

3. Constantine & Christendom

I. Constantine's Rise to Power

In 285, 293 Diocletian (284-305) subdivided the Empire between four rulers, The Tetrarchy: an Augustus in East and West, with a Caesar under each.

West: Augustus: Maximian (285-305, ret.)

Caesar: Constantius (293-), Augustus (305-†306); succeeded as Augustus by son Augustine.

East: Augustus: Diocletian (284-305, ret.)

Caesar: Galerius (293-), Augustus (305-†311)

Christians were severely persecuted by Diocletian (the Great Persecution, 302-) and Galerius.

306 Constantius died in York, designating his son Constantine as Augustus.

311 Galerius, on his death bed, gave amnesty to Christians, asking for their prayers.

312 Battle of the Milvian Bridge, outside Rome. Constantine defeated Maxentius (fellow Augustus in West), claiming that in a vision the previous night he had seen in the sky the Chi-Rho symbol plus the words: *in hoc signo vince*, in this sign conquer. Arch of Constantine, Rome (315) commemorates this victory.

313 Constantine and Licinius (Augustus 311-324) met in Milan, agreed on religious liberty. Later issued "Edict of Milan": religious toleration of Christians, cessation of persecution, restoration of property. Christianity was now a *religio licita*.

324 Constantine defeated Licinius to become sole ruler, the emperor.

Constantine chose to build a new capital atop Byzantium, an old Greek colony. This would be New Rome, dedicated in 330. No temples, but several churches, notably Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom), Hagia Eirene (Holy Peace), the Holy Apostles (Constantine's burial place).

II. The Ecumenical Councils

1. 325 Nicea
2. 381 Constantinople
3. 431 Ephesus
4. 451 Chalcedon
5. 553 Constantinople
6. Constantinople (680-81)
7. Nicea (787)

A. Nicea 325

Arius (256-336), a presbyter in Alexandria, started a dispute (c. 318) with his bishop, Alexander. To preserve the uniqueness and otherness of God, Arius taught that God the Father is "alone unbegotten, alone everlasting, alone unbegun"; the Son is begotten of the Unbegotten, a creature, not eternal. Alexander condemned Arius. This issue divided churches of the East.

The Council of Nicea was called to decide the issue. Constantine presided over the first session. About 220 bishops attended, at public expense. The council lasted 2 months. It issued a Creed and 20 Canons.

1. The Creed

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, Only-begotten, that is, from the substance [ousia] of the Father; God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance

[*homoousios*] with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us human beings and for our salvation came down and was incarnate, was made human, suffered, and rose again the third day, ascended into heaven, and is coming to judge the living and the dead.

And in the Holy Spirit.

And those who say, “There was when he was not,” and “Before his generation he was not,” and “He came to be from nothing,” or those who pretend that the Son of God is of other reality [*hypostasis*] or substance [*ousia*], the catholic and apostolic church anathematizes.

2. The Canons

- Alexandria, Antioch, Rome recognized as having authority over Egypt&Libya, Syria, s. Italy.
- Date of Easter: follow practice of Rome, Alexandria, independent of Passover

B. Constantinople 381

The Arian debate continued to trouble the empire for the next 60 years.

Athanasius (299-373), attended Nicea as Alexander’s secretary. Bishop of Alexandria (328-373). A staunch defender of the Son’s full deity. Was exiled five times. Argued that Christ “was made human so that we might be made divine.”

The Cappadocian Fathers

1. Basil of Caesarea (the Great, c. 329-379)
2. Gregory of Nazianzus (the Theologian, c. 329-389)
3. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330-395)

Defended full humanity and deity of the Son: “the unassumed is the unhealed; but that which is united to the Godhead is saved” (Gregory of Nazianzus).

Argued for full deity of the Holy Spirit.

How is the Son related to the Father? 4 positions:

1. *anomoios/heteroousios*, unlike/different substance
2. *homoios*, like
3. *homoiousios*, like substance
4. *homoousios*, same substance.

Emperor Theodosius (379-) issued an edict calling for Christianity to be the official religion, then called a church council. 150 bishops attended, all from the East. Issued a new creed:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance [*homoousios*] with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

In one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

C. Ephesus 431

D. Chalcedon 451

Issued the Chalcedonian Definition:

Therefore, following the holy Fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer (*theotokos*); one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence (*hypostasis*), not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the Fathers has handed down to us.