

21. Doctrine of the Trinity (continued)

The Council of Nicea: A.D. 325

Because of the spread of the Arian heresy, which denied the deity of Christ, the unity and even the future of the Roman Empire seemed uncertain. The newly converted Constantine convened an ecumenical council in Nicea to settle the issue.

The Issue: Was Christ fully God, or was he a created and subordinate being?

Arius

Only God the Father is eternal.
The Son had a beginning as the first and highest created being.
The Son is not one in essence with the Father.
Christ is subordinate to the Father.
He is called God as an honorific title.

Athanasius

Christ is co-eternal with the Father.
Christ had no beginning.
The Son and Father are of the same essence.
Christ is not subordinate to the Father.

Crucial Statements of the Council's Creed

[We believe] "in one Lord Jesus Christ . . . true God of true God, not made, of one substance with the Father."

"But those who say there was when He was not, and before being begotten He was not . . . these the Catholic Church anathematizes."

"And we believe in the Holy Spirit."

Results From the Council

Arianism was formally condemned.
The *homoousia* (same substance) statement created conflicts.
Arians reinterpreted *homoousia* and accused the council of modalistic monarchianism.
Doctrine of the Holy Spirit was left undeveloped.

The Council of Constantinople: A.D. 381

Arianism was not extinguished at Nicea; it actually grew in prominence. Additionally, Macedonianism emerged, which subordinated the Holy Spirit in much the same manner as Arianism had subordinated Christ.

The Issue: Is the Holy Spirit fully God?

Crucial Statement of the Council's Creed

". . . and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver, who proceeds from the Father, who is worshiped and glorified together with the Father and the Son."

Results From the Council

Arianism was rebuffed and the Nicene Creed reaffirmed.
Macedonianism was condemned and Holy Spirit's deity affirmed.
Major conflicts over Trinitarianism were resolved (though Christological debates continued until Chalcedon, A.D. 451).