

## **Church History**

### **Lesson 12 - The Arian Controversy and the Council of Nicea**

#### **1. Introduction - Peace Without, Strife Within**

- 1.1. After three centuries of persecutions, the church suddenly found itself at peace with the empire. Though the Empire was not “Christian” the church was at peace with her former enemies without.
- 1.2. However, almost immediately a major theological controversy regarding the nature of Jesus’ Deity arose. This controversy, known as Arianism after the name of its initial proponent Arius, erupted in Alexandria but soon threatened to envelop the whole church.
- 1.3. To determine to proper course for the church - and to maintain the unity he so desired for the church and the empire - Constantine called for a meeting of the bishops of the church at Nicea. This group met to handle the controversy and drafted one of the most enduring confessions of the Christian faith - the Nicene Creed.

#### **2. The Beginnings of the Arian Controversy**

- 2.1. The background - the teachings of Justin, Clement, Origen
  - 2.1.1. The great teachers of the earliest days of the church had wrestled to understand and explain the faith to their neighbors.
  - 2.1.2. Some leaders, such as Tertullian, had argued that Christianity should not employ Greek philosophical thought in this process. However, others, most notably Clement and Origen, had followed a very different path, attempting to explain Christianity using terms borrowed from Greek philosophy.
    - 2.1.2.1. the controversy was a direct result of the manner in which Christians came to think of the nature of God, thanks to the work of Justin, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and others. - Gonzales, location 3294
    - 2.1.2.2. But this was also a dangerous argument. It was possible that Christians, in their eagerness to show the kinship between their faith and classical philosophy, would come to the conviction that the best way to speak of God was not that of the prophets and other biblical writers, but rather that of Plato, Plotinus, and the rest. Since those philosophers conceived of perfection as immutable, impassible, and fixed, many Christians came to the conclusion that such was the God of Scripture. - Gonzales, location 3300
  - 2.1.3. Especially notable were their attempts to understand, define, and explain the nature of Jesus, and His relation to the Eternal God. In this regard, it was their development of the doctrine of the Logos that came to the fore in later thought. This doctrine, using the terminology of John - and Greek philosophy - tried to understand Jesus and His relation to the Father as the Logos - the Word/reason by which the Father - who was immutable and impassible - related to the world.

- 2.1.3.1. Two means were found to bring together what the Bible says about God and the classical notion of the supreme being as impassible and fixed. These two means were allegorical interpretation of scriptural passages, and the doctrine of the Logos. - Gonzales, location 3304
- 2.1.3.2. This was the doctrine of the Logos, as developed by Justin, Clement, Origen, and others. According to this view, although it is true that the supreme being—the “Father”—is immutable, impassible, and so on, there is also a Logos, Word, or Reason of God, and this is personal, capable of direct relations with the world and with humans. Thus, according to Justin, when the Bible says that God spoke to Moses, what it means is that the Logos of God spoke to him. - Gonzales, location 3314
- 2.1.3.3. The generally accepted view was that, between the immutable One and the mutable world, there was the Word or Logos of God. It was within this context that the Arian controversy took place. - Gonzales, location 3319
- 2.1.4. One of the problems was that the teachings of the Logos could be interpreted as either teaching that Jesus the Logos was Himself Divine and one with the Father, or that He was a created being and thus not fully Divine. These questions were simply not developed enough by the earlier thinkers in their own day.
  - 2.1.4.1. The theological background to the early Arian controversy is provided by the two different ways in which the successors of Origen worked out his theology in relation to the Monarchian controversies of the third century. The catholic viewpoint had followed the lines of the Logos doctrine instead of either of the two Monarchian positions (chapter 7). In Greek philosophy God is impassible, and that premise controlled theological speculation among intellectuals. After the Gnostic and Marcionite controversies, no distinction was possible between Creator and Redeemer. - Ferguson, location 3722
  - 2.1.4.2. Origen’s theology could be developed either in the direction of emphasizing the unity of nature (this Alexander did) or of emphasizing the subordination to the extent of saying different natures (this Arius, with a penchant for pushing things to their logical conclusions, did). Since the exact relation of the Logos to the supreme God was still not clearly agreed upon, further formulation was needed. - Ferguson, location 3729
- 2.2. The major players - Arius, Alexander, and Athanasius
  - 2.2.1. Arius
    - 2.2.1.1. Arius born in 256 AD, probably somewhere in modern day Libya.
    - 2.2.1.2. He was a pupil of Lucian of Antioch, a very popular preacher who was martyred in 312.
    - 2.2.1.3. Arius was a priest and teacher in the city of Alexandria. He was the parish priest at the church of Baukalis, the oldest and most important church in Alexandria.

- 2.2.1.4. Arius seems to have been a man of great skill and abilities. In fact, he was one of the most popular teachers in the whole city.
- 2.2.1.5. It also appears that Arius had himself been considered as a possible successor to become the Patriarch of Alexandria - but the position was given to Alexander.
- 2.2.2. Alexander
  - 2.2.2.1. Alexander was the bishop/patriarch of Alexandria. He had apparently come to that position around 313, around the time of the Edict of Milan, announcing the end of persecution. As such, Arius, along with many other priests, were under his supervision in the city and region of Alexandria - which was one of the most important in all of the Church.
- 2.2.3. Athanasius
  - 2.2.3.1. Athanasius was apparently born in Alexandria, around 296 AD. He was thus quite a bit younger than the other main protagonists in this controversy.
  - 2.2.3.2. Athanasius was originally a secretary to Alexander. However, in the wake of this controversy he rose to great position and fame, and spent the rest of his life as the main proponent of Nicene orthodoxy.
  - 2.2.3.3. We will read his work "On the Incarnation" and discuss it during the next class.

### 3. The Arian Controversy

#### 3.1. The teaching of Arius

- 3.1.1. Sometime around 318 Arius began to challenge the teaching of others - including Alexander - that Jesus was co-eternal with the Father. In contrast to the teaching that Jesus was One with the True God, and was Himself eternal, Arius and his followers began to assert "There was a time when he was not."
  - 3.1.1.1. The bishop of Alexandria, Alexander, clashed over several issues with Arius, who was one of the most prestigious and popular presbyters of the city. Although the points debated were many, the main issue at stake was whether the Word of God was coeternal with God. The phrase that eventually became the Arian motto, "there was when He was not," aptly focuses on the point at issue. - Gonzales, location 3322
- 3.1.2. Arius taught that "begetting" was the same as "creating" and therefore the Logos, while far greater than any other creatures, was still a created being nonetheless.
  - 3.1.2.1. He was already a popular preacher in Alexandria when he challenged his bishop Alexander's teaching that the Father and the Son possess equal eternity. Arius affirmed, "There was (once) when Christ was not." Understanding "begetting" as equivalent to "creating," Arius taught that Jesus Christ was not derived from the substance of the Father, but, as the first and highest of God's creations, became the instrument of all the rest of creation. - Ferguson, location 3733

- 3.1.2.2. Sometime around 318, Arius openly challenged teachers in Alexandria by asserting that the Word (Logos) who assumed flesh in Jesus Christ ( John 1:14) was not the true God and that he had an entirely different nature, neither eternal nor omnipotent. To Arius, when Christians called Christ God, they did not mean that he was deity except in a sort of approximate sense. He was a lesser being or half-God, not the eternal and changeless Creator. He was a created Being—the first created Being and the greatest, but nevertheless himself created. In explaining his position to Eusebius, the bishop at the empire’s capital of Nicomedia, Arius wrote, “The Son has a beginning, but . . . God is without beginning. - Shelley, location 1909
- 3.1.2.3. What Arius said was that, before anything else was made, the Word had been created by God. Alexander argued that the Word was divine, and therefore could not be created, but rather was coeternal with the Father. - Gonzales, location 3327
- 3.1.3. What was really at stake was the very nature of Jesus. Was Jesus really and truly God - or was He a created being? Thus, the heart of the faith was really at stake in this controversy.
  - 3.1.3.1. Although this may seem a very fine point, what was ultimately at stake was the divinity of the Word. Arius claimed that, strictly speaking, the Word was not God, but the first of all creatures. - Gonzales, location 3325
- 3.1.4. Arius was a very effective teacher, and also a great popularizer, so his ideas spread quickly. He and his followers also used popular tunes re-written with lyrics to teach Arianism. Thus, This became a huge controversy that engulfed Alexandria and then spread out other cities as well.
  - 3.1.4.1. Arius’ views were all the more popular because he combined an eloquent preaching style with a flair for public relations. In the opening stages of the conflict, he put ideas into jingles, Read more at location 1920
- 3.1.5. NOTE: This teaching of Arius should sound familiar. It is essentially the teaching of the Jehovah’s Witnesses today. Their teaching is Arianism revived.
- 3.2. The response of Alexander
  - 3.2.1. Alexander strongly disagreed with the teaching of Arius.
  - 3.2.2. It appears Alexander called a synod in Alexandria somewhere between 318-320 (the dates are disputed). This synod condemned the teaching of Arius, removed him from his position, and excommunicated him.
  - 3.2.3. Alexander then sent letters to some of his fellow bishops notifying them of the excommunication of Arius.
    - 3.2.3.1. Bishop Alexander secured a condemnation of Arius’s teaching at a synod in Alexandria (317 or 318) that sent a letter to other bishops concerning the exclusion of Arius from fellowship. - Ferguson, location 3738



#### **4. Constantine Intervenes**

- 4.1.** As we have seen, the Arian controversy was threatening to divide the entire Eastern Church. Thus it garnered the attention of Constantine, who had only recently defeated Licinius and become sole emperor of the Roman Empire. Constantine wanted the Church to be a force for unity in the Empire, and furthermore he was now a professed follower of Christ himself.
  - 4.1.1.** Thus, the local disagreement in Alexandria threatened to divide the entire Eastern church. Such was the state of affairs when Constantine, who had just defeated Licinius, decided to intervene. - Gonzales, location 3341
- 4.2.** Constantine initially sent a representative named Hosius to investigate. Hosius led a council in Antioch in early 325. This council condemned Eusebius of Caesarea (the famous church historian) for being an Arian sympathizer, formulated a creed in favor of Alexander's theology, and installed Eustathius - a strong opponent of Arius - as bishop of Antioch.
  - 4.2.1.** The issue came to the fore at a synod in Antioch in early 325. The synod condemned the Christology of Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, and two others; Eustathius, a strong opponent of Arius, became bishop of Antioch. - Ferguson, location 3741
- 4.3.** When the controversy continued to erupt, Constantine called for a meeting of bishops from across the empire (but especially in the East where the controversy was centered.) The council was to meet at Nicea, which was not far from Nicomedia, his current seat of government, and from Constantinople the future planned Capital. This meeting took place in 325.
  - 4.3.1.** Constantine decided to take a step that he had been considering for some time: he would call a great assembly or council of Christian bishops from all parts of the Empire. - Gonzales, location 3344
  - 4.3.2.** It was the year 325 when the bishops gathered in Nicaea, a city in Asia Minor within easy reach of Constantinople, for what later would be known as the First Ecumenical—that is, universal—Council. - Gonzales, location 3348
  - 4.3.3.** Constantine recognized that the explosive issue had to be defused. So, in 325, he called for a council to meet at Nicaea not far from Nicomedia in Asia Minor. - Shelley, location 1925
- 4.4.** Constantine not only called for the bishops to meet - he paid for their transportation. Furthermore, the meeting was held in his royal hall at Nicaea. Furthermore, the bishops often were able to dine with the Emperor. This was indeed a very different day from the times of persecution!
  - 4.4.1.** So he invited the bishops to come in May 325 to the royal palace at Nicaea. He offered the assistance of the imperial post in providing transportation to the meeting. Probably around 250 bishops responded. - Ferguson, location 3745
  - 4.4.2.** At dinner some of them lay on the same couch as the emperor, while others rested on cushions on both sides of him. Easily one could imagine this to be the kingdom of Christ or regard it as a dream rather than reality. - Shelley, location 1966

## 5. The Council of Nicaea

- 5.1. In early 325, a large group of bishops gathered to consider the questions arising from the Arian controversy, and to also handle a number of other matters. These bishops were drawn mainly from the East, but included bishops from all over the Empire, so that Nicaea is often called the first Ecumenical council of the Church.
  - 5.1.1. There were approximately three hundred, mostly from the Greek-speaking East, but also some from the West. - Gonzales, location 3351
  - 5.1.2. so he invited the bishops to come in May 325 to the royal palace at Nicaea. He offered the assistance of the imperial post in providing transportation to the meeting. Probably around 250 bishops responded. - Ferguson, location 3745
- 5.2. The atmosphere at the council certainly created quite a scene. Many of the bishops had suffered torture in the recent persecutions. Now the Emperor, rather than sitting in judgement sat in as a friendly observer - and had paid for the proceedings!
  - 5.2.1. In order to understand that event as those present saw it, it is necessary to remember that several of those attending the great assembly had recently been imprisoned, tortured, or exiled, and that some bore on their bodies the physical marks of their faithfulness. And now, a few years after such trials, these very bishops were invited to gather at Nicea, and the emperor covered their expenses. - Gonzales, location 3352
  - 5.2.2. The presence of bishops who showed the injuries sustained during the recent persecutions, now gathered under the favor and in the presence of the Roman emperor, was a moving experience. Constantine called for unity. - Ferguson, location 3747
  - 5.2.3. Most of the 300 or so bishops had fresh memories of the days of persecution. Many could show the scars of suffering and prison. One had lost an eye during the persecution. Another had lost the use of his hands under torture. But the days of suffering seemed over now. The bishops did not set out for Nicea secretly, as they used to do, fearing arrest. They did not painfully walk the long miles as once they did. They rode in comfort to the council, all their expenses paid, the guests of the emperor. - Shelley, location 1928
- 5.3. The council handled a great number of issues. They determined a universal policy regarding the question of the lapsed (those who had recanted faith under persecution), determined proper practices for the appointment of elders and bishops, and other administrative matters. But the major question that loomed over the gathering was the questions regarding the teaching of Arius.
  - 5.3.1. In this euphoric atmosphere, the bishops discussed the many legislative matters that had to be resolved after the end of persecution. They approved standard procedures for the readmission of the lapsed, for the election and ordination of presbyters and bishops, and regarding the order of precedence of various episcopal sees. But the most difficult issue that the Council had to face was the Arian controversy. - Gonzales, location 3368
  - 5.3.2. Other matters came before the assembled bishops. They approved the method for determining the date of Easter that would henceforth be observed in Christendom. They set policies for treating followers of Novatian, Melitius Antioch, and Paul of Samosata who returned to the church. - Ferguson, location 3800

- 5.4.** The debate of the views of Arius
- 5.4.1.** Ironically, since Arius was not a bishop he was not allowed to sit in the council. So it was his close friend and supporter Eusebius of Nicomedia who spoke for him and his position. Arius' followers were confident that when their ideas were presented all of the bishops would see their view was correct.
- 5.4.1.1.** Since Arius was not a bishop, he was not allowed to sit in the Council, and it was Eusebius of Nicomedia who spoke for him and for the position that he represented. This small group was convinced that what Arius taught was so patently correct that all that was needed was a clear exposition of the logic of the argument, and the assembly would vindicate Arius and rebuke Alexander for having condemned his teachings. - Gonzales, 3374
- 5.4.2.** The bulk of the argument offered by the Arian party were confessions of faith drawn from scriptural language. However, the other bishops recognized that these statements did not really get to the difference of interpretation between Arius and Alexander, and so the confessions were deemed inadequate.
- 5.4.2.1.** The supporters of Arius offered confessions of faith drawn from scriptural language, but since these did not address the difference of interpretation between Alexander and Arians like Eusebius of Nicomedia regarding the origin of Christ, they were inadequate. - Ferguson, location 3749
- 5.4.3.** It appears there were several distinct groups of bishops at the council. First, there was a party that were clearly Arian. Second, there was moderate group that thought Arius went to far, but that a compromise could be found. His ideas were not heretical. Third, there was a group who did not want any new words or ideas not directly stated in Scripture, and whose chief concern was peace. Fourth, there was another group that were convinced that Arianism was a direct threat to the heart of the Christian faith, and the Deity of the Son must be maintained. Fifth, there was a small group who disagreed with Arius, because they thought the Father and the Son were the same Person - they wanted to revive the older idea of monarchianism/modalism. Finally, most of the bishops from the West were not even that interested in the debate. To them it appeared to be an internal argument between Eastern followers of Origen, and they though Tertullian had already sufficiently answered this question years before - in God there were Three Persons but one Substance.
- 5.4.3.1.** The viewpoints on the doctrinal issue represented at the council may be listed as follows: (1) the convinced adherents of Arius's teaching led by Eusebius of Nicomedia; (2) the moderate subordinationists in the tradition of Origen who, although they would not have stated matters as sharply as Arius, did not see his teachings as dangerous, of whom Eusebius of Caesarea may be taken as representative; (3) conservatives hostile to new formulas and concerned with unity, many without theological education; (4) those who found Arius's teaching dangerous and wanted to outlaw it, such as Alexander and Hosius; and (5) the Monarchians, whose views were perceived by many as carrying an implicit Modalism, such as Eustathius of Antioch and Marcellus of Ancyra. - Ferguson, location 3751



- 5.4.3.2.** In direct opposition to the Arian party, there was another small group of bishops who were convinced that Arianism threatened the very core of the Christian faith, and that therefore it was necessary to condemn it in no uncertain terms. The leader of this group was Alexander of Alexandria. Among his followers was a young man who, being only a deacon, could not sit in the Council, but who would eventually become famous as the champion of Nicene orthodoxy: Athanasius of Alexandria. - Gonzales, location 3377
- 5.4.3.3.** Another small group—probably no more than three or four—held positions approaching “patripassianism,” that is, that the Father and the Son are the same, and that therefore the Father suffered the passion. These bishops agreed that Arianism was wrong, but their own doctrines were also rejected in the later course of the controversy, as the church began to clarify what it meant by Trinitarian doctrine. - Gonzales, location 3383
- 5.4.3.4.** Most of the bishops from the Latin-speaking West had only a secondary interest in the debate, which appeared to them as a controversy among eastern followers of Origen. For them, it was sufficient to declare that in God there were, as Tertullian had said long before, “three persons and one substance. - Gonzales, location 3381
- 5.4.4.** At the beginning, many of those present hope a compromise could be achieved. However, as the discussion continued Eusebius flatly stated that the Son, the Word/Logos of God, was no more than a mere creature. The highest of all creatures to be sure - but a created being nonetheless. Eusebius was sure that others would see this as well - but he was greatly mistaken. This was a major turning point in the debate.
- 5.4.4.1.** It seems that at the beginning of the sessions these bishops hoped to achieve a compromise that would make it possible to move on to other matters. A typical example of this attitude was Eusebius of Cesarea, the learned historian whose erudition gained him great respect among his fellow bishops. - Gonzales, location 3388
- 5.4.4.2.** From the report of those present, what changed matters was the exposition that Eusebius of Nicomedia made of his own views—which were also those of Arius. He seems to have been convinced that a clear statement of his doctrine was all that was needed to convince the assembly. But when the bishops heard his explanation, their reaction was the opposite of what Eusebius of Nicomedia had expected. The assertion that the Word or Son was no more than a creature, no matter how high a creature, provoked angry reactions from many of the bishops:Read more at location 3391
- 5.4.4.3.** The mood of the majority had now changed. Whereas earlier they hoped to deal with the issues at stake through negotiation and compromise, without condemning any doctrine, now they were convinced that they had to reject Arianism in the clearest way possible. - Gonzales, location 3396

- 5.4.5.** Once the council agreed that Arianism was to be rejected, the difficulty became how to do this. At first, attempt was made to use biblical words and phrases, but the problem was that the Arians were misinterpreting these very phrases, filling biblical words with foreign meanings. Thus the council would have to use other words to clearly define what was meant by Scripture, so that the ideas of the Arians were plainly rejected.
- 5.4.5.1.** At first the assembly sought to do this through a series of passages of Scripture. But it soon became evident that by limiting itself to biblical texts the Council would find it very difficult to express its rejection of Arianism in unmistakable terms. It was then decided to agree on a creed that would express the faith of the church in such a way that Arianism was clearly excluded. - Gonzales, location 3398
- 5.4.5.2.** An overwhelming majority of the bishops did not agree with Arius, but it was harder for them to agree on a positive statement of doctrine. - Ferguson, location 3757
- 5.4.5.3.** A word not found in Scripture was considered necessary because the Arians interpreted every scriptural phrase in accordance with their teaching, but in a way that the majority felt was inconsistent with the intended meaning of Scripture. - Ferguson, location 3768
- 5.4.6.** The specific word which became the source of discussion was the Greek word homoousios (or in Latin, consubstantialis), which means “of the same Being/substance.” The reason that this term was proposed it that it would clearly reject the central tenet of Arianism - that the Son was not God, but was rather a creature. However, some did not like the word homoousios because it was thought it would leave the door open to monarchianism/modalism (that God is only One Person, assuming different modes/titles at different times) and partipassianism (that the Father Himself suffered on the cross). In fact, this would become a problem that had to be addressed at a later council. However, it was determined that homoousios was the best word to describe the central problem at hand - was Jesus One with the Father or not.
- 5.4.6.1.** The key word, however, and the one that was the subject of much controversy, is homoousios, which is usually translated as “of the same substance.” This was intended to convey that the Son was just as divine as the Father. But it also provided the main reason for later resistance to the Creed of Nicea, for it seemed to imply that there was no distinction between Father and Son, and thus to leave the door open for partipassianism. - Gonzales, location 3424
- 5.4.6.2.** The major concern in Eusebius’s report, and no doubt in the minds of many others, was the addition to the creed of the Greek word homoousios (in Latin, consubstantialis), “of the same substance.” Eusebius explains the word, “which it has not been our custom to use,” as affirming that the Son of God “bears no resemblance to creatures,” was like the Father “in every way,” and did not derive from any other substance than that of the Father himself. - Ferguson, location 3761

- 5.4.6.3. The council adopted the word homoousios in order to eliminate Arian teaching, as well as to affirm that Jesus Christ was fully God, sharing in some way the same divine nature as the Father. - Ferguson, location 3766
- 5.4.6.4. A word not found in Scripture was considered necessary because the Arians interpreted every scriptural phrase in accordance with their teaching, but in a way that the majority felt was inconsistent with the intended meaning of Scripture. - Ferguson, location 3768
- 5.4.6.5. Homoousios was a word the Arians could not accept, and it was approved for this negative reason. Only as the post-council debates proceeded did the word come to acquire a more precise meaning as a safeguard of monotheism, the oneness of substance. - Ferguson, location 3773
- 5.4.7. After a lot of debate, Constantine appears to have pressed the council for a unified decision. The council therefore adopted the term homoousios and included it in a creed that was intended to define the orthodox, catholic understanding of the person and work of Jesus. (Eusebius says that it was Constantine who said the term homoousios should be included, but it is highly unlikely that the term had been introduced by him - this may have been done by Bishop Hosius of Cordova in Spain. However it was probably his insistence that caused the debate to cease and the opinion of the majority that homoousios was the best term to be adopted.)
  - 5.4.7.1. Constantine suggested that the word homoousios—to which we shall return—be included in the creed. Eventually, the assembly agreed on a formula that clearly rejected Arianism:Read more at location 3402
  - 5.4.7.2. Eusebius says that the emperor insisted on the addition of the word homoousios. This is likely the case, but it is questionable whether the initiative lay with him, since many of the bishops themselves did not understand the issues. - Ferguson, location 3777
  - 5.4.7.3. Into it they inserted an extremely important series of phrases: “True God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father.” The expression homo ousion, “one substance,” was probably introduced by Bishop Hosius of Cordova (in today’s Spain). - Shelley, location 1946

## 6. The Creed and Decisions of the Council of Nicaea and Their Importance

### 6.1. The original Nicene Creed which was adopted read:

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,  
begotten from the Father, only-begotten,  
that is, from the substance of the Father,  
God from God,  
light from light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten not made,  
of one substance with the Father,  
through Whom all things came into being,  
things in heaven and things on earth,  
Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down,  
and became incarnate  
and became man,  
and suffered,  
and rose again on the third day,  
and ascended to the heavens,  
and will come to judge the living and dead,  
And in the Holy Spirit.  
But as for those who say, There was when He was not,  
and, Before being born He was not,  
and that He came into existence out of nothing,  
or who assert that the Son of God is of a different hypostasis or substance,  
or created,  
or is subject to alteration or change  
- these the Catholic and apostolic Church anathematizes.

**6.1.1.** Notice that this creed is very similar to what we commonly call the Nicene creed, but there are a few differences. The Creed usually called the Nicene Creed is actually the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, which is an altered form approved at the Council in Constantinople in 381. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is longer, and adds a number of affirmations after the phrase “and in the Holy Spirit.” It also does not include the anathema’s at the end which were aimed at Arians.

**6.1.2.** This Creed was agreed upon by almost every single bishop present (perhaps only two refused to sign), with the notable exception of Eusebius of Nicomedia. Those who refused to sign were deemed heretical and were deposed. Constantine then added a line urging that the deposed bishops be banished from their cities. This last addition seemed small but set a bad precedent of the civil magistrate using their power to enforce orthodoxy.

- 6.1.2.1. The bishops gathered at Nicea hoped that the creed on which they had agreed, together with the clear anathemas appended to it, would put an end to the Arian controversy, and proceeded to sign it. Very few—Eusebius of Nicomedia among them—refused to sign. These the assembly declared to be heretical, and deposed them. - Gonzales, location 3427
  - 6.1.2.2. All but two bishops present signed the creed; and these two, along with Arius himself, were soon afterward sent into exile. - Shelley, location 1961
  - 6.1.2.3. After Nicea, however, first Constantine and then his successors stepped in again and again to banish this churchman or exile that one. Control of church offices too often depended on control of the emperor's favor. - Shelley, location 1970
  - 6.1.2.4. When one reads the formula as approved by the bishops at Nicea, it is clear that their main concern was to reject any notion that the Son or Word—Logos—was a creature, or a being less divine than the Father. - Gonzales, location 3417
- 6.2. The acceptance of the Nicene Creed has been universal among orthodox Christians. Despite other major differences, it is affirmed by virtually all Christian bodies in the East and the West, including Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant groups. Virtually no other writings or creeds outside of Scripture enjoy as wide support as the Nicene Creed (especially in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan form.)
  - 6.2.1. This formula, with a number of later additions, and without the anathemas of the last paragraph, provided the basis for what is now called the “Nicene Creed,” which is the most universally accepted Christian creed. The “Apostles’ Creed,” being Roman in origin, is known and used only in churches of Western origin—the Roman Catholic Church, and those stemming from the Protestant Reformation. The Nicene Creed, on the other hand, is acknowledged both by these Western churches and by those of the East—Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, and the like. - Gonzales, location 3412
  - 6.2.2. After more days of inconclusive debate the impatient emperor intervened to demand that this statement be adopted. Thus, there emerged that Nicene Creed, which to this day is the standard of orthodoxy in the Roman, Eastern, Anglican, and some other churches: Shelley, location 1949
- 6.3. The lasting importance and legacy of the Nicene Council
  - 6.3.1. Nicea was the first “universal” council of the church
    - 6.3.1.1. Although not all bishops were present (and the West was far less represented than the East), Nicea was the first time that so many leaders from around the world had gathered. This set the pattern for several future councils that would have to deal with difficult and divisive issues.
      - 6.3.1.1.1. Nicaea was the first ecumenical (“universal”) council.. It was unprecedented for Rome to send legates to an Eastern council, and although the number of Western bishops was small (the names of only five, including Hosius, plus the two presbyters representing the Roman bishop, are known), their presence gave a

consciousness of a truly universal representation. -  
Ferguson, location 3808-3811

**6.3.2.** Nicea marks a crucial development in doctrinal history.

**6.3.2.1.** At Nicea, the leaders of the church really labored together to define essential Christian beliefs and to refute heretical ideas which were clothed in Christian garb. To do this, these leaders employed non-biblical terms (which had been done before), and also defined not only what was believed, but also what was denied. And all of this was necessary, not for new converts to the faith, but so that bishops did no err in their doctrine!

**6.3.2.1.1.** Nicaea marked a crucial development in doctrinal history... Instead of being summaries of catechetical instruction to be confessed at baptism, as they had been, creeds in the fourth century became formulations of councils. At Nicaea it was not catechumens who needed a creed, but bishops. -  
Ferguson, location 3824-3825

**6.3.2.1.2.** The use of nonbiblical language in the Nicene Creed was not so great in significance as many then and since have thought. The problem was safeguarding a biblical thought. - Ferguson, location 3827

**6.3.2.1.3.** It is true that any positive affirmation implies a rejection of its opposite, but Nicaea took an important step in its language of exclusion, a step whose consequences were made more severe. -  
Ferguson, location 3834

**6.3.3.** Nicea introduced the idea of civil involvement in church affairs.

**6.3.3.1.** Constantine not only called for the council, but also underwrote many of the expenses, spoke a couple of times at the council, and suggested that the deposed bishops be exiled from their cities. Once this Pandora's box was opened, future Emperors and political figures would almost always try to intervene to impose their will upon the church. To be sure, many have vastly overblown Constantine's role at Nicea, but the seeds were definitely sown there.

**6.3.3.1.1.** Nicaea served as a symbol of imperial involvement in church affairs.... The age of persecution was over and the age of Christendom—Christianity as a religion favored by government—had begun. - Ferguson, location 3817-3820

**6.3.3.1.2.** But Constantine added his own sentence to that of the bishops, banishing the deposed bishops from their cities. He probably intended only to avoid further unrest. But this addition of a civil sentence to an ecclesiastical one had serious consequences, for it established a precedent for the intervention of secular authority in behalf of what was considered orthodox doctrine. - Gonzales, location 3430

**6.3.4.** Surprisingly, the Nicene Council, declarations, and Creed did not resolve the problem with the Arian heresy. The Emperor would actually vacillate over time, and the fortunes of Arianism would ebb and flow. It was not really until almost 50 years later that the end of the Arian heresy was finally seen - but that will be covered in the next session as we look at the life and writings of Athanasius.

NEXT CLASS: Saturday, August 1

NEXT TIME: THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF ATHANASIUS.

To prepare, please read the ending sections of Chapter 17 of Gonzales.

Also, please read Athanasius "On the Incarnation" and the introduction CS Lewis wrote to this pivotal text. Finally, read Athanasius' Paschal Letter from 367 AD. WE will mainly discuss the writings, with a brief introduction to the life of Athanasius and the controversies that followed the council of Nicea.

The writings may be found for free on the internet at the following places:

CS Lewis introduction

<http://silouanthompson.net/library/early-church/on-the-incarnation/introduction/>

Text of On The Incarnation

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/athanasius/incarnation.pdf>

Paschal Letter, 367 AD

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf204.xxv.iii.iii.xxv.html>