

ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

I. Council of Nicea - 325 - Arianism

{Alexandria}

A. Problem: What is the relationship between the Father & the Son?

B. Players

1. Arian Party (Arius, Eusebius of Nicomedia)
 - a. Son was created "*ex nihilo*" by the Father
 - b. Son was created before all else - "First of all Creation"
 - c. Son was "*heteroousios*" from the Father (different substance)
 - d. Son was finite - "there was when he was not."
2. Alexandrian Party (Athanasius, becomes bishop of Alexandria in 328)
 - a. Son was begotten by the Father's nature; not subordinate to Father
 - b. Son is co-eternal with Father; *logos* existed eternally with Father
 - c. Son is "*homoousios*" with Father (same substance)
 - d. Son is separate personality - distinct from Father (not merely *mode*)
3. Eusebius of Caesarea (Semi-Arianism)
 - a. Rejected Arius's "*ex nihilo*" and "there was when he was not."
 - b. Rejected both "*heteroousios*" and "*homoousios*"
 - c. Son was instead "*homoiousios*" (similar substance)
4. Western Bishops (Latin-speaking) were not so concerned with distinctions being drawn by Greek-speaking Eastern churches. Satisfied with Tertullian's formulas (2:1 for Christ and 3:1 for Trinity)

C. Council called by Constantine - Emperor of Roman Empire

1. Incorporated "*homoousios*" at insistence of Constantine
2. Adopted a creed, called *Creed of Nicea*; non-signatories were banished
3. Condemned Arianism, banished Arians (e.g., Ulfilas, missionary to Goths c. 350)

II. Council of Constantinople - 381 - Apollinarianism

{Alexandria}

A. Problem: Is Christ both fully God and fully Man?

B. Players

1. Apollinarius Party (complex sets of beliefs represented by Apollinarius of Laodicea)
 - a. Argued for unity of Godhood and Manhood of Christ: one personality
 - b. Emphasizes the full deity of Christ over the human
 - c. Taught that Christ was neither fully God nor fully Man: but a fusion
2. Alexandrian Party (Athanasius dies 373; Gregory of Nyssa; Gregory of Nazianzus)
 - a. Christ was complete both in his divinity and in his humanity
 - b. If Christ was less than fully man, how could he identify fully with mankind, whom he'd come to redeem?

C. Council

1. Theodosius the Emperor calls Council in Constantinople
2. Confirms Athanasius's position that Christ was fully human and fully divine (safeguarding the humanity of Christ; and condemns Apollinarianism)
3. Confirms orthodox position of Nicea regarding the relationship of the Godhead/3 in 1 and applies the same relationship to the Holy Spirit (with the interpretation that there were three distinct persons) and settles the question of the Trinity
4. Issues the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381, often called the *Creed of Nicea*, the most widely accepted creed in the east and west together
5. Appoints Constantinople as the honorary position over all Eastern churches save Rome

III. Council of Ephesus - 431 - Nestorianism {Antioch vs Alexandria for Constantinople patriarch}

A. Problem: How many Persons and Natures is Christ? And what about Mary?

(Antioch and Alexandria fought over placement of their respective candidates in the patriarchate of Constantinople, the most powerful in the East. Nestorius, a monk from Antioch, became patriarch of Constantinople)

B Players

1. Antioch Party (John, Patriarch of Antioch, Nestorius) - Emph. humanity of Christ
 - a. Insisted that Christ has two natures: human and divine; harmonious in will but unable to show the consistent unity of personality; each nature had its own personality; attributed with also believing Christ was two persons
 - b. Mary was not regarded as "*theotokos*" (God-bearer/mother of the divine), but "*christotokos*" (bearer of the humanity of Christ only)
2. Alexandrian Party (Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, violent polemicist)
 - a. Insisted that Christ has two natures, and a single unified personality
 - b. Emphasized the divine over the human; he only "appeared to be finite"
 - c. Issues *12 Propositions* attacking the Antiochene school
 - d. Insisted Mary was "*theotokos*" (mother of God)

C. Council

1. Stage One:
 - a. Cyril obtains permission from western bishops to hold council in Ephesus, 431
 - b. John and Antiochenes delayed by famine and storm at sea; cannot be on time
 - c. Alexandrians arrive, meet, condemn Nestorius as heretic and depose him
2. Stage Two:
 - a. John & Co arrive and find out Cyril had already met and deposed Nestorius
 - b. John holds his own council, deposes Cyril as heretic & restores Nestorius
 - c. Cyril meets again to restore himself, reaffirm first decision & condemn John
3. Stage Three:
 - a. Theodosius II intervenes and obtains compromise
 - b. Both parties finally agree to accept two natures, one person of Christ
 - c. John agrees to deposition and replacement of Nestorius (who goes to China)
 - d. Cyril agrees to recall his *12 Propositions* (schools more important than people)
 - e. Term for Mary is "*theotokos*" (God-bearer; Mariolatry begins here)

IV. Council of Chalcedon - 451 - Eutychianism {Antioch & Alexandria w/Constantinople VS ROME}

A. Problem: What is Christ's relationship to Man by Nature? Is He Consubstantial with Man?

(Consubstantial: of one and the same substance or being. The word is used especially of the eternal relationship which subsists between the 3 persons of the Holy Trinity. The Latin *consubstantialis* is the western counterpart of the Greek word *homoousios* - the test word of theological orthodoxy in the Arian controversy). * Eutyches of Alexandria has become Archimandrite [Abbot] of large monastery in Constantinople and is teaching that Christ's is NOT consubstantial with man: His flesh is not human but heavenly. He is main theological spokesman for Alexandrians.

B. Players

1. Antiochene (Flavian of Antioch succeeds Nestorius as Patriarch of Constantinople; Theodoret succeeds John as Patriarch of Antioch and writes defending Nestorius)
 - a. Flavian & Theodoret condemn "heavenly flesh" views of Eutyches (Alexandrian)
 - b. Christ IS the same substance with man: He IS consubstantial
2. Alexandrian (Dioscorus succeeds Cyril as patriarch of Constantinople; Eutyches)
 - a. Christ was same essence as Father; but body was not same as man's
 - b. His flesh is heavenly flesh (not human); therefore, he is NOT consubstantial

c. Originally, Christ was two natures, but later those unified into one. The human remains, but is so overwhelmed by the divine so as to be virtually annihilated (his example? Drop of honey into the ocean is overcome)

C. A Council meets in 448 and condemns Eutyches; then Robber's Synod of 449

- a. Packed council censures Flavian, Theodoret, Antiochenes; restores Eutyches
- b. Flavian is beaten in the night (dies days later); Leo (Rome) calls council

D. Chalcedon Council of 451 - Theodosius II has died; sister Pulcheria takes Empire - *Empress - Woman*

- a. Leo's *Tome* is read to crowd; everyone stands and cries, "Leo has spoken."
- b. Insists that Christ is perfect both in his deity and humanity (Alexandrian)
- c. Christ is consubstantial with the Father and Man (Antiochene); no diff. flesh
- d. Born of a virgin (Mother of God)
- e. One unified person, two natures (reaffirms Tertullian's two formulas)

* Reaffirms 1st three councils: Nicea 325; Constantinople 381; Ephesus 431

*From Leo's
affirmations*

V. II Constantinople - 553 - Monophysitism *"One Body"* (Antioch vs Alexandrian fringe groups)

A. Problem: Is Christ's Body Incorruptible? (Did it decay in the tomb? Was it human flesh?)

B. Players

1. Emperor Justinian was Chalcedonian (above); but Mrs. Justinian was extreme Alexandrian, believed Christ was more divine - Monophysite)

a. Monophysites (one-nature advocates/divinity/Alexandrians) dissatisfied with 2:2 ideas. Against (Antioch's) Theodore of Mopsuestia's *"Three Chapters"*

b. Wanted another council to clarify the Chalcedonian statement

2. *"Three Chapter"* (Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrillus, Ibas of Edessa)

a. These Antiochene writers (Nestorian Epoxy types) wanted more humanity in X

b. Wrote their *"Three Chapters"* to attack Cyril's (Alexandrian) divinity emphasis

C. Council called by Justinian (compromise between Alexandrian and Antioch positions)

1. Reaffirms Chalcedon's two natures in one person (Tertullian formula for Christ)

2. Accepts Cyril's "Hypostatic union of one flesh" definition (that "Christ's humanity possessed no true nature or individuality of its own. It only existed as part of a whole that was Christ *incarnate*. His manhood had never existed apart from the Word" [Origen]).

3. Adopts Monophysite's divine emphasis (incorruptibility of Christ's flesh) (Copts, Abyssinian, Armenians, Jacobites [Syrians]) continued divinity emphasis

VI. III Constantinople - ⁶⁸⁰⁻⁶⁸¹ ~~680~~/1 - Monothylitism *"One Will" People*

A. Problem: How Many Wills did Christ Have? (Human Will? Divine Will?)

B. Players

1. Monothylites said Christ had only one will (divine). He could not choose otherwise.

2. Chalcedonians said he had human and divine will unified as part of his "fused person"

C. Council called: Moslems are invading much of Monophysite/Monothylite territory; can't come

1. Monothylites are condemned. Council upholds Chalcedon position

2. Clarifies: Human will follows divine will, but is subject to it

** Ends all Trinitarian Issues **

VII. II Nicea - 787 - Iconoclasm *"Worship of Images/Icons"*

A. Problem: Should icons (images) be used in the worship of the church?

B. Council results:

1. Bishops agree to the bowing-down & kissing as legitimate forms of worshipping God.
Forbade worship of images; worship was to be bestowed upon God alone

2. In East, forbids worship of images; prefers paintings in churches rather than statues

③ In West, statues okay but be careful; allows images to decorate to encourage good deeds

