

COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE (381)

The Development of the Doctrine of the Trinity

BACKGROUND

EMPERORS

- Valentinian (364-75)
 - Stayed out of religious disputes (Hanson, 793)
- Gratian (375-83)
 - In 378 decreed toleration for all Christian views except the Manichean, Photinian, and Eunomian varieties (Hanson, 794)
- Valens (364-78)
 - Homoian
 - Banished Gregory from Nyssa and Eusebius from Samosata; installed Lucius to succeed Athanasius in Alexandria when the latter died in 373, banishing Peter, Athanasius's elected successor, who was pro-Nicea; he also banished Eunomius (Hanson, 791)
- Theodosius (379-95)

THEODOSIAN DECREE OF 380

- Theodosius was declared emperor on 19 Jan 379. In Feb 380 he officially promoted the Nicene understanding of the Trinity in an edict known as *Cunctos Populos*, referencing the faith of Damasus of Rome and Peter of Alexandria: "the single divinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within an equal majesty and an orthodox Trinity" (Hanson, 804).
- On 10 Jan 381, Theodosius issued the edict *Nullis haereticis*, prohibiting gatherings of heretics: Eunomians, Photinians, Arians. All should hold to the following (given in Hanson, 805)
 - "He who professes the Nicene faith is to be thought of as the genuine worshipper in the Catholic religion, who confesses God Almighty and Christ his Son in one Name, God from God, Light from Light, who does not blaspheme the Holy Spirit, whom we hope for and accept from the highest Author of the world by denying him, in whose bosom the undivided substance (which is called by those who believe rightly by the use of the Greek word *ousia*) of the pure Trinity flourishes in the apprehension of an undefiled creed."

PRO-NICENE COUNCILS

376	Rome (Roman)
378	Rome (Western)
379	Antioch (Eastern)
381	Constantinople (Ecumenical)
382	Constantinople (Eastern)

THE COUNCIL

- The Council of Constantinople met in May, June, and July of 381 (Hanson, 805). Hanson says that "no acts nor ordered accounts of its proceedings survive" (805). Activities and pronouncements are known, but their context and order are not.
- The bishops seem to have been chosen based on their friendliness to Meletius (Hanson, 806).

- It met in various churches throughout the city (Hanson, 806).
- Gregory of Nyssa's quote about bread buying is in regard to the city during the council (Hanson, 806, *De Deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti*, PG 46.557):
 - "If you ask for change, the man launches into a theological discussion about begotten and unbegotten; if you enquire about the price of bread, the answer is given that the Father is greater and the Son subordinate; if you remark that the bath is nice the man pronounces that the Son is from non-existence."
- Meletius died suddenly at the beginning of the proceedings. Gregory of Nazianzus was declared the legitimate bishop of Constantinople and was named president of the council at the death of Meletius. Gregory became outdone at the progress and behavior of the council and resigned its headship, along with the episcopacy of Constantinople. (Hanson, 806-7)
 - Socrates (HE V 7.1-2) has this to say about Gregory: "But Gregory, who far excelled in eloquence and piety all those of the age in which he lived, understanding that some murmured at his preferment because he was a stranger, after expressing his joy at the Emperor's arrival, resigned the bishopric of Constantinople." And in 7.6-9 says that Gregory was elected bishop after the Macedonians left in the face of opposition from the Egyptian bishops and that another bishop had been appointed at Nazianzus. (in Stevenson, *Creeeds, Councils, and Controversies*).
 - Gregory, in Or 42 (24-27) complains that his appearance was found wanting and in Ep 130 says that councils do more harm than good and bring out the worst in the participants as opportunities for pride, arrogance, and political maneuverings.
- After unsuccessful negotiations with them, about 30 Macedonian bishops walked out; a large delegation of Egyptian bishops arrived late. (Hanson, 807)
- Four canons were produced. Those given as canons 5 and 6 were from the council in Constantinople in 382; canon 7 is from a later date. (Hanson, 807)
- The creed is only vaguely mentioned in a letter to Rome by the Constantinople council of 382, referring back to "the ecumenical synod" of the year before. It is not mentioned by contemporary historians. It is known only when it is read out at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, with very little reference to it in the meantime. (Hanson, 812)

THE CREED

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

- Hanson gives thirteen differences between this creed and that of Nicea (816)
 1. "maker of heaven and earth" is added
 2. "Only Begotten" replaces "from the Father"

3. "that is, from the substance of the Father" is omitted
 4. "the things in heaven and the things on earth" is omitted
 5. "by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary" is added
 6. "was crucified under Pontius Pilate" is added
 7. "and was buried" is added
 8. "in accordance with the Scriptures" and "is seated at the right hand of the Father" are added
 9. "in glory" is added to "will come again"
 10. "and his kingdom will have no end" is added
 11. The paragraph on the Holy Spirit is elaborated
 12. The concluding phrases are added referring to the Church, baptism, and resurrection
 13. The anathemas are omitted.
- Hanson concludes that the incidental changes show that this creed is an adaption of some other creed than that of Nicea (817)
 - Number 10 was added in condemnation of Marcellus of Ancyra
 - The absence of the anathemas is explained by the fact that the wording is by now outdated (819).
 - The paragraph on the Spirit Hanson sees as specifically worded to condemn the Macedonian position (818). It, as Hanson shows, is completely consistent with Basil's position and not far from that of Gregory of Nyssa (818). The Spirit is called divine, but not explicitly God or consubstantial. This would coincide with Gregory of Nazianzus's assertion that the statement muddied the waters and was a mediocre and half-way doctrine.
 - The omission of number 3 is curious to scholars. Harnack saw it as Cappadocian-inspired conciliation to allow for acceptance of Nicea (817). Hanson suggests that this might be mere indifference to any significance (818). Hanson goes further, arguing that if this creed was seen as a reaffirmation of Nicea, there was no need to be rigorously specific in its description. It was not intended to be a codified formula but a statement of what Nicea meant. The absence of the phrase does not contradict it, and probably was intended to be implied (820).
 - Hanson concludes that the fathers of the council and those who received it saw this creed as a reaffirmation of Nicea, not as a new creed.

THE AFTERMATH

- Theodosius affirmed the council by edict; those who refused it were considered heretics.
- Damasus responded to Canon 3 by developing a theory of primacy based on the presence of Peter: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch (see 822)
- The western bishops were not at first wholeheartedly behind the council and the Council of Aquileia in 381 protested against it (which was responded to by a council in Constantinople in 382). However, the clarity of the doctrine of God, which supported many western concerns, and the imperial support, eventually led to its support by the western bishops, with everything except canon 3.

THE DOGMA OF THE TRINITY

- God is one substance (*ousia*) in three persons (*hypostases*)
- Everything the Father is the Son is, except being Father and being Son
- Everything the Son is the Spirit is, except being Son and being Spirit
- Everything the Father is the Spirit is, except being Father and being Spirit
- The Son and Spirit each have a mission, but share in all that it is to be divine

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