

OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY IN 36 ILLUSTRATED LECTURES

LECTURE 10 – COUNCILS AND CREEDS TO 451

We'll start with a prayer from the period to be studied.

O God, light of the hearts that see you, life of the souls that love you, strength of the thoughts that seek you, from whom to be turned away is to fall, to whom to be turned back is to rise again, and in whom to abide is to stand firm for ever; grant us now your grace and blessing, as we offer up our prayers, and though we are unworthy to approach you, or to ask anything of you, hear and answer us for the sake of our great high priest and advocate, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Augustine (354-430), *Soliloquia* 1.3.

The rest of this page is an outline of this lecture.

1. INTRODUCTION
2. APOSTLES' CREED
3. COUNCIL OF NICAEA AND CREED OF NICAEA, 325
 - 3.1 Arian Controversy
 - 3.2 First Ecumenical Council - at Nicaea
 - 3.3 Creed of Nicaea
 - 3.4 *homoousios* (of one substance) or *homoiousios* (of similar substance)?

TOPIC –LIFE OF ATHANASIUS (c296-373)

- 3.5 Arian controversy (318-381) was complicated by four factors

4. OVERVIEW OF THE YEARS 318 TO 451
 - 4.1 Three overlapping debates
 - 4.2 Three Cappadocian Fathers
 - 4.3 The Nicene Creed - agreed at the Council of Constantinople in 381
- 5 THE TWO NATURES OF CHRIST
 - 5.1 Council of Chalcedon (451)
 - 5.2 The 'Definition' Of Chalcedon (451)
 - 5.3 Monophysite (one nature) and Nestorian (two nature) churches

6. ATHANASIAN CREED

In preparation, read Cairns, 125-131; Lion, 145 (Athanasius), 153 (Apostles' Creed), 164-172 (Council of Nicaea); Vos, 40-42; Lane, 33-35 (Cappadocian Fathers), 35-36 (Council of Constantinople), 52-3 (Apostles' Creed) and 50-52 (Council of Chalcedon).

Olson, skim-read through as much as possible of 129-30 (Apostles' Creed), 141-157 (Arius and Nicaea), 157-160 (Councils generally), 161-172 (Athanasius), 173-195 (Cappadocians), 195-6 (Council of Constantinople and Nicene Creed), 197-221 (Person of Christ), 222-235 (Council of Chalcedon).

1. INTRODUCTION

If you attend an Anglican or a Lutheran or a similar church, then on most Sundays, as part of the service, the congregation will stand and will recite together what is called the Apostles' Creed – 'I believe in...'

What are creeds and why do we use them? The word 'creed' comes from a Latin word *credo*, 'I believe'. In reciting a creed, we are saying, 'This is what we believe ...' In the Early Church, when many were illiterate, it was important to repeat and to repeat a creed until everyone know it from memory.

Many Christians now, including Pentecostals, Baptists, Church of Christ and others, don't use creeds and some don't believe in having creeds – they say they are unnecessary because it's all in Scripture. Now, Scripture is our only authority, but it can be helpful – not essential, but helpful – to set out a statement of faith. Those who don't believe in reciting creeds still accept the doctrines in them.

We're going to look at five Creeds and how they came into being:

<u>Creed</u>	<u>Council</u>	<u>at stake</u>
Apostles' Creed	in common use by 200	no issue
Creed of Nicaea	Council of Nicaea, 325	Father and Son
Nicene Creed	Council of Constantinople, 381	Trinity
'Definition' of Chalcedon	Council of Chalcedon, 451	Natures of Christ
Athanasian Creed	Authorship uncertain, c500	Devotional

2. APOSTLES' CREED (Cairns, 114; Lane, 52-53)

This is the first creed we know about (apart from some very early 'confessions of faith' in the New Testament itself). Unlike the others we're going to look at, it was not the product of a Council, or a controversy, but it developed naturally, from c150 to c200, as the Church in the city of Rome prepared converts to the Christian faith for baptism. We see this by comparing what happened at baptism with the Apostles' Creed - take the narrative out of column one and you get the essentials of column two.

Baptism at Rome c200 (Lion, 116-7)

Apostles' Creed (Lion, 117)

<p>When the person being baptized goes down into the water, he who baptizes him, putting his hand on him, shall say: 'Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty?' And the person being baptized shall say: 'I believe.' Then holding his hand on his head, he shall baptize him once.</p> <p>And then he shall say: 'Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born by the Holy Spirit from the Virgin Mary, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was dead and buried,</p>	<p>I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth,</p> <p>and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried, [he descended into</p>
--	---

<p>and rose again the third day, alive from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the living and the dead?’</p> <p>And when he says: ‘I believe’, he is baptized again.</p> <p>And again he shall say: ‘Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, in the holy church, and the resurrection of the body?’ The person being baptized shall say: ‘I believe’, and then he is baptized a third time.</p>	<p>hades]¹, on the third day, he was raised from the dead, he ascended into the heavens, and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from where he will come to judge the living and the dead.</p> <p>I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic Church; [the communion of saints], the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and eternal life.</p>
---	---

Note the questions which uncovered and excluded Gnostics (whom we looked at in lecture 4, and who, you remember, believed (1) that the true God was not the creator of the world and (2) that he could not have come in human form. Imagine that you have Gnostic ideas, and you’ve applied for membership of the local Christian church. The interviewing office-bearers take you through the Apostles’ Creed and ... (read in your own time through it and decide which statements you, as a Gnostic, could not affirm).

Note, in the last paragraph of the Creed, the phrase ‘the catholic Church’. Remember how Ignatius (we met him in Lecture 2, writing letters to various churches about church leadership) coined the word ‘*katholikos*’, meaning catholic in the sense of ‘universal’ or ‘throughout the world’, to distinguish the Church from the myriad of deviant groups, calling themselves Christian but who had no unity. The phrase ‘Roman Catholic’ was not coined until the Reformation, as we’ll see in Lecture 26.

Why is it called the Apostles’ Creed? It got its name, and its popularity, from a legend that as the twelve apostles were about to leave Jerusalem, to preach the gospel in different places as Jesus had commanded, they felt it necessary (according to the legend) to agree on the contents of their message. They therefore met together and each one of the twelve contributed one article:

Peter said, ‘We must include: “I believe in God, the Father almighty”’,
Andrew added, ‘and in Jesus Christ, his only Son’,
and so on.

That legend has no historical foundation, but it was widely accepted in the Early Church – everyone was agreed that the truths expressed in it reflected the apostles’ teaching – so in that sense it may properly be called the Apostles’ Creed. It sufficed as a statement of faith for the next hundred years, until the first controversial issue came up, necessitating not one, but a series of Councils to sort it out. The first of these is known as the Council of Nicaea, and is described on the next page.

¹ ‘he descended into hades’ and ‘the communion of saints’ were later additions. The Greek word *hades* is often translated ‘hell’ in English versions of the Creed but it has a wider meaning, referring to the ‘spirit world’, the ‘realm of departed souls’. After death, Christ’s human soul or spirit went into the spirit world - not ‘hell’, but paradise (Luke 23:43).

3. COUNCIL OF NICAEA AND CREED OF NICAEA, 325

3.1 The Arian Controversy (Cairns, 126-9; Lion, 143-4, 164-8; Vos, 40-4; Lane 28-30)

In 318, a senior presbyter/elder in the Church in Alexandria, called Arius, (256-336), was in charge of one of the twelve parishes of Alexandria. He was an elderly, cultured and pious man and a popular preacher; as he evangelised among pagans in the city of Alexandria, who believed in many gods, he became concerned that teaching that Jesus was the Son of God might make people think that Christians worship two Gods, the Father and the Son. He therefore began to teach that Christ, although he is somewhat God, was not fully God. According to Arius, Christ was the first and highest of all created beings, but he did not exist from eternity and was not of the same substance as the Father. The Father alone was God.

His views were summarized by an orthodox Christian, Athanasius, whom we'll look at in our Topic, who said that Arius taught:

God was not always a father. There was a time when God was all alone, and was not yet a father; only later did he become a father. The Son did not always exist. Everything created is out of nothing ... so the Logos of God came into existence out of nothing. There was a time when he was not. Before he was brought into being, he did not exist. He also had a beginning to his created existence.

Athanasius, Against the Arians.

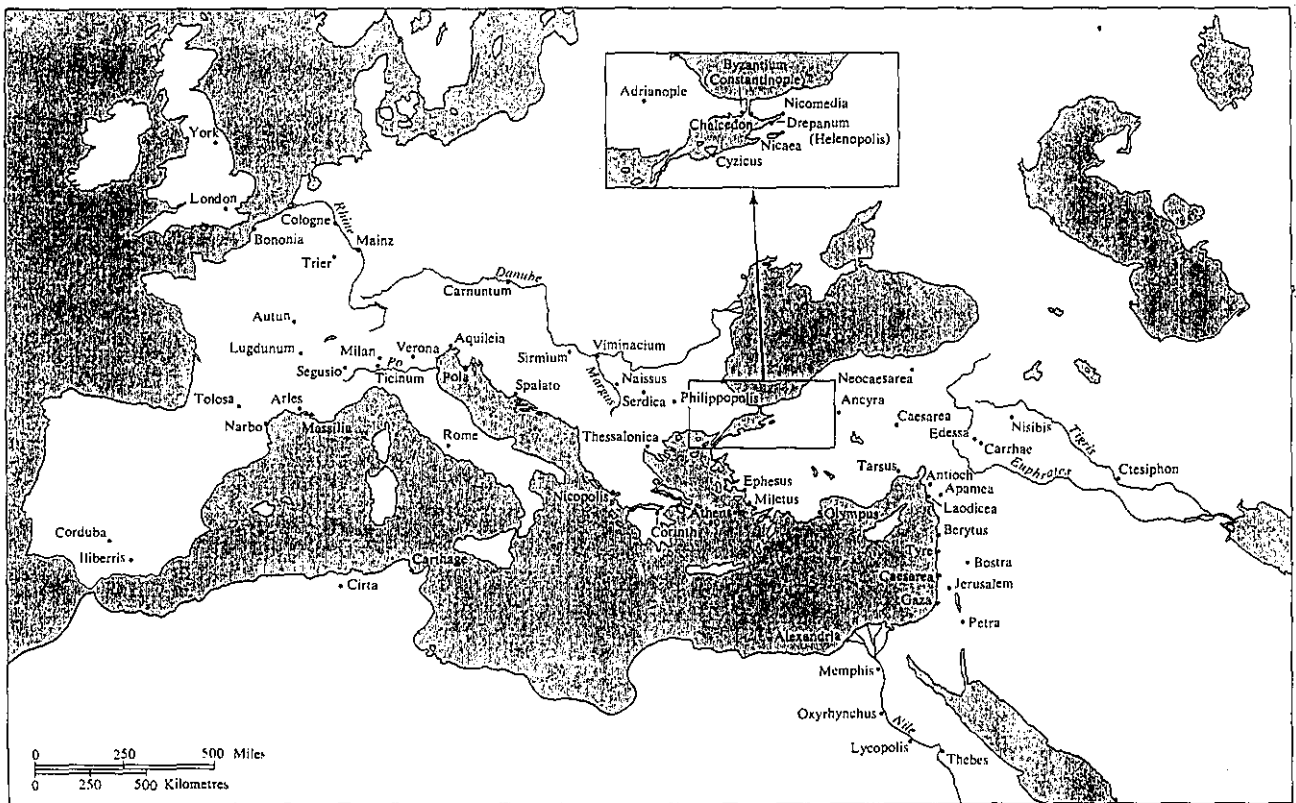
That is almost identical to what Jehovah's Witnesses believe today.

Arius was excommunicated – put out of the Church – but he and his followers would not stop teaching their ideas. Incidentally, before we go on, note two Scottish Christians who encountered Arius' views in their own day. The pastors who started the first enduring Baptist Church in Edinburgh in 1765 'were much agitated about the question of the eternal sonship of Christ'. More recently, I was involved, a few years ago, in setting up a Trust Deed for an evangelical mission in the Republic of the Congo. The Chairman came to see me, a while later, to ask how the Council could get rid of their Treasurer. I was concerned that he had been misappropriating funds, but the problem was that (to quote the Chairman) 'he no longer believes in the eternal sonship of Jesus'.

3.2 First Ecumenical Council - at Nicaea, May to July 325. See map and picture on the next page'

When Constantine became sole ruler of the Roman world in 324, he was concerned for the unity of his huge and sprawling empire. He saw the Church as the 'glue' to hold the empire together, although he was not a member of it – he was not yet baptised. We saw earlier how the Church was now spread right across the empire, and was well organised with archbishops and bishops, so what a marvellous organisation, thought Constantine, to have on his side. When he heard that Arius had been excommunicated, but wouldn't stop teaching his controversial views, Constantine personally intervened. He summoned the bishops to meet at Nicaea (sometimes spelt Nicea) in north-west Asia Minor in 325 - now that he ruled the entire empire, this meant all bishops, so it was the first 'ecumenical Council' (from the Greek *oikoumene* = inhabited world). See the comment below the map on the next page about ecumenical Councils.

Why Nicaea? Constantine was building his new capital city, Constantinople, and during its construction his palace was in a little town nearby, called Nicaea, so that is where the Council assembled. Constantine paid for all the expenses and he chaired it. He wanted to dominate the Church, to keep the bishops in their place, to show that he was in charge.



Of many Councils held in Early Church, history has elevated four to status of Ecumenical Councils (from Greek *oikoumene* = inhabited world), meaning that they represented not just part of Church nor did they have only local theme, but they represented whole Church throughout 'the world' (i.e., Roman Empire) and passed regulations binding on universal Church. Ecumenical Councils in Early Church period were Nicaea in 325, Constantinople in 381, Ephesus in 431 and Chalcedon in 451.



The Council of Nicaea, 325. Several hundred bishops attended, only 28 of whom were Arian supporters, but they were vociferous. There were no direct votes with numbers for and against. First, opinions of various parties were heard, and then there was free discussion, during which there were spontaneous expressions of approval and disapproval. What emerged is known as the Creed of Nicaea

3.3 Creed of Nicaea, 325

This is not what we know as the Nicene Creed – that came later, as we’ll see in a moment at 4.3. This is the document adopted by the Council of Nicaea. It’s not copied here because it never ‘caught on’ and it was replaced in 381, as we’ll see. The text of the Creed of Nicaea in English translation, and also in Greek and Latin, is at http://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/creed_of_nicaea_325.htm.

The key word was *homoousios*, meaning ‘of one substance’ (*homo* = one – *ousios* = substance). Constantine, in the chair, was prompted by his favorite bishop to propose this as the key word to decide the issue of the relationship of Jesus to the Father – Jesus was *homoousios*, ‘of one substance’ with the Father. The Father is eternal, so is the Son; the Father is omnipotent, so is the Son, and so on – wise, good, pure. This was supported by the majority and the emperor gave it binding legal force throughout the empire. Anyone who dissented was exiled, banished outside the empire – which is what happened to Arius, and two of his supporters, who would not sign it.

Only these three admitted that they didn’t accept it, but 25 others signed it with their fingers crossed (or whatever was the equivalent in those days of saying something that you don’t believe). Their problem was that when the emperor had spoken, no one dared tamper with the Creed during his lifetime - however much they secretly disagreed with its key word.

This was a problem only in the Eastern Greek-speaking part of the Church. It was a mirror of the formula that Tertullian had put forward in Latin in the West, over a hundred years before, *una substantia*. The West remained happy with that, but the dissenters in the East would not let the issue go. When Constantine died, the dissenters became vocal, so Constantine’s son, Constantius, tried to humour them by saying, ‘Look, if we can’t agree on *homoousios*, what about *homoiousios*. So 3.4:

3.4 *homoousios* (of one substance) or *homoiousios* (of similar substance)?

Was it just a difference of one Greek letter - the letter ‘i’? Athanasius, the leader of the orthodox Church, immediately saw that it was not just one letter, but the difference between Christianity and paganism.

Homoiousios meant that the Son was not the same as the Father, only similar. It may seem a subtle point, but it was vital to the Christian faith. The fury of the debate prompted the British historian Edward Gibbon to comment in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* that never had so much energy been spent over single vowel. Prof. R.A. Finlayson, of the Free Church of Scotland College, a great admirer of Athanasius, used to lecture on: ‘Did Athanasius peril the unity of the Church on a comma?’ - because the Greek letter *iota* looks like comma. He said ‘no’ - that although only a ‘comma’ (*iota*) distinguished the two words, it was, as mentioned, the difference between Christianity and paganism.

So who was this man Athanasius, who opposed Arianism tooth and nail? We’ll take the Topic now, and then come back, at 3.5, to see why the debate was so bitter.

TOPIC – THE LIFE OF ATHANASIUS – was taken at this point in the Lecture; here, it is printed at the end of the Notes for this Lecture.

Why did it take fifty-six years to sort out the Arian controversy? We’ll look at 4 factors.

3.5 The Arian controversy (318 - 381) was complicated by four factors:

(a) theologians were genuinely perplexed - and it took twenty Church councils over a period of 56 years to reach a consensus. It was hair-splitting stuff, but everyone got involved. One of the theologians who put forward the formula that was eventually accepted in 381 wrote about the passions it aroused, not just in theologians but also in lay people. He said.

If you ask a person in the street to give you some small change for a large coin, he will tell you 'What distinguishes the Father from the Son is that He is not begotten.' (Orthodox view) If you go into a shop to buy a loaf, the shopkeeper solemnly informs you that, 'The Father is greater than the Son.' (The Arian view). If you ask your servant whether the water is hot enough for a bath, you have to be satisfied with his assurance that 'The Son has been generated out of nothing.'

(b) theologians were slowly and reluctantly driven to realize that the question could not be answered in purely biblical language, because all sides appealed to the Bible for their stance and found what we would call proof-texts. So it was only by using non-biblical words like *homoousios* that the Church was able to state the relationship of the Father to the Son. An example of the phrase they finally settled on is in the Christmas carol. 'O come all ye faithful ...' which says that the Son was 'begotton not created'. That phrase is not in the New Testament. John used the word 'begotton', but nowhere in the Bible do you find the additional word 'not created', yet that became essential, because if Jesus was 'created', he was not God.

(c) The emperors continually interfered, but they were politicians, looking for a formula that would restore Church unity, so they kept calling Councils, and bishops who sought imperial favour said what they thought the emperor wanted to hear, while others refused to compromise, and so it went on and on.

(d) The key word, *homoousios*, was deliberately misunderstood and misrepresented by those who wouldn't accept it.

To bring this up to date, does it matter? Yes, our pluralistic society thinks of Jesus as just one of the ways to God, not the only way. The Arian controversy was an early example of doctrine, on which the gospel stands or falls, being hammered out. The divinity of Christ is as important to our faith to-day as it was to Athanasius.

4. OVERVIEW OF THE YEARS 318 TO 451

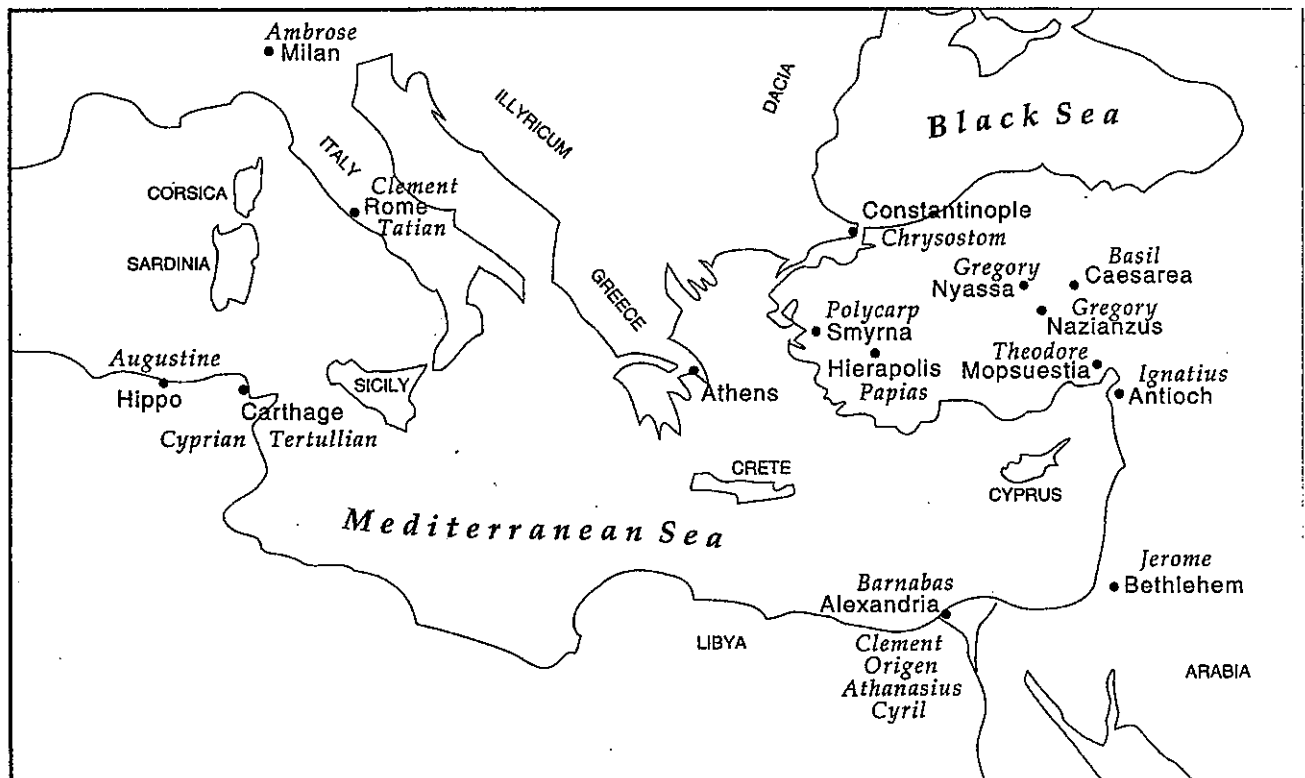
4.1 Three overlapping debates

There were three overlapping debates. Two (the first and third) were about the person of Christ (Christological), with the debate on the Trinity starting and finishing between them. The debates overlapped and moved through broadly three stages, as follows:

1. The first debate was Christological - whether Christ was truly God? That should have been settled at Nicaea in 325, but it rumbled on for another 56 years, until the Council of Constantinople in 381; the whole debate is often called the 'Arian controversy' although Arius died in 336.

2. By c360, that is halfway through the Arian debate, three leaders of the orthodox Church, known as the 'Three Cappadocian Fathers' (details in the next section), realised that orthodoxy would never defeat Arianism on the Christological issue alone, so they searched for a formula which would include the relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit. The debate therefore moved from Christological to Trinitarian. They brought an acceptable formula to a Council held at Constantinople in 381, now known as the Nicene Creed – we'll look at the text of it on page 11.) That settled both the Christological question, which had divided Church since 318, and also the Trinitarian question that had emerged during that debate.

3. Then another issue, which had not being raised before, came up. After it had been agreed at Constantinople in 381 that Christ was truly God, people began to ask how he could be truly man at the same time? This was resolved at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 (which we'll come to at 5.1), which agreed a 'Definition' (that is, set boundaries) beyond which one could not go and remain orthodox.



We looked at this map in Lecture 8, but it is repeated here to identify key figures in the Arian Debate; only the Greek-speaking Eastern Church leaders were involved – the West was satisfied with Tertullian's formula (Lecture 5, page 10) and took almost no part.

4.2 The Three Cappadocian Fathers

Three wise men, leaders of the orthodox Church, Basil (330–379), who was bishop of Caesarea, his younger brother Gregory (c.332–395), who was bishop of Nyassa, and a close friend, Gregory (329–389), who was bishop of Nazianzus, are known as the Cappadocian Fathers, because they lived in the region of Cappadocia (in the east of modern Turkey) - see them on the map. All were fascinating individuals, and their biographies are worth reading in the textbooks or on the Internet, but this lecture looks only at their contribution to settling the debates which had raged in the Eastern Church for sixty years. They were all mentioned in Lecture 8 about the Golden Age of Early Church Fathers.

The Cappadocian formula about the Trinity

The Cappadocian formula (4.3 below, on page 11) included the key word *homoousios*, 'of one substance', which they applied to all three Persons of the Trinity = 'One God in Three Persons'. You say, 'of course'; we sing 'Holy, Holy Holy, Lord God Almighty, .. God in three persons, blessed Trinity'. (Lecture 8, page 8.) It's 'of course' to us – but it took the Cappadocians years to persuade the Eastern Church that 'One God in Three Persons' meant (1) that Father, Son and Spirit are identical in their substance – their divinity – and (2) that Father, Son and Spirit share that divinity, in a relationship which, for want of a better word, they called the relationship of Persons. We today think of 'persons' as individuals, but in the ancient world a person was always an individual within a community. The Cappadocian emphasis was not on the individuality of the three Persons – which could have led to three gods – but on their close and inter-dependent relationship within the Godhead.

So the Cappadocians said that the Trinity is (1) *homoousios*, of one substance – i.e., there is one divinity – and (2) that that divinity is expressed in three Persons in relationship within the Godhead.

No illustration of the Trinity is complete, and rightly so, because the Trinity is a mystery. Many then, and some now, try to make it simple, intelligible, like Patrick's shamrock, but we are standing before a mystery beyond human comprehension. The Cappadocians knew this, and they tried to 'protect the mystery' in their formula.

They used the illustration of a rainbow, and drew two lessons from it. They said that (1) although we see different colours, we don't say that the rainbow has different 'substances' (here's the key word coming in – 'one substance'), it's still one rainbow, and (2) nobody says that there are no distinctions within one rainbow, it's obvious that there are distinctive colours, but it's still one rainbow. A quote from the Cappadocians: 'The colours are not even parts that can be separated out leaving the rainbow intact. In the same way, God is one divine substance made up of three distinct but inseparable Persons.'

If there was a weakness in the Cappadocian formula, it emphasized too much the relationship of the Persons of the Trinity among themselves – the focus was on them – while the New Testament stresses the Persons of the Trinity acting together for our salvation – the Father loves us, the Son died to save us, the Spirit lives in us – and so on.

What's in a name? - the 'Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed'

Before we look at what is popularly called the 'Nicene Creed', a word of explanation as to why it is sometimes described as the 'Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed'.

The Creed of Nicaea of 325 was debated and developed and refined during the Arian Debate. The most notable additions in 381 were the sections on the Holy Spirit, the Catholic Church, Baptism and the Resurrection.

However, the extant records of the Council of Constantinople in 381 don't mention the Creed which we call 'Nicene', and it was not popularly used before the Council of Chalcedon in 451. However, Chalcedon accepted it as in some sense the work of the Council of Constantinople, and it is beyond the scope of this Lecture to enquire why it was not officially recognised until then. Because it was not (apparently) 'authenticated' until Chalcedon, the two names 'Nicene' and 'Constantinople' are sometimes brought together to describe the emergence of what in popular parlance is the 'Nicene Creed'.

Cairns refers several times to three early Creeds:
 The Apostles' Creed at pages 114, 349,
 The Nicene Creed at pages 125, 128, 196, 349,
 The Athanasian Creed at pages 125, 349.

As this lecture is focusing on them, here is a helpful analysis of them. The reason why the Nicene Creed is sometimes called the Niceano-Constantinopolitan Creed is explained at the foot of the previous page in these Notes.

EARLY CREEDS

TITLE	ORIGINS	BACKGROUND DATA
APOSTLES' CREED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Probably formulated in Rome between 150-175 * Based on confessions of belief in Gospels, and especially on Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Reaffirms facts of the Faith and is a summary of what apostles believed and taught * Taught to catechumens and used as a baptismal creed * Gained wide acceptance in Western Church * Regarded as having apostolic authority by time of Tertullian * Title first discovered c 390 in letter of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan
NICENE CREED	<p>This is popular name for creed which was first formulated at Council of Nicaea in 325 (see notes in third column), where it was known as 'Creed of Nicaea'; it was refined at Council of Constantinople in 381, but it not officially promulgated until 451. Sometimes (because of two places of origin) k/a Niceano-Constantinopolitan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Based on creed used by Eusebius at Caesarea * Drawn up to defend orthodox Faith against Arianism * Clauses about the Holy Spirit added at Council of Constantinople, 381 * Expresses a maturer Christian experience than the Apostles' Creed * Longer formula used in Eucharist, both Eastern and Western churches
ATHANASIAN CREED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Probably composed by a theologian from Spain, 5th century 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * A Latin hymn, beginning 'Quicumque vult...', became known as 'The Faith of St Athanasius' * An exposition of the meaning of the Nicene Creed, focusing on the Trinity and the Incarnation * Intended as a means of instruction, warning against false doctrine.

4.3 The Nicene Creed - agreed at the Council of Constantinople in 381

Unlike the dissent that followed the Council of Nicaea in 325, the Nicene Creed was (and still is) unanimously supported. The Reformation embraced it and reaffirmed it. Protestants, Catholics, Greek Orthodox – all recite it today. Non-liturgical Churches, like Pentecostal and Baptist Churches, don't use it, but all of them accept its doctrine. More than any other document, the Nicene Creed remains, for all Christians, the touchstone of orthodox, biblical belief.

It reads: (paragraph numbering for lecture purposes only.)

- 1 I believe in one God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.
- 2 and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not created, of the same substance [*homoousios*] as the Father; by whom all things were made;
- 3 who, for us human beings and our salvation came down from the heavens, and was made flesh by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, and became man;
- 4 and was crucified for our sake under Pontius Pilate; he suffered, died and was buried;
- 5 and he rose again on the third day, according to the Scriptures;
- 6 and ascended into the heavens, and sits on the right hand of the Father;
- 7 and he shall come again in glory, to judge the living and the dead; and his kingdom will have no end.
- 8 and [I believe] in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father [~~and the Son~~]²; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke through the prophets.
- 9 and [I believe] in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
- 10 I acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins;
- 11 and I look for the resurrection of the dead,
- 12 and the life of the world to come. Amen

5 THE TWO NATURES OF CHRIST

5.1 Council of Chalcedon, 451 (Cairns, 129-130; Vos, 42; Lane, 50, 52)

The Nicene Creed settled the Arian debate and the Trinitarian debate, but it threw up a new problem, which had not been raised before. If (as agreed at Constantinople in 381) Christ was truly God, how could he be truly man at the same time? What was the relationship between his deity and his humanity?

Two divergent views emerged in the Eastern Church, because Antioch and Alexandria had different ways of understanding the Bible. (Lecture 3, p.12).

² This was a later and controversial addition; the West unilaterally added 'and the Son' in 589, giving rise to the *filioque* (Latin, 'and the Son') dispute. The Eastern Church was horrified for two reasons: (1) they said that the Western Church had no right to tamper with an Ecumenical Creed and (2) they didn't believe what was being claimed.

(a) The view favoured by Antioch. This is illustrated by Luke 8:23, where Jesus was asleep in a boat during a storm (his human nature) and then woke and calmed the storm (his divine nature). They said that his two natures were 'conjoined' and illustrated it by looking at the difference between (1) mixing wine and water and (2) mixing oil and water. In the former, they combine to form a new substance, which is neither wholly wine nor wholly water but is a combination of both. In the latter, both substances maintain their own identity. Antioch preferred the former. The weakness of Antioch's position was that Scripture teaches that Christ was perfectly divine and perfectly human, at one and same time, and Antioch couldn't relate them to each other.

(b) The other view was favoured by Alexandria. 'The word (*Logos*) became flesh' (John 1.14), so Christ was God in the shape of man but with only one nature. The weakness of the Alexandrian position was that the *Logos* remained *Logos* although living in flesh, so there was only one divine nature, living in a human body.

The 520 bishops present at Chalcedon were delighted and relieved when the delegates from the West, the Latin-speaking Church, produced a formula that solved their dilemma. Remember that the West never had a problem with either the Trinity or the Person of Christ, because the Latin language was less speculative, and the West was happy with the formula that Tertullian had coined about the year 210. So when the Western delegates said, in effect, 'What's your problem – here's how we understand the Two Natures of Christ', the Council made headway for the first time and came up with what became the 'Definition of Chalcedon; 'The ancient faith of Tertullian was accepted in the East: Jesus Christ as one person of two natures or substances.' (Olson, 232).

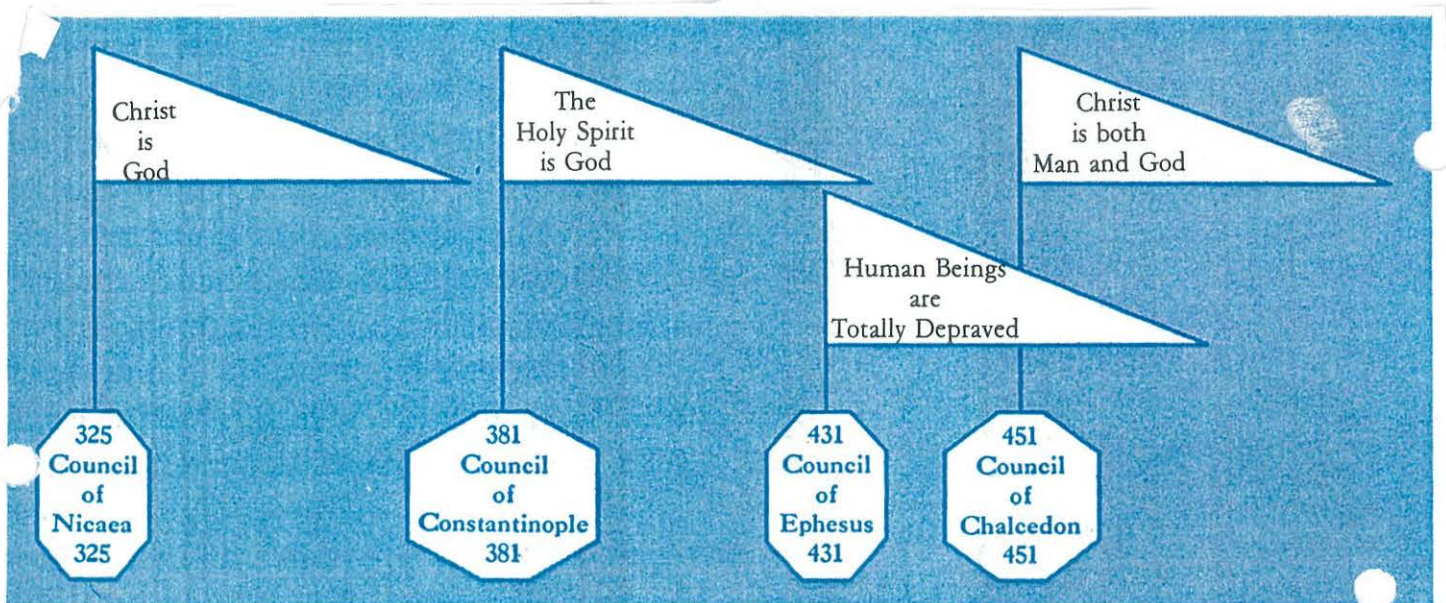
5.2 The 'Definition' Of Chalcedon (451)

It's called a 'Definition', from the Latin *fines* = 'boundaries', and not a 'Creed' because the Council recognised we can never fully express, in human language, how the divinity of Christ related to his humanity. They did not attempt to explain the Person of Christ, but set 'limits' = 'boundaries' beyond which one could not go and remain orthodox; within these boundaries we may reverently discuss the divinity and the humanity of Christ. Alexandria's concerns (the words in *italics*) and Antioch's concerns (the words underlined), were both met:

We all unanimously teach that our Lord Jesus Christ, *one and the same Son*, is at once perfect in deity and perfect in humanity, truly God and truly man, consisting of a rational soul and body; of the same essence as the Father in His deity, of the same essence as us in His humanity, like us in all things apart from sin; begotten of the Father before all ages as regards His deity, *the same born of the Virgin Mary, the birth-giver of God* as regards His humanity, but in the last days, for us and our salvation; *One and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only Begotten*, to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the difference of the natures being in no way removed because of the union. but rather the characteristic property of each nature being, preserved, and coming together to form one person and one entity, he is not split or divided into two persons, but he is one and the same son and only-begotten god, the word (logos), the Lord Jesus Christ, as formerly the prophets and later Jesus Christ Himself have taught us about Him, and as it has been handed down to us by the Creed of the Fathers.

This was a masterly statement. We can never, in this life, fully understand the Person of Christ, but in words like these we can marvel at what God has done for us in Christ.

The Council of Chalcedon



5.3 Monophysite (one nature) and Nestorian (two nature) churches

The extreme Alexandrians, to whom the doctrine of two distinct natures of Christ meant that Christ was two persons, did not accept the 'Definition' and continued to hold to 'one nature'. Sections of the Eastern Church broke away, to form their own independent national Churches, known as Monophysite (one nature) Churches. The Churches in Armenia and Ethiopia today are monophysite, as is the Coptic Church in Egypt (the largest Christian body in Egypt today).

At the other extreme, those who continued to insist that Christ had two natures, which never fully came together, had an impact on the world which neither they nor the orthodox Church even dreamed of.

We saw earlier that the Early Church didn't evangelise outside the boundaries of the Roman Empire - they had no sense of mission to the barbarians. If someone deviated from orthodoxy, they were excommunicated -- and deported outside the Empire. Arius and his followers, banished to the north of the Empire, into what we call Germany, had great success in evangelising the pagan tribes there.

The debate on the Person of Christ had even more far-reaching consequences to the East of the Empire. One of the early casualties of the debate – his views were condemned in 431 and he was excommunicated and exiled – was the Bishop of Constantinople, a man called Nestorius. He believed in the two natures of Christ, and when his followers were also exiled – deported over the Eastern boundary of the Roman Empire - they evangelised the areas to which they been exiled, and we'll see in lecture 14 how they planted Nestorian Churches across Persian, Arabia, India and all the way to China.

For Nestorius, see Lion 179-81 and Lane (under the heading 'Cyril') 45-47 for the issues.

6. THE ATHANASIAN CREED (Cairns, 125, 349; Lane, 77-78)

This is the first creed in which the equality of the three persons of the Trinity is explicitly stated. It is often known by its opening words in the original Latin, *Quicumque vult* = 'Whoever wishes (to be saved) ...' and the opening goes on '... must first of all hold the catholic faith.'

The need for a clear confession against Arianism arose in western Europe when the Ostrogoths and Visigoths, who had been converted to Christianity by those who held Arian beliefs and who had been expelled from the Roman Empire because of it, invaded the Roman Empire at the beginning of the 5th century and destroyed most of its libraries. It was probably written in Spain or Southern France as the barbarians invaded - so, despite the name, it cannot be the work of Athanasius of Alexandria (our Topic for this lecture). Priests of local churches, who had no access to books following the barbarian invasions, memorised these 44 rhyming verses and recited them at services, summing up all that the Early Church believed about the Trinity.

Nowadays, Churches which recite the Apostles' Creed on most Sundays may recite the Athanasian Creed instead on Trinity Sunday.

The text of it is on following page. It is marvellous devotional reading, even today.

THE ATHANASIAN CREED

We worship one God in trinity and trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons, nor dividing the substance.

For the Father's person is one, the Son's is another and the Holy Spirit's is another, but the deity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is one. Their glory is equal and their majesty is co-eternal.

Whatever the Father is, such is the Son and such also is the Holy Spirit. The Father is uncreated, the Son is uncreated and the Holy Spirit is uncreated. The Father is infinite, the Son is infinite and the Holy Spirit is infinite.

The Father is eternal, the Son is eternal and the Holy Spirit is eternal. Yet there are not three eternals but only one eternal, just as there are not three uncreated beings nor three infinite beings but only one uncreated being and only one infinite being.

In the same way, the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty and the Holy Spirit is almighty. yet there are not three almighties but one almighty. Thus the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God – and yet there are not three Gods but one God. Thus the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord and the Holy Spirit is Lord – and yet there are not three Lords but only one Lord.

For just as Christian truth compels us to acknowledge each person by himself to be both God and Lord, so the catholic religion forbids us to speak of three Gods or three Lords.

The Father is neither made nor created nor begotten from anything. The Son is from the Father alone - not made nor created but begotten. The Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son - not made nor created nor begotten but proceeding.

Therefore there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits. And in this trinity no one is before or after another; no one is greater or less than another, but all three persons are co-eternal and coequal with each other.

Thus in all things, as has already been said, both trinity in unity and unity in trinity are to be worshipped. This is how to think of the Trinity if you wish to be saved.

Furthermore, it is necessary for eternal salvation to believe faithfully in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For correct faith is believing and confessing that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is equally God and man. He is God from the being of the Father, begotten before the world was made, and he is man from the being of his mother, born in the world.

He is both perfect God and perfect man, composed of a rational soul and human flesh. He is equal to the Father, as God; less than the Father, as man.

Although he is both God and man, yet he is not two but one Christ. He is one however, not by the conversion of his deity into flesh, but by the taking up of his humanity into God. He is one indeed, not by confusion of human and divine being but by unity of Christ's one person. For just as the rational soul and the flesh make one man, so also God and man make one Christ.

He suffered for our salvation, descended into sheol, rose again from the dead, ascended into the heavens and sat at the right hand of the Father. He will come from there to judge the living and the dead.

When he comes, all men will rise again with their bodies and will render account for their own deeds. Those who have done good will go to eternal life, those who have done evil to eternal fire

EARLY CHURCH COUNCILS

LOCATION and EMPEROR	KEY FIGURES	POINTS OF INTEREST, MAIN ISSUES, COURSE OF EVENTS
<p>NICAIA (Bithynia 325)</p> <p>Constantine (313-337)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea * Athanasius * Arius * Alexander 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * First ecumenical council – attempt to bring all parts of Christian Church together. * Drafted original form of Nicene Creed * Arian heresy condemned; Eusebius presented orthodox creed for discussion * Use of term <i>homoousios</i> (the Son is of 'one substance with the Father') accepted * Four anti-Arians anathemas added
<p>CONSTANTINOPLE (Thracia) 381</p> <p>Theodosius I (379-395)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Meletus * Gregory, Bishop of Nazianzus * Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Second ecumenical council (though only Eastern bishops present) * Called to end Arian controversy * Ratified doctrine of Christ formulated at Nicaea * Affirmed deity of the Holy Spirit * Condemned Apollinarianism
<p>EPHESUS (Asia) 431</p> <p>Theodosius II (480-450)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria * Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople * John, Bishop of Antioch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Summoned to settle Nestorian controversy * Nestorius banished to Upper Egypt, his documents condemned * Creed of Nicaea reaffirmed * Use of term <i>theotokos</i> (God-bearer) upheld
<p>CHALCEDON (Bithynia) 451</p> <p>Marcian (450-455)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Pope (Leo) sent four legates * Dioscurus, Patriarch of Alexandria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Largest council to date, 520 bishops present * Acknowledged Christ's two natures in one person, he was fully God and fully man * Formulated the creed of Chalcedon, regarded as the orthodox solution of the Christological problem

Provoked by the affirmations of Arius, according to whom Christ had been 'created'. The Council affirmed that the Word incarnate is of the same substance (*homoousios*, consubstantial) as the Father, God born of God.

Strove to put an end to Arianism by reaffirming the divinity of Christ and the divinity of the Holy Spirit, which had been contested by Eunomius. The text has been lost.

(Lane, 47-48)

No definition emerged from the Council. In 433, an 'Act of Union' said: 'Thus we confess Our Saviour Jesus Christ, only Son of God, perfect God and perfect man, composed of a rational soul and body, begotten of the Father before all ages according to his divinity and born in these last days of the Virgin Mary.'

Reacted against Monophysitism (belief that there was only one nature in Christ) and affirmed 'one and the same Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity, truly God and truly man'.

OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY IN 36 ILLUSTRATED LECTURES

TOPIC FOR LECTURE 10 – ATHANASIUS (c296-373)

Please give us a short biography of Athanasius; try to confine it to the facts of his life and his personality; if you try to weave his theology into his biography, it will become unmanageable.

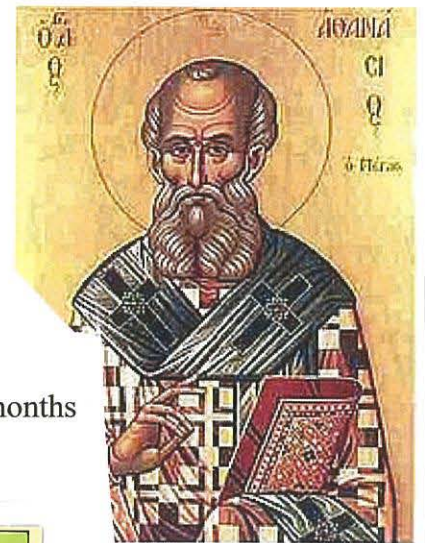
Lecture 10 will already have looked at his contribution to the Christological debate known as the 'Arian Controversy'.

Cairns, 128; Olson, 161-167; Lion, 145; Vos, 22; Lane, 30-32. Picture at Cairns, 128.

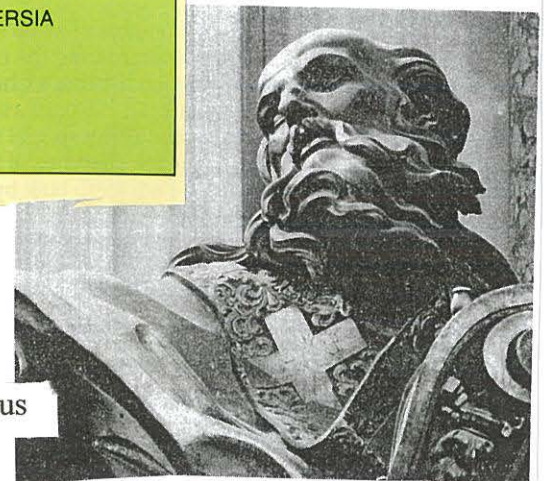
There are also some references to him in the notes for lecture 10.

The following places in his life are marked on the map below:

Born, Egypt, c296
At the Council of Nicaea, 325
Bishop of Alexandria, 328
Summoned to Constantinople, 330
Tried at Antioch, 334
First exile, to Trier, 335, for 2.5 years
Second exile, to Rome, 339, for 7.5 years
Third exile, to the Egyptian desert, 357, for 6 years
Fourth exile, again to the Egyptian desert, 362, 10 months
Fifth exile, in Egypt, 365, 4 months
Died, Alexandria, 373



The church in the fourth century



Athanasius