

His-Story

Church history and why it matters to me

THE FOUR C's: CHRISTIANS, COUNCILS, CREEDS, & CONFESSIONS

I. Introduction

- A. When evaluating a diamond (its value and purity), the four C's (cut, color, carat, and clarity) are important
- B. In evaluating theological teachings with a view towards maintaining the peace and purity of the church, the church needed four C's too
 - 1. **Christians:** true Believers being led by the Holy Spirit in the interest of the whole church
 - 2. **Councils:** All parties (of differing views) coming together to arrive at the truth
 - 3. **Creeds and Confessions:** The final by-product of the council(s) to distinguish truth from heresy
 - a. Creed: from the Latin *credo*: "I believe"
 - b. Creeds: typically shorter and were/are often used in worship (ex. Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed)
 - c. Confessions: typically longer and contain a body of systematic doctrine (ex. Westminster Confession of Faith)



Notes

II. Apostles' Creed

- A. Legend (probably false)
 - 1. The 12 Apostles gathered together before launching out on the mission Christ had given them, and they composed the creed – each contributing a clause (since there are 12 clauses)
 - 2. More likely the creed was put together in Rome around AD 150.
- B. Then called a "symbol of the faith"
 - 1. Used in baptisms where a candidate was asked three questions (using the creed):
 - a. Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty...?
 - b. Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his son, our Lord...?
 - c. And do you believe in the Holy Ghost...?
 - 2. Used as a simple statement of faith to distinguish true orthodoxy from gnosticism and Marcionism (a Gnostic or Marcionite would never have confessed the Apostles' Creed in its entirety)

III. Christians and Apostolic lineage

- A. Growing heresies and rampant confusion on matters of theology led the church to seek (and trust in) true Believers who could link their authority back to the Apostles
- B. Bishops were those who had been brought up under the teachings of the disciples of the Apostles and therefore had theological credibility and weight
 - 1. Several of the oldest churches maintained lists (records) linking their bishops to the original Apostles (Church in Rome, Church in Antioch, Church in Ephesus)
 - 2. Gnostics and Marcionites could not prove Apostolic lineage
- C. The Apostolic link thinking paved the way for the justification of a central Bishop (pope)

IV. The Ecumenical Councils of the early church (from Robert C. Walton's *Chronological and Background Charts of Church History*)

| LOCATION | DATE | EMPEROR | KEY PARTICIPANTS | MAJOR OUTCOMES |
|----------------|---------|----------------|---|--|
| NICEA | 325 | Constantine | Arius Alexander Eusebius of Nicomedia Eusebius of Caesarea Hosius Athanasius | Declared Son <i>homoousios</i> (coequal, consubstantial, and coeternal) with Father. Condemned Arius. Drafted original form of Nicene Creed. |
| CONSTANTINOPLE | 381 | Theodosius | Meletius Gregory of Nazianzus Gregory of Nyssa | Confirmed results of Council of Nicea. Produced revised Nicene Creed. Ended Trinitarian Controversy. Affirmed deity of the Holy Spirit. Condemned Apollinarianism. |
| EPHESUS | 431 | Theodosius II | Cyril Nestorius | Declared Nestorianism heretical. Accepted by implication Alexandrian Christology. Condemned Pelagius. |
| CHALCEDON | 451 | Marcian | Leo I Dioscurus Eutyches | Declared Christ's two natures unmixed, unchanged, undivided, inseparable. Condemned Eutychianism. |
| CONSTANTINOPLE | 553 | Justinian | Eutychius | Condemned "Three Chapters" to gain support of Monophysites. Affirmed Cyrillian interpretation of Chalcedon. |
| CONSTANTINOPLE | 680–681 | Constantine IV | | Rejected Monothelitism. Condemned Pope Honorius (d. 638) as heretical. |
| NICEA | 787 | Constantine VI | | Declared veneration of icons and statues legitimate. |

A. Council of Nicea (325)

1. Theological dispute between Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, and Arius, a presbyter (leader/elder) in his congregation
2. Arius trying to solve the problem of Jesus Christ in his nature and relation to God
 - a. Claimed that Christ was the first created being who then created the world
 - b. Claimed that Christ couldn't be truly divine like the Father
3. Emperor Constantine convened the council (in Nicea) to settle debate
 - a. Constantine moderated the council
 - b. Key figures at the council: Arius, Alexander, Eusebius of Nicomedia, Eusebius of Caesarea (considered to be the first church historian), Hosias (Bishop of Cordova and Constantine's mediatorial bishop), and Athanasius (a well known theologian who wrote an important work called *On the Incarnation*)
4. Outcome
 - a. Proposal of the reconciling word: *homoousios* (Greek for "of one essence" in understanding the relationship between the Son and the Father)
 - b. Concluded Christ is co-equal, co-substantial, and co-eternal with the Father
 - c. Arius' views condemned



Notes

- d. Original wording for the Nicene Creed was drafted (at the time it was called the Creed of Nicea)¹
 - e. The council also wrote 20 canons (standards): regulations overseeing church practices
5. Long term results and ramifications
- a. Constantine considered the council a triumph for the church and its unity
 - b. Arius (and followers) banished but they still spread heretical teaching
 - c. “The Theology of Nicea” adhered to in the west
 - d. Resistance to The Theology of Nicea in the east (misunderstandings of key words like *homoousios*)
 - e. The divide continued to grow between the east and west

B. Council of Constantinople (381)

1. Growing division between the western followers of The Theology of Nicea and the eastern Arians who continued to reject (nor recognize) the Imperial Church and its head bishops
2. The Cappadocian Fathers: Three men of eastern Asia minor who sought to repair the damage in the church
 - a. Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus
 - b. Wrote and taught extensively on the doctrine of the trinity
 - c. Basil responsible for the famous explanation of the trinity as “being one substance (*ousia*) and three persons (*hypostaseis*).”
3. Enter Emperor Theodosius (became emperor in 379)
 - a. Established Christianity as the official religion of the Empire
 - b. In 381 Theodosius called for the Council of Constantinople
 - c. Key figures at the council: Meletius, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus
4. Outcome
 - a. Updated the Creed of Nicea to the Nicene Creed²
 - b. Ended the trinitarian debate (thus affirming the deity of the Holy Spirit)
 - c. Marked the end of Arianism in the Empire

C. Council of Ephesus (431)

1. Debate about the two natures of Christ from John 1 – and the Word became flesh
2. Nestorius a bishop who taught Christ consisted of two distinct persons (one human and one divine). He loathed the term used of Mary as *theotokos* (God-bearer).
3. Council of Ephesus condemned Nestorius’ teaching, and he was declared as a heretic.

V. Why this segment of history matters (or *should matter*) to me

- A. Looking at the struggles of the third and fourth century church we

¹ 325 version of the Nicene 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 the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father;

By whom all things were made both in heaven and on earth; Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; He suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

And in the Holy Ghost.

But those who say: ‘There was a time when he was not;’ and ‘He was not before he was made;’ and ‘He was made out of nothing,’ or ‘He is of another substance’ or ‘essence,’ or ‘The Son of God is created,’ or ‘changeable,’ or ‘alterable’— they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church.

² 381 version of the Nicene Creed

I 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 with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men 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 I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

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

are reminded that all we experience in our times is not dissimilar.

1. How do we overcome differences and ideas and remain unified?
2. When is it appropriate to label a teaching as heretical?

B. Consider this quotation from Michael D. Williams:

We are participants in the story of God's people, not just a reader of it. Our heritage and identity as well as the ending are known, we play our active part. Who are we going to be? How are we going to live? We must faithfully improvise as God's people in the modern era. Historically this has been accomplished through creeds, liturgical calendars, hymns & songs, confessions and catechism (covenant renewal ceremonies).

—from the course *God and His Word*. © Covenant Theological Seminary

C. *Improvise* means to fit into the context of the on-going story. Therefore what are things we can do as individuals or churches to maintain the peace and purity of the church?

Notes