

{ Lecture 11 }

CONTROVERSIES AND COUNCILS
From Nicaea to Constantinople III

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*(*Notes for this section primarily adapted from Stitzinger's class syllabus)*

The Councils

1. Council of Nicea (325)

REVIEW

a. Introduction

- 1) Also known as New Constantinople, Nicea is located near Nicomedia and Constantinople—a very important council.
- 2) The issue—the Deity of Christ.

Resolving the question of how Christ's deity can be preserved (on the one hand), and the unity of the Godhead can be preserved on the other

b. The Position

- 1) **Hetro-ousios**—Different substance. Logos (Christ) is not co-eternal, co-essential with, or co-equal with the Father. Psalm 2:7; Acts 7:33. He was a son born, did not always exist. A "logical" position; "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 subsistence from nothing." The position of Arius (256-336) and Eusebius of Nicomedia. Arius was a presbyter of the Antioch Church.
- 2) **Homo-ousios**--Same substance. Logos (Christ) is co-eternal with the Father, never to change. Mal. 3:6, Heb. 13:8 and I Cor. 1:24. The position of Alexander of Alexandria, Hosius of Cordova, and Athanasius (an archdeacon who was small, young and brilliant and was not permitted a voice or seat at the council.) Despite this he had the most zeal and promise.

- 3) **Homoi-ousios**--Similar substance. Logos is of like substance with the Father. This position held to a subordinate Trinity teaching Christ's nature was divine but not deity. Rather than co-eternal, Christ was viewed as an act or event.

c. The Council

- 1) The disputing first led to a council called by Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria. 100 bishops of Egypt attended who excommunicated Arius and his followers (Eusebius of Nicomedia.)
- 2) More disputing occurred causing the Emperor Constantine to call a major council in Nicea. 318 bishops attended along with presbyters and deacons—totaled 2,000 in all. The event lasted 41 days. 18 Arian bishops came.
- 3) The emperor wavered back and forth as the two major positions were debated. It became obvious that this compromise position would not pass as Homo-ousios supporters insisted on the inclusion of this word.

c. The Results of the Council

- 1) The council thus adopted the *Nicene Creed* with its short but direct statement of deity but which lacked precision. It did not speak to the question of the deity of the Holy Spirit giving rise to controversy and subordinationism in the Trinity being taught in the Eastern Church.
Constantine's purpose was church unity—not theological purity!
- 2) The position of Arius was rejected with only two Egyptian bishops and Arius not signing the creed. These were banished to Illyria. Arius' books were burned.
- 3) The date of Easter was appointed.
- 4) Bishops of Rome, Antioch and Alexandria called metropolitans (high authority.)
- 5) Did not settle the controversy.
 - a) Athanasius became Bishop of Alexandria and the leading spokesman for the orthodox view. Due to opposition from Arius, he was deposed and restored five times until his death.
 - b) Arius was still very influential.

- c) While the council passed the Nicene creed; a statement of orthodoxy; many were still leaning toward the middle position of Eusebius.

2. Council of Constantinople I (381)

a. The Issue:

- 1) The Arian controversy is still the issue though Arius died in 336. This was partially due to the popularity of the semi-Arian view.
- 2) Between 335 and 360, at least eight smaller councils and a number of synods were held to deal with the problem.
- 3) A new issue—Apollinarianism—which taught that Christ had no human nature.

b. The Positions

- 1) **Arianism** -- though intellectually weak, was well-represented with bishops. Arians (Eudoxians) and semi-Arians (Pneumatomachi) were both at issue.
- 2) **Apollinarianism** -- Apollinarius, Bishop of Laodicea, bitterly opposed Arius affirming the full deity of Christ. He nevertheless injected a new problem teaching that Christ had deity, but in humanity Christ had only body—no soul/spirit. Thus, Christ lacked a human nature, having instead the "Divine Logos," and only having the flesh of a human body.
- 3) **Orthodox Position** -- supporting the Nicene Creed dominated the council. This position was strongly supported by the Cappadocian Fathers; Basil the Great of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzum, and Gregory of Nyssa. These brilliant theologian/philosophers argued successfully for years before the council, devastating the Arian position.

c. The Council

- 1) Called by the emperor Theodosius I who himself was educated in the Nicene faith. Prior to the council he had required all subjects to confess the orthodox faith and threatened all heretics with punishment.
- 2) 150 orthodox bishops and 36 heretical bishops attended.
- 3) Lasted 3 months

d. The Results

- 1) Affirmed the Nicene position of full deity of Christ. This marked the final victory of Orthodoxy. After this time only a few barbarian peoples of Gaul and Spain were affected.
- 2) Apollinarianism was condemned, safeguarding the humanity of Christ. This condemnation followed the earlier condemnation of the Alexandrian Council of 362. The significance of this council was that the problem of the two natures received its first real airing. The issue of the two natures is still confused and at places incorrect. Clarification was still needed.
- 3) The creed adopted by this council is still known as the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed*. It was improved, especially with respect to the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures. This creed gradually replaced the earlier creed in the churches. Like the earlier Nicene Creed, it did not contain the *fili*
- 4) *oque* clause, “and the Son”, (see note below). A few have suggested that the N-C Creed actually comes out of Chalcedon in 451 but there is strong evidence that it was in existence from 381.

Note: The Filioque clause was added to the N-C Creed by the Western Church at the Synod of Toledo in 589 to prevent *subordinationism* which was creeping into the Eastern Church. The growing subordinationism of the Eastern Church led to Eastern rejection of the clause. The clause establishes the *consubstantiality* of the three persons of the Godhead. While the filioque clause was added in 589, the Western Church did not use the Creed with the filioque until the 11th century. When they did so, it caused the great schism of East and West, ending then relative harmony that existed until the 9th century and precipitating the split in 1054.

The Scriptures clearly teach deity of the Spirit and associate Him with the Father and the Son (John 15:26; Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6). To say the Spirit proceeds from the Son alone and the Son proceeds from the Father alone, is to subordinate the Spirit and the Son.

- 5) Affirmed that the order of patriarchs was first Rome, then Constantinople, then Alexandria (still no papal idea.)
- 6) Condemned both Novatians and Montanists.

3. Council of Ephesus (431)

a. The Issue

- 1) The Alexandrian church began using the title “theotokos” to refer to Mary, in order to emphasize that Jesus was fully God at His birth.
- 2) The Antiochenes objected to the term because it emphasized Christ’s deity over His humanity.

Moreover, it had the potential to create a wrong impression about Mary.

b. The Positions

- 1) **Theotokos** - Mary bore God. When Christ was born and took on human form, He was God-man -- the idea of the incarnation in which Christ had both human and divine natures (deity and humanity.)

This position was accused of mixing and confusing the two natures (closer to one divine nature.)

In addition, it created the potential danger of venerating Mary to an unbiblical status (as evidenced in later Roman Catholics).

Supported first by Proclus of Constantinople and later Cyril of Alexandria. Fighting was bitter and wicked.

- 2) **Anthropotokos** - Mary bore man (Jesus). The idea that Mary gave birth to a man whom the logos began to dwell in after His baptism. This position stressed the humanity of Christ. Represented by Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428) of Antioch.
- 3) **Christotokos** - Mary bore Christ. Similar to Anthropotokos but according to its main proponent, Nestorius, it was a middle position. The idea that Mary gave birth to Christ who was both God and man. He argued that the eternal God could not be born and thus God assumed the human nature. There was thus a duality of natures which were conjoined together but not mixed or confused. Critics claimed that Nestorius overemphasized the separation between the two natures of Christ, thus implying that Christ was two separate persons.

b. The Council

- 1) Called by Theodosius II.
- 2) Nestorius was vehemently opposed by Cyril. (This was the outworking of the rivalry between Antioch/Constantinople and Alexandria.)

- 3) The council was opened with only the 60 bishops of Cyril there. Nestorius was banished, anathematized, deposed, excommunicated, and exiled to a monastery in Antioch before any Pro-Nestorian, Syrian bishops could arrive (they were late).
- 4) Upon the Syrian bishops' arrival, a meeting was called where Cyril was excommunicated. There was some later reconciliation between the Syrian bishop, John of Antioch, and Cyril.
- 5) The Council thus affirmed *theotokos* but little was actually accomplished as Nestorius went back to a large, independent following. The council was only negative, condemning Nestorius and lacked anything positive.
- 6) Nestorius was an honest man and probably not far from the truth! (Schaff III, p 740)

4. **Council of Chalcedon (451)** (*Note: This resulted in the establishment of "Hypostatic Union"*)

a. Introduction

- 1) A result of the lack of accomplishment at Ephesus. No positive statement of refutation had emerged from Ephesus.
- 2) Both the Antiochan (Nestorian) and Alexandrian (Cyril) positions were drifting into stranger error.

b. The Positions

- 1) **Monophysite Party** - viewed Christ in the incarnation as having only one nature, the nature of God that became flesh and man. Hence, God is born, God suffered, God was crucified and died. The deification of the human in Christ, confounding the two natures. Cyril died in 444 and thus the position was represented by his archdeacon Dioscurus (intellectually and theologically weak.) Also associated with this view was Eutyches. This position was known as Eutychianism.
- 2) **Nestorian Party** - views Christ as having a double personality of human and divine. The view stressed the unfused union of two natures in one person, producing a dual personality. This was a moderation of the older Nestorian position and stressed the separation of the two natures. Main proponent was Theodoret (c.393-458).

3) **Middle position** - offered by Leo, Bishop of Rome

- a) Must recognize both the true humanity and true deity of Christ.
- b) Two distinct natures - one personality - Christ perfect in both. The Hypostatic Union-- the union of Jesus= divine and human natures in one person (Hypostatic having to do with nature or essence).
- c) Born of the Virgin Mary.
- d) Two natures without confusion, change, division or separation.

c. The Council

- 1) Prior to the council, a second council met at Ephesus where the position of Cyril was put forth with such fanaticism that Theodoret was badly mistreated and the middle position of Leo was not represented. It has been known in history as the "Council of Robbers" or the "Robber Synod."
- 2) Leo I, Bishop of Rome (not emperor), called for a general council to settle the issue. 500-600 bishops attended from October 8– November 1 in Chalcedon.
- 3) Leo I sat in Rome from 440-461 and displayed ability, boldness and strength not seen before in Rome.
- 4) Leo's *Tome* was presented which outlined his middle position of "two natures, without confusion, without severance, and without division."

d. The Result

- 1) The bishops overwhelmingly accepted this position as "the faith of the Fathers", the orthodox position. The emperor was present and enforced the decision as law.
- 2) All Eutychian bishops were banished and their books burned. Although their view was not stopped, Chalcedonian Christology became the orthodox doctrine of Christendom. Later councils gave precision to what was laid down here.
- 3) While Chalcedon did not have complete acceptance, it did form the bedrock of future thought. For this reason, it is often appealed to

as foundational and decisive. (The Hypostatic Union of Christ -- 2 natures; 1 person) Schaff III, p 768

- 4) Bishops listed in order of importance: Rome, Constantinople (New Rome), Alexandria.

5. Council of Constantinople II (553)

a. The Issue

- 1) After Chalcedon, some continued to debate the integrity of Christ's human nature
- 2) The *monophysites* persisted with their idea of one nature after the incarnation (2 before) as taught by Eutyches.
- 3) The orthodox (Chalcedonian) position also continued with strength.
- 4) Monophysites broke out in bloody fighting, mostly in the oriental church.
- 5) Monophysites raged in various factions including the Severians, Phantasiasts, and the Julianists.

b. Positions

- 1) **Monophysites** - The continued followers of Eutyches who insisted on one nature in Christ, clad in human flesh—a composite nature. These said Chalcedon lead to two persons; two sons of God. Their liturgical shibboleth--"God has been crucified."
- 2) **Dyophysites** - Adherents to the Council of Chalcedon—one person; two natures. This position was supported by followers of Leontius of Byzantium, who taught Christ's humanity was impersonal and who also brought into the Chalcedonian tradition the Monophysite emphasis on the unity of Christ. He stressed *enhypostasia*—the humanity of Christ was made personal by its union with deity (Antiochian Theology).

Enhypostasia made Christ's humanity impersonal (that is, less than whole) finding its subsistence in the divine logos—a fusing of the natures.

c. The Council

- 1) The emperor, Justinian I (527-565), was at first an admirer of Chalcedon, but was turned toward the Monophysitic position by his wife, Theodora, a strong supporter.
- 2) In his *Three Chapters*, Justinian strongly condemned the Nestorians and also condemned those who wrote against Cyril.
- 3) Justinian then called a council in 553 to end the controversy. There were 164 bishops meeting in eight sessions.
- 4) The council supported the *Three Chapters* condemning the Nestorians (Antiochian Theology) saying only, "God was crucified; one of the Trinity has suffered." The net result was that the dyophysitic position of Chalcedon was given a monophysitic interpretation, confusing the human with the divine. There was no clear decision.

d. The Result

- 1) The controversy continued with Chalcedonian dyophysitism reacting to form dyothelitism.
- 2) The monophysites left the council to continue their belief as a number of sects in the East. These included the Jacobites, Abyssinians, and Armenians. This produced a distinction in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

5. Council of Constantinople III (680)

a. Introduction

- 1) Called as a result of forty more years of fighting over the nature of Christ.
- 2) Some suggest the council was politically motivated in an effort to unite the earlier monophysites with the orthodox church.

b. Positions

- 1) **Monothelites** -- Growing out of the Monophysitic position of one nature of Christ, the human and divine wills of Christ are merged into one will. Supported by Sergius (610-638) and Macarius, patriarch of Antioch.
- 2) **Dyothelites** -- Two distinct, inseparable natures in Christ and, therefore, two separate wills—the divine and the human. The Orthodox, Catholic view (Chalcedon).

c. The Council

- 1) Called by the Emperor Constantine IV with the support of the Pope (Agatho).
- 2) There was no real contest as the Monothelitic view was not well substantiated and bitterly denounced.
- 3) The Monothelitic position was anathematized by the council along with Pope Honorius I (625-638) because he supported it. A strong argument from history against papal infallibility! Some Monothelitic followers went on to become tri-theists e.g. John Aseunages
- 4) Dyothelitism was supported affirming two wills—the human will is subordinate to the divine will—the two walking in perfect harmony.

Charts of the Councils (by Kenny Fox)

Ecumenical Councils of the Apostolic Church

Council Name	Date	Key Participants	Central Focus	Major Outcomes
JERUSALEM	49/50	Elders at Jerusalem church Apostles Paul and Barnabas Peter James	Should Gentile Christians be circumcised according to the Law in order to be saved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recorded in Acts 15 & Galatians 2. • Judaizers were forbidden to trouble the Gentiles with keeping the Law. • Gentile Christians must abstain from: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Things sacrificed to idols. 2. Eating meat containing blood. 3. Animals that have been strangled. 4. Fornication.

Ecumenical Councils of the Post-Nicene Church

Council Name	Date	Key Participants	Central Focus	Major Outcomes
NICEA	325	Arius Alexander Eusebius of Nicomedia Eusebius of Caesarea Hosius Athanasius	Relationship between the Father and the Son	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nicene Creed composed, which stated Jesus was <i>homoousios</i> (Son is coequal, coeternal, and consubstantial with the Father). • Arius (priest from North Africa, who proposed that Jesus was a created being) was condemned. • Established date for Easter.
CONSTANTINOPLE I	381	Meletius Gregory of Nazianzus Gregory of Nyssa	Holy Spirit's relationship with the Father and the Son (<i>filioque</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revised Nicene Creed to include Holy Spirit as coequal, coeternal, and consubstantial with the Father and Son. • Ended Trinitarian controversy. • Affirmed deity of Holy Spirit. • Apollinarianism (Jesus had a human body but a divine mind/spirit) is condemned.
EPHESUS	431	Cyril Nestorius	Nestorius said Jesus had two separate parts (One part divine the other part human)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nestorianism (Jesus existed as two persons, human and divine, rather than two natures of one divine person) is condemned. • The term <i>Theotokos</i> (mother of God) is applied to the Virgin Mary. • All creeds banned beside Nicene. • Cyril (Alexandrian school) defeated Nestorius (Constantinople school).
CHALCEDON	451	Pope Leo I Dioscurus Eutyches	Unity between the Two natures of Christ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affirmed that Christ two natures (deity and humanity) exist “without confusion, change, division, and separation.”

CONSTANTINOPLE II	553	Patriarch Eutychius of Constantinople	“Three Chapters” Controversy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The “Three Chapters” were condemned (Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus, and Ibas of Edessa) in order to placate the Monophysites.
CONSTANTINOPLE III	680-681	George I Pope Agatho	Debate b/w the human and divine wills of Christ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monothelism (natures of Christ did not matter because He only had one will) was condemned. • Achieved Christological unity with Rome and Constantinople.
NICEA II	787	Patriarch Tarasios of Constantinople Papal legates for Pope Adrian I	Iconoclastic controversy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorized veneration of icons and statues. • Especially those of Christ, Mary, holy angels, and the saints.

Ecumenical Councils of the Medieval Church

Council Name	Date	Key Participants	Central Focus	Major Outcomes
LATERAN I	1123	Pope Callistus II	Investiture controversy (conflict b/w church and emperor)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concordat of Worms is confirmed. • Priests are forbidden to marry. • Crusaders are granted indulgences. • Simony (buying an office or position within the church) is condemned.
LATERAN II	1139	Pope Innocent II	Internal schism caused by Antipope Anacletus II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Followers of Anacletus II are anathematized. • Lateran I decisions confirmed. • Regulated clerical dress.
LATERAN III	1179	Pope Alexander III	Schisms caused by the Cathari & Waldenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catharism & Waldensianism condemned. • Cardinals can only elect the new pope by a two-thirds vote.
LATERAN IV	1215	Pope Innocent III	Investiture controversy (conflict b/w church and laity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Est. doctrine of transubstantiation. • Est. papal primacy. • Est. the Inquisition. • Confession at least once a year.
LYONS I	1245	Pope Innocent IV	Discuss the emperor and the crusades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emperor Frederick II condemned. • Planned for a new crusade (the Seventh Crusade).
LYONS II	1274	Pope Gregory X James I of Aragon	Conquest of Holy Land and union b/w the eastern church and the western church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church reaffirmed the filioque clause. • The Eastern Church (Rome) and the Western Church (Constantinople) attempted to reunite. • Tithe to pay for crusade to Holy Land.
VIENNE	1311-1312	Pope Clement V	Knights Templar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knights Templar (military order that escorted pilgrims from Europe to Jerusalem) was disband.

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New crusade attempted but failed. • Beguines & Beghards condemned.
PISA	1409	Peter D'Ailly Peter Philargi Guy de Maillesec	Papal Schism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not official ecumenical council. • Deposed Gregory XII of Rome and Benedict XIII of Avignon and appointed Alexander V, leaving the church with three popes.
CONSTANCE	1414-1418	John XXIII Sigismund Peter D'Ailly John Gerson	Papal Schism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deposed all three popes and elected Pope Marin V. • Condemned & burned John Huss at the stake.
BASEL/ FERRARA	1431-1449	Pope Martin V Pope Eugene IV Julian Cesarini Nicholas of Cusa	Problem with Hussites and the schism b/w east and west church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pope reasserted his authority. • Settled dispute with Hussites. • Reconciliation b/w the east and west was reached but short-lived. • Doctrine of purgatory established.

Ecumenical Councils of the Modern Roman Catholic Church

Council Name	Date	Key Participants	Central Focus	Major Outcomes
COUNCIL OF TRENT	1545-1563	Pope Paul III Pope Julius III Pope Pius IV James Laynez Giovanni Morone	Protestant Reformation and church reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tradition equal to Scripture. • Vulgate is official Bible of church. • Original sin and justification by faith alone were rejected. • Catholic Church possessed correct interpretation of the Bible.
FIRST VATICAN COUNCIL	1869-1870	Pope Pius IX Henry Manning Karl J. Hefele Felix Dupanloup	Papal infallibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the pope speaks on matters of faith and morals (<i>ex cathedra</i>), what he says is considered infallible and binding on the universal church.
SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL	1962-1965	Pope John XXIII Pope Paul VI Karl Rahner Hans Küng	Updating church in faith and life (<i>aggiornamento</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bible translation/reading encouraged. • Veneration of Mary. • Protestants labeled "separated brethren." • Dialogue encouraged between other faiths. • Catholic Church is reaffirmed as the only way of salvation.

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