

# First Four General Councils

## And the Development of the Dogma of the Incarnation

### Antioch Humanistic

**Arianism:** Father alone is God in the full sense; Christ was a created being

**Nestorianism:** Christ had one nature, a human nature (attempt to defend complete humanity)

### Alexandria Transcendent (Pietistic)

**Council of Nicea, A.D. 325:** Christ is “being of one substance with the Father.”

**Council of Constantinople, A.D. 381:** Christ is truly Man, with a human body, soul, and spirit.

**Council of Ephesus, A.D. 431:** Christ has both human and divine nature. Also, the Blessed Virgin Mary was declared to be *Theotokos*, “Mother of Him who is God.”

**Council of Chalcedon, A.D. 451:** “Christ is one Person in two Natures, without confusion, change, division, or severance: the difference of the Natures being in no way abolished because of the union, but rather the perfection of each being preserved in the one Person.”

**Apollinarianism:** Christ had no human “spirit” (“Humans have body, soul, and spirit”)

**Monophysitism:** Christ has one nature, the divine one (attempt to defend the divinity of Christ)

## The Apostles' Creed Contra Heresies

Creed Text	Gnostic Error*	Other Heresies	Modern Errors
I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth,	The Gnostics held that the physical universe is evil and that God did not make it.		
And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary,	The Gnostics denied that God had taken human nature or a human body. Some of them distinguished between Christ, whom they acknowledged to be in some sense divine, and the man Jesus, who was at most an instrument through whom the Christ spoke. They held that the man Jesus did not become the bearer or instrument of the Christ until the Spirit descended upon him at his baptism, and that the Spirit left him before the crucifixion, so that the Spirit had only a brief and tenuous association with matter and humanity. Others affirmed that there was never a man Jesus at all, but only the appearance of a man, through which appearance wise teachings were given to the first disciples. Against this the orthodox Christians affirmed that Jesus was conceived through the action of the Holy Spirit (thus denying the Gnostic position that the Spirit had nothing to do with Jesus until his Baptism), that he was born (which meant that he had a real physical body, and not just an appearance) of a virgin (which implied that he had been special from the first moment of his life, and not just from the baptism on.	<p><i>Adoptionism.</i> Jesus was adopted as God's son at birth or at baptism.</p> <p><i>Docetism.</i> Christ only seemed to have a human body.</p> <p><i>Marcionism.</i> Jehovah is not God the Father. Jehovah's law is not for Christians. No virgin birth.</p> <p><i>Modalism.</i> Father, Son, and Holy spirit are not three persons but three modes or forms of God's activity; God as Father in the work of creation, as Son in the work of redemption, and as the Holy Spirit in the work of sanctification.</p>	<p>The Marcion "Father" is a very nice god, who is popular with those who would roll own Christianity.</p> <p>Modalism was preached from one ELCA pulpit of which I'm aware on Trinity Sunday a few years ago.</p>

\* Condensed from annotations provided by James E. Kiefer, cited at various Web sites.

Creed Text	Gnostic Error*	Other Heresies	Modern Errors
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,	There were many stories then current about gods who died and were resurrected, but they were offered quite frankly as myths. If you asked, “When did Adonis die, you would be told either, “Long ago and far away,” or else, “His death is not an event in earthly time.” Jesus, on the other hand, died at a particular time and place in history, under the jurisdiction of Pontius Pilate, Procurator of Judea from 26 to 36 c.e., or during the last ten years of the reign of the Emperor Tiberius.		
was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into Hell.	Here the creed emphasizes that he was really dead. He was not an illusion. He had a real body, a corpse, that was placed in a tomb. He was not merely unconscious—his spirit left his body and went to the realm of the dead. The reference to the descent into Hell is here to make it clear that the death of Jesus was not just a swoon or a coma, but death in every sense of the word.		
The third day he rose from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.			
From thence he shall come to judge the living and dead.		<i>Marcionism.</i> No judgment.	“My god” wouldn’t send anyone to Hell!
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church,	The Gnostics believed that the most important Christian doctrines were reserved for a select few. The orthodox belief was that the fullness of the Gospel was to be preached to the entire human race. Hence the term “catholic,” or universal, which distinguished them from the Gnostics.		
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,	The Gnostics considered that what men needed was not forgiveness, but enlightenment. Ignorance, not sin, was the problem. Some of them, believing the body to be a snare and delusion, led lives of great asceticism. Others, believing the body to be quite separate from the soul, held that it did not matter what the body did, since it was completely foul anyway, and its actions had not effect on the soul. That accordingly led lives that were not ascetic at all. Either way, the notion of forgiveness was alien to them.		Plethora of books revealing hidden truths: Bible numerology as an extreme example.
the resurrection of the body,	The chief goal of the Gnostics was to become free forever from the taint of matter and the shackles of the body, and to return to the heavenly realm as Pure Spirit. They totally rejected any idea of the resurrection of the body.		
And the life everlasting. AMEN			

\* Condensed from annotations provided by James E. Kiefer, cited at various Web sites.

## The Nicene Creed Contra Heresies

Creed Text	Arian Error*	Other Heresies	Modern Errors
We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.			Contrast with Muslim belief:  Qur'anic inscription in the Dome of the Rock:
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,  Eternally begotten of the Father,	Note 1  Note 2—the Son is not eternal	Docetism Apollinarianism Eutychianism Ebionism	“Praise be to God, who begets no son, and has no partner. He is God, one, eternal. He does not beget, He is not begotten, and He has no peer.” (Qur'an CXII)
God from God, Light from Light,	Note 3—Analogy of Light		
True God from true God, begotten, not made,	Note 4—the Son is not a created being		
Of one being with the Father.	Note 5: This line: “of one essence with the Father, of one substance with the Father, consubstantial with the Father,” (in Greek, HOMO-OUSIOS TOU PATROU) was the crucial one, the acid test.		
Through him all things were made.	The Son is not a created thing. This is a direct quote from John 1:3. The Son is not a created thing. Rather, He is the agent through Whom all created things come to be.	Ebionism	
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.		Adoptionism Marcionism Monarchianism Docetism Apollinarianism Eutychianism	Jehovah's Witnesses: Jesus is a created being. Note 8
On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.			

Creed Text	Arian Error*	Other Heresies	Modern Errors
He will come again in glory to judge the living and dead, and his kingdom will have no end.			
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.		Note 6: Filioque controversy.	
With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.	This line was directed against the view that the Holy Spirit did not exist, or was not active, before Pentecost.		
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.			
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. AMEN.			

\* Condensed from annotations provided by James E. Kiefer, cited at various Web sites.

**Note 1:** Here and elsewhere (such as John 1:14) where the Greek has μονογενη[τος] υιος (Mono-GEN-itos ei-OS), an English translation may read either “only Son” or “only begotten Son.” The Greek is ambiguous. We may take *monogenitos* to mean either “only begotten” or “one-of-a-kind, only, sole, unique.”

**Note 2:** Here the older translation has “begotten of the Father before all worlds.” One might suppose that this means, “before the galaxies were formed,” or something of the kind. But in fact the English word “world” used to mean something a little different. It is related to “were” (pronounced “weer”), an old word for “man,” as in “werewolf” or “weregild.” (Compare with Latin VIR.) Hence a “world” was originally a span of time equal to the normal lifespan of a man. Often in the KJV Bible, one finds “world” translating the Greek αιων (AI-on-“eon”), and a better translation today would be “age.” So here we have “begotten of the Father before all times, before all ages.” Arius was fond of saying, “The Logos is not eternal. God begat him, and before he was begotten, he did

not exist.” The Athanasians replied that the begetting of the Logos was not an event in time, but an eternal relationship.

**Note 3:** A favorite analogy of the Athanasians was the following: Light is continuously streaming forth from the sun. (In those days, it was generally assumed that light was instantaneous, so that there was no delay at all between the time that a ray of light left the sun and time it struck the earth.) The rays of light are derived from the sun, and not vice versa. But it is not the case that first the sun existed and afterwards the Light. It is possible to imagine that the sun has always existed, and always emitted light. The Light, then, is derived from the sun, but the Light and the sun exist simultaneously throughout eternity. They are co-eternal. Just so, the Son exists because the Father exists, but there was never a time before the Father produced the Son. The analogy is further appropriate because we can know the sun only through the rays of light that it emits. To see the sunlight is to see the sun. Just so, Jesus says, “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14.9)

**Note 4:** This line was inserted by way of repudiating Arius' teaching that the Son was the first thing that the Father created, and that to say that the Father begets the Son is simply another way of saying that the Father has created the Son.

Arius said that if the Father has begotten the Son, then the Son must be inferior to the Father, as a prince is inferior to a king. Athanasius replied that a son is precisely the same sort of being as his father, and that the only son of a king is destined himself to be a king. It is true that an earthly son is younger than his father, and that there is a time when he is not yet what he will be. But God is not in time. Time, like distance, is a relation between physical events, and has meaning only in the context of the physical universe. When we say that the Son is begotten of the Father, we do not refer to an event in the remote past, but to an eternal and timeless relation between the Persons of the Godhead. Thus, while we say of an earthly prince that he may some day hope to become what his father is now, we say of God the Son that He is eternally what God the Father is eternally.

**Note 5:** This line: "of one essence with the Father, of one substance with the Father, consubstantial with the Father," (in Greek, homo-ousios tou patrou) was the crucial one, the acid test. It was the one formula that the Arians could not interpret as meaning what they believed. Without it, they would have continued to teach that the Son is good, and glorious, and holy, and a Mighty Power, and God's chief agent in creating the world, and means by which God chiefly reveals Himself to us, and therefore deserving in some sense to be called divine. But they would have continued to deny that the Son was God in the same sense in which the Father is God. And they would have pointed out that, since the Council of Nicea had not issued any declaration that they could not accept, it followed that there was room for their position inside the tent of Christian doctrine, as that tent had been defined at Nicea. Arius and his immediate followers would have denied that they were reducing the Son to the position of a high-ranking angel. But their doctrine left no safeguard against it, and if they had triumphed at Nicea, even in the negative sense of having their position acknowledged as a permissible one within the limits of Christian orthodoxy, the damage to the Christian witness to Christ as God made flesh would have been irreparable. (Incidentally, HOMOOUSIOS is generally written without the hyphen. The OU (in Greek as in French) is pro-

nounced as in "soup", "group", and so on, and the word has five syllables HO-mo-Ou-si-os, with accents on first and third, as shown. The Greek root HOMO, meaning "same," is found in English words like "homosexual" and "homogenized", and is not to be confused with the Latin word HOMO, meaning "man, human".)

The language finally adopted in the East was that the Trinity consists of three HYPOSTASES (singular HYPOSTASIS) united in one OUSIA. The formula used in the West, and going back at least to Tertullian (who wrote around 200, and whose writings are the oldest surviving Christian treatises written in Latin), is that the Trinity consists of an element meaning "under, below" (as in "hypodermic", "hypothermia", etc.) followed by an element meaning "stand". Thus it was natural for a Greek-speaker, reading a Latin document that referred to One SUBSTANTIA to substitute mentally a reference to One HYPOSTASIS, and to be very uncomfortable, while a Latin-speaker would have the same problem in reverse. Thus the seeds were sown for a breakdown of communication.

**Note 6:** The words "and from the Son," are a Western addition to the Creed as it was originally agreed on by a Council representing the whole Church, East and West. They correspond to the Latin word FILIOQUE (Fili = Son, -O = from, -Que = and; pronounced with accent on the O), and the controversy about them is accordingly known as the Filioque controversy.

If we are looking for a statement that can be taken as common ground by all Christians, East and West alike, it clearly cannot include the FILIOQUE. On the other hand, Western Christians will be unwilling to have it supposed that they are repudiating the statement that the Spirit proceeds jointly from Father and Son. I accordingly suggest that we print the Creed with the FILIOQUE either in brackets or omitted altogether, but with the understanding that, while assenting to the resulting statement does not commit anyone to belief in the Dual Procession of the Spirit, neither does it commit anyone to disbelief in the dual Procession.

**Note 7:** The Mormon Church claims to have restored the true teachings of Jesus. Mormonism teaches that Jesus is a procreated being, the literal offspring of God the Father and one of His heavenly wives. According to

Mormon theology, God the Father, Elohim, dwells on a planet with His many spirit wives producing numerous spirit children who await to inhabit physical bodies so that they too may one day ascend to godhood as their parents did. Jesus is believed to be the firstborn spirit child of Elohim. The Doctrine and Covenants, one of four sacred books of Mormonism states, "Christ, the firstborn, was the mightiest of all the spirit children of the Father." The Gospel Principles, which is the manual of the Mormon Church, states, "The first spirit born to our heavenly parents was Jesus Christ." James Talmage, one of the early apostles of the church wrote, "[A]mong the spirit-children of Elohim, the firstborn was and is Jehovah or Jesus Christ to whom all others are juniors."

**Note 8:** From the Jehovah's Witnesses Web site: "Having been created by God, Jesus is in a secondary position in time, power, and knowledge. While on earth, Jesus was a human, although a perfect one because it was God who transferred the life-force of Jesus to the womb of Mary (Matthew 1:18-25) But that is not how he began. He himself declared that he had

"descended from heaven." (John 3:13) So it was only natural that he would later say to his followers: "What if you should see the Son of man [Jesus] ascend to where he was before?"—John 6:62, NJB

Thus, Jesus had an existence in heaven before coming to the earth. But was it as one of the persons in an almighty, eternal triune Godhead? No, for the Bible plainly states that in his prehuman existence, Jesus was a created spirit being, just as angels were spirit beings created by God. Neither the angels nor Jesus had existed before their creation."

Sources:

James E. Kiefer, various Web sites

Jehovah's Witnesses: <http://www.watchtower.org/library/ti/article05.htm>

Mormonism: <http://www.probe.org/docs/mormon-jesus.html>

Council of Nicea: <http://www.probe.org/doc/nicea.html>

Heresies: <http://www.datarat.net/DR/Heresies.html>

The Lutheran Cyclopedia: <http://www.lcms.org/cyclopedia>

## **ARIANISM**

Arianism is the heresy that Jesus is not Divine, and indeed, Christ was a created being (subordinate to God the Father). In this scheme of things, Christ had been the first created person.

(Promoted by Arius, an Alexandrian priest, c 250-336 A.D.)

## **MONARCHIANISM**

Monarchianism comes in two forms:

Adoptionist or Dynamic Monarchianism;

Modalist Monarchianism, Sabellianism, and Patripassianism (all essentially the same).

Modalist Monarchianism/Sabellianism/Patripassianism are covered under Modalism.

Adoptionism and Dynamic Monarchianism are covered under Adoptionism.

## **ADOPTIONISM**

Adoptionism is the heresy that Jesus was the adopted son of God, and NOT co-eternal with God the Father.

(It's also known as Dynamic Monarchism.)

According to this error, Jesus was elevated to godhood either at His baptism or after His resurrection.

## **MODALISM**

In capsule, Modalism is the heresy that the three Persons of the Trinity are actually mere manifestations (or modes) of God...rather than distinct and co-existent Persons.

This is known as Monarchianist Modalism, and also Sabellianism (after a Roman priest, Sabellius), as well as Patripassianism.

## **NESTORIANISM**

Nestorianism is the heresy that Christ's two natures (human and Divine) are two different persons in one...and not two natures inseparably joined in one person.

(Nestorius was Bishop of Constantinople in 428 A.D.)

## **DOCETISM**

Docetism is a word derived from the Greek term *dokeo*, which means to "seem" or appear".

Docetism is the heresy that Jesus was God the Father and only appeared to be human, and/or Jesus didn't really die on the cross but was replaced there by Simon of Cyrene or by Judas Iscariot.

(Muslims believe that Simon died in place of Jesus. There was also a Gnostic variant of Docetism.)

## **APOLLINARIANISM**

Apollinarianism is the heresy that Christ took on only a fleshly human nature, and not full humanity.

(So-called because it was originally promoted by Apollinaris the Younger (c 310–390), bishop of Laodicea in Syria.)

Apollinaris taught that Jesus had a divine mind and divine soul, but not a human mind or human soul. He conceded that Jesus had a human body...yet a spiritual one not fully human. (COMPARE: Docetism.)

## **EUTYCHIANISM**

Eutychianism is the heresy that Jesus had neither a human nature nor a divine nature, but a third kind.

This "theanthropic" nature was part God and part human.

A combined human/divine being not fully God or fully human.

## **EBIONISM**

Ebionism is the heresy that Jesus was a created being and not God. A prophet...perhaps even an angel...but in no way Divine.

## **SUBORDINATIONISM**

Subordinationism is the heresy that one Person of the Trinity is lesser in rank or dignity than the others.