theotokos – Mary bore God
2. Anthropotokos – Mary bore Man
3. Christotokos – Christ – two natures (Nestorius)

*Won by default*
Bishop Nestorius Banished By Council of Ephesus, Flees East

Bishops of Council of Ephesus

Emperor Theodosius II

Nestorius
The Nestorians, after being declared heretics at Ephesus (and Chalcedon) fled east and formed the Nestorian Church, which grew greatly in Persia and India and even sent missions to Tibet and China. Nestorius wrote an autobiography in which he said he’d been misunderstood. His point against Mary being the God bearer was more about Mary than about Jesus.
Chalcedon 451

- Subsequent to 2nd council at Ephesus – called “Council of Robbers” because positions were misrepresented and ignored.
- Leo I, a bishop of unprecedented ability, was highly influential in settling issue of Christ’s nature
- 650 bishops present
- condemned Monophysites

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<tr>
<td>451</td>
<td>Chalcedon</td>
<td>Leo I</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Monophysite – one nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Nestorian Party – two natures, confused</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Leo’s middle position – two natures, not confused</td>
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Chosen by vast majority of council
Chalcedon: The Three Positions

• **Monophysite:** Incarnate Christ has only one nature: God is born, God suffered, God was crucified and died. Deification of human in Christ. Developed by Cyril, continued by Dioscurus, Eutyches. *Eutychianism.*

• **Nestorian:** Christ has double personality of human and divine. Unfused union of two persons in one, moderation of earlier Nestorian view, but still heretical. Theodoret.

• **Middle position:** Christ has two distinct natures – one personality – perfect in both. Recognizes true humanity, true deity of Christ. Hypostatic Union – union of Jesus’ divine and human natures in one person. Born of Virgin Mary. No confusion, change, division, or separation between natures. Offered by Leo, Bishop of Rome.
Conclusions of Chalcedon

- Person = unity
- Nature = duality (human and divine)
- Jesus is one person in two natures
- The key point: Jesus is fully human and fully divine --

Greek Bishop in Orant Prayer

Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem
Crafting Creeds by Compromise?

- Both parties were fanatical and calling for others destruction
- After four sessions, Leo presented his middle position in an epistle. This position was overwhelmingly accepted as orthodox
- Emperor was present, enforced decision as law
- Eutychian bishops banished, books burned.
- Egyptian and Syrian Churches split off from Orthodox Chalcedon church, create “Coptic” Churches
Other Lesser Known Points from the Council of Chalcedon

- last time east and west bishops would meet together in a single council
- Bishops listed in order of importance: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria.
The Creed of Chalcedon (451)

We also teach that we apprehend this one and only Christ—Son, Lord, only-begotten—in two natures; and we do this without confusing the two natures, without transmuting one nature into the other, without dividing them into two separate categories, without contrasting them according to area or function. The distinctiveness of each nature is not nullified by the union. Instead, the “properties” of each nature are conserved and both natures concur in one “person” and in one essence. They are not divided or cut into two persons, but are together the one and only and only-begotten Logos of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus have the prophets of old testified; thus the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us; thus the Symbol of the Fathers has handed down to us.
The Monophysites, after being declared heretics at Chalcedon, broke away from the “Orthodox” Church and formed the Syrian and Egyptian Coptic Churches, churches which remain monophysite to this day.

It helped the split that These regions soon fell outside the Control of the Roman Empire.
Geographic Distribution of Sects by 6th Century

- Nestorians
- Armenians
- Arians
- Chalcedonian/Nicene Orthodox
- Novationists
- Montanists
- Jacobites
- Donatists
- Copts
Lots of Questions to Consider!

- Why did the church tolerate the presumptive “chairmanship” of Constantine and other emperors at church councils? Would we tolerate it today? Why not?
- Should the church “universal” seek to hammer out creeds as a sort of political event, complete with compromises and even horse trading? Is that really how doctrine is to be formulated?
- If not, then are the Confessors of Westminster, or the 1689 London Baptists any different? How?
- Should church denominations use adherence to creeds as a way of governing individual congregations? If a local church disagrees with the Nicene Creed or Westminster Confession should the church be disciplined? How?
- Is your answer different depending on what creed the church is obliged to conform to? Is variation from the London Baptist Confession of 1689 tolerable while variation from the Nicene Creed is not? Where is the difference?
- What penalty should be imposed on heretics? What about error that doesn’t give rise to heresy?
- What is “orthodoxy” if one council can rescind or ratify another?