# The First Four Ecumenical Councils as Ineffective Means to Control the Rise and Spread of Heterodox Christian Ideologies

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**Abstract**

This paper is essentially an examination of the doctrine produced at the first four Christian ecumenical councils, and whether the codification of the theological constructs therein served the purpose for which they were designed. At the councils of Nicaea in 325 C.E., Constantinople I in 381, Ephesus in 431, and Chalcedon in 451, attempts were made to establish a correct, and therefore universally acceptable, form of the Christian faith. Any divergent beliefs, as well as those individuals who harbored them, were considered heretical. While the bishops at the councils desired to eradicate heresy and institute orthodoxy, the most common outcome was both the perseverance of existing heterodox positions and the birth of new ones. As a direct result, further councils were convened in response to the ongoing predicaments, and the Orthodox Christians were consequently required to alter their creeds. Given this combination of the persistence of heterodox ideas and the resulting instability of orthodox doctrine, Hasbrouck concludes that the first four ecumenical councils were an inadequate method by which to restrict heresy.

Orthodox Christianity is a product of the fourth century. Dating back to the beginning of the Christian religion, there were numerous views regarding God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the connection that each had to one another as well as to humanity. The group who would actuate the establishment of universal Christian doctrine, presently known as the proto-Orthodox, fought vociferously against the promoters of ideas which they deemed heretical. The need for stability within the Christian community ultimately led to the convening of councils designed in part to address and condemn the heretics. Instituting a doctrine of the faith endorsed by the proto-Orthodox leaders and the Roman Emperor alike seemed to be the most effective means by which to accomplish such a goal. Ideally, the realization of this objective would purge Christianity of theologically heterodox positions. However, the desired result and the end result proved to be as divergent as the arguments from which the councils were born.

An examination of the conciliar decisions illuminates a simultaneous attempt to solidify orthodoxy and suppress heresy. The attending theologians produced doctrinal statements, or creeds, which elevated their own views of the faith and stifled all others. Nevertheless, the need for subsequent councils indicates that their success was less than absolute. The ecumenical councils of Nicaea in 325 C.E., Constantinople I in 381 C.E., Ephesus in 431 C.E., and Chalcedon in 451 C.E. were convened in response to the rise and spread of beliefs held to be counter-Orthodox. However, following each council, problems continued to

surface both in the form of new heresies and modifications of those already in existence, thereby requiring the Orthodox to amend their creedal statements accordingly.  Furthermore, mere misinterpretation of the established doctrine often led to accusations of heresy between the two major schools of Christian thought, respectively located in Alexandria and Antioch.  As a result of the ideological division and doctrinal instability concerning the nature of Christ, the composition of the Trinity, and the role of Mary in the incarnation, the first four ecumenical councils were largely ineffective in restricting the promulgation of heresy.

Throughout the first several centuries of the Common Era, individuals and communities promoted differing viewpoints about Jesus and his relationship to both God and humanity.  While there were some who preferred to consider themselves primarily Jewish, most all of these groups referred to themselves as Christians.  Before the legalization of Christianity early in the fourth century, there was no single concrete set of theological guidelines to which self-proclaimed followers of Jesus were expected to adhere.  As such, those who championed different branches of the faith hurled insults at one another, and the word heresy was used with little discretion.  In *The Early Church*, Henry Chadwick illuminates the proto-Orthodox point of view that "[H]eresy was born out of the itch for something new.  It came from 'curiosity', which meant prying into matters which the human mind had neither capacity to know nor authority to even think about."[1]  The desire to eradicate such practices and gain stability through orthodoxy required the formation of a universal Christian doctrine to which obedience was strictly enforced.  Ideally, the realization of such a doctrine would curb the growing popularity of ideologies already considered heretical by the proto-Orthodox, and chief among these were the views endorsed by Sabellius and Arius.  An understanding of the actions taken and decisions made at the ecumenical councils necessitates a brief description of these heresies.

Though Sabellius lived in the early third century, long before the Council of Nicaea, his beliefs were still in existence by the time of that council.  In his text *Early Christian Doctrines*, J.N.D. Kelly writes that Sabellius subscribed to a belief structure known as "monarchianism proper, otherwise called modalism."[2]  Advocates of this tradition asserted that "[A]ny suggestion that the Word or Son was other than, or a distinct Person from, the Father seemed. . . to lead inescapably to the blasphemy of two Gods."[3]  This modalistic form of monarchianism spread throughout the Christian communities of the Roman Empire, and Sabellius was understood to be its most enthusiastic supporter.  Insisting upon the absolute unity of God and Jesus, he made implications which were unacceptable to many Christians.  Leo Donald Davis addresses these controversial issues in *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology*, by explaining that, to Sabellius, "Father and Logos are one and the same. . . . It was the Father who deified the flesh and made it one with himself, so that Father and Son, one person, suffered together."[4]  The very notion that God could feel pain in the same manner as human beings fell far outside the bounds of proto-Orthodox Christianity, making Sabellianism a target for centuries to come.  As will become clear later, it was attacked at the Council of Nicaea and subsequent councils.  However, the most prominent heresy addressed by the bishops at Nicaea was Arianism, a much more recent development founded by Arius, who himself actually attended the council.

Arius was a priest in Alexandria, and by the early fourth century his paradigm of Christian thought was gaining momentum.  According to Rowan Williams, attempting to understand the specifics of Arian

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[1] Henry Chadwick, *The Penguin History of the Church*, vol. 1, *The Early Church*, rev. ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 82.

[2] Kelly, J.N.D., *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1978), 119.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1983), 42.

theology proves difficult because "[W]e have only a handful of texts than can confidently be treated as giving us Arius' own thinking in his own words; apart from these, we are wholly dependant upon the reports of his enemies."[5]  Information about a theological position as offered by those opposed to that position must indeed be treated as suspect.  This issue notwithstanding, the writings of Arius that are still in existence do effectively clarify some of his beliefs.  For example, in his Letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia, believed to have been written in 319, Arius explains:

> The bishop greatly pillages us and persecutes us, and invoking all things moves against us, so that he might drive us as godless men from the city.  All this because we do not agree with him when he states in public, "Always God Always Son," "At the same time Father, at the same time Son," "The Son ingenerably coexists with God," "Ever-begotten, ungenerated-created, neither in thought nor in some moment of time does God proceed the Son."[6]

Eusebius of Nicomedia was sympathetic to Arius, and in the above correspondence the author has outlined the Orthodox view regarding the origination of Christ as it existed in the early fourth century. The bishop referenced was in fact his own bishop, Alexander of Alexandria, to whom he wrote a comparable letter.

After complaining to Eusebius about his treatment by Alexander, Arius sent a letter to Alexander himself in which he lucidly presents his own Trinitarian and Christological position.  Regarding the relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Arius writes that "there are three *hypostases*. God being the cause of all is without beginning, most alone; but the Son, begotten by the Father, created and founded before the ages, was not before he was begotten.  Rather, the Son. . . was caused to subsist by the Father."[7]  The implication here is that Jesus, because he was brought into existence by the Father, cannot be elevated to the same height as the Father in terms of divinity.  Jaroslav Pelikan, in his monumental work entitled *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, notes that "[T]he Arian doctrine of Christ as creature collided with the tradition of describing him as God."[8]  Therefore, the heterodoxy embraced by the Arians began "not in the doctrine of God as such, but in the doctrine of the relation between God and the divine in Christ."[9]  Distinction between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the three components which together comprise the trinity, was also considered heretical insofar as it was taken to mean that Jesus and the Spirit existed in a state of "subordination to the Father."[10]  In response to the general framework and broadening influence of the Arian Christian tradition, Alexander attempted to solve the problem himself.

Alexander believed the Arians to be separate from orthodoxy, and therefore engaged in active opposition to the Christian church.  He employs a biblical passage acceptable to the Orthodox in order to describe the folly of Arius and his followers:

> [T]hey forget the words indicating his essential glory, nobility, and dwelling with the Father.  "I and the Father are one" [John 10:30]. The Lord says this, not proclaiming himself the Father. . .

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[5] Williams, Rowan, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 95.

[6] Arius, *Letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia*, in *The Trinitarian Controversy*, ed. William G. Rusch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 29.

[7] Arius, *Letter to Alexander of Alexandria*, in *The Trinitarian Controversy*, ed. William G. Rusch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 31-32.

[8] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 200.

[9] Ibid., 195.

[10] Davis, 51.

but saying that the Son of the Father is disposed by nature accurately to save the paternal likeness. Thus he took from his nature an impression of his likeness in all regards and is an unchangeable image of the Father and can express the image of the archetype.[11]

Alexander refused to relegate Jesus to a secondary status within the Godhead, and accused Arius of having espoused just such a notion. In an attack of his own, "Arius labeled his bishop's position Sabellian and insisted that if the Father had begotten a Son, then the Son began to exist."[12] The bishop would tolerate no more; Alexander and a group of his fellow bishops "expelled them altogether from the church that worships Christ's divinity."[13] However, the actions taken by Alexander failed to produce the desired result. In defense of Arianism and antagonism to Alexander, a group of bishops met with Eusebius of Nicomedia "to verify that Arius's views were 'orthodox'—that is, within the range of ideas acceptable for Christians to hold."[14] With the situation spiraling further out of control, the Emperor Constantine intervened; this intervention took the form of the first ecumenical council.

The escalation of the dispute between the Arians and the proto-Orthodox concerning the divinity of Jesus led Constantine to call a council of bishops from sees spanning the whole of the Roman Empire. After a discrepancy regarding location, Nicaea was decided upon, and "[T]he council was to begin its work, as originally planned, at the end of May 325. . . Constantine's great hope was to convene a conference that would end the bishops' bitter wrangling and begin an era of harmony in the Church."[15] The means by which to achieve this goal was the development and codification of a universally accepted doctrine of the Christian faith. The council indeed established such a doctrine; however, an examination of its precepts and the events following the council reveal that orthodoxy did not emerge completely victorious.

The statement of orthodoxy resulting from the council, known as the Nicene Creed, reads as follows:

> 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 of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, Begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father, through Whom all things were made.
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> Who for us men and for our salvation came down and became incarnate, and was made man, suffered and rose on the third day, And ascended into heaven, And is coming with glory to judge living and dead, And in the Holy Spirit.
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> But those who say, There was when the Son of God was not, and before he was begotten he was not, and that he came into being from things that are not, or that he is of a different hypostasis or substance, or that he is mutable or alterable – the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes.[16]

The beliefs that Arius expressed in his above-cited letter to Alexander are dealt with in the Creed. Pelikan expands on this observation by writing that the bishops "condemned any and all of the various formulas by which Arius and his supporters had attempted to range Christ on the other side of the line

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[11] Alexander of Alexandria, *Letter to Alexander of Thessalonica*, in *The Trinitarian Controversy*, ed. William G. Rusch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 40.

[12] Davis, 53.

[13] Alexander of Alexandria, in *The Trinitarian Controversy*, 34.

[14] Richard Rubenstein, *When Jesus Became God: The Struggle to Define Christianity during the Last Days of Rome* (Orlando: Harcourt, Inc.), 59.

[15] Ibid., 68-69.

[16] Reprinted in Davis, 60.

separating Creator from creature."[17]  The attendees of the Council of Nicaea had succeeded in officially declaring the heterodoxy of Arianism.  Davis points out that this feat was made possible by the inclusion of the words "'of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father.'  This phrase asserts that the Son shares the same being as the Father, and is therefore fully divine."[18]  However, while the bishops had denounced Arius and his followers as heretics, the Creed contained some ambiguities that proved to be problematic.

The doctrinal integrity of the Nicene Creed was in question from the outset, thus hindering the legitimate acceptance of orthodoxy by allowing individuals to interpret Christ and the Trinity according to their own understanding of the proclamation.  This issue is of fundamental importance to the development of Orthodox Christianity because with the passage of time and materialization of heretical positions, the ecumenical statements were adjusted to combat perceived threats against the church.  Although the *homoousios* formula satisfactorily toppled Arian Christology, many of the bishops objected to it because "if Father and Son were of one numerically identical substance, the doctrine of the creed could well be Sabellian, Father and Son being identical and indistinguishable."[19]  The council was designed to eliminate all heresy, not to inadvertently endorse one while deposing another.  Nevertheless, the possible connection with Sabellianism was denied and the Nicene Creed passed into official orthodoxy.  Arius, of course, did not give his consent to its passage, and "he was joined, apparently, by only two of the council fathers."[20]  His denunciation official, Arius removed himself from the council.  As for the other bishops, they "went right on teaching as they always had.  In the case of most of them, this meant a doctrine of Christ somewhere between that of Arius and that of Alexander."[21]  The creed, and therefore the council, essentially served its purpose on paper alone.  Pelikan offers a succinct outline of the Nicene creedal achievement by writing that "it represented anything but theological unanimity at the time of the Council of Nicea itself, much less during the half-century that followed."[22]  In the aftermath of the first ecumenical council, Arianism persisted and new heretical ideas arose.

Constantine took ill and died in the year 337, and shortly thereafter the throne was assumed by his son Constantius.  The change in leadership "had a profound impact on the Arian controversy, for Constantius was close to Eusebius of Nicomedia, whom he soon made Bishop of Constantinople, and sympathized with the suborbinationist views."[23]  Although Arius himself had passed away by this time, having an emperor who supported his theological prescriptions was detrimental to the Nicene faithful.  Constantius widened the gap between the opposing parties when he began "the deposition and exile of bishops and priests who supported Nicene views."[24]  Concerning the individuals who replaced those removed and the renewed strength of Arianism, Davis notes that "[T]o the see of Milan the staunch Arian Auxentius was elected to make the city a center of Arian resistance to the Nicene Creed until 373."[25]  As damaging as these proceedings may seem, it was through one of the banished men that the Orthodox regained their sense of doctrinal superiority.

Among the men whose positions were attacked by Constantius was Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria.  William Rusch, in *The Trinitarian Controversy*, describes Athanasius as "the great defender of the

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[17] Pelikan, 203.
[18] Davis., 61.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Pelikan, 203.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Rubenstein, 140.
[24] Davis, 87.
[25] Ibid., 92.

decision at Nicaea. His commitment to the faith of Nicaea was unalterable."[26] Given his stance on the first council, Athanasius was severely and openly opposed to all heresies and Arianism in particular. As such, he took upon himself the responsibility of developing a justification of orthodoxy that would preserve Nicene doctrine and further vilify Arianism. In the first book of his *Orations Against the Arians*, he acknowledges their perseverance after Nicaea:

> The ecumenical synod, not enduring Arius's impiety, cast Arius, who says these things, out of the church and anathematized him. . . . And, as I said previously, though such a judgment against impiety should be sufficient in itself to persuade all to flee from it, nevertheless certain so-called Christians, either ignorant or hypocrites, as was said before, regard the heresy as not different from the truth and consider the individuals who think these things Christians.[27]

In this text, Athanasius has provided further proof that after the Council of Nicaea the Arians did not simply fade away. One can assume that his words are genuine; as a staunch advocate of Nicene orthodoxy it is difficult to imagine a cause for which he would fabricate the existence of his enemies. The persistence of Arianism verifies that the Nicene Creed had not produced the desired theological uniformity. However, Athanasius refused to admit defeat, and resolved to counter their strength by insisting that Jesus was both God and man, and for this task he employed the concept of the Incarnation.

Whereas Arius had claimed that Jesus was essentially a man, a created entity separate from God, Athanasius argued that He was simultaneously man and God. In order to evidence his position, he presented the act of the Incarnation in terms of how it allowed Jesus to fulfill His intended role on earth. In his *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius elaborates this belief by stating that "the solidarity of mankind is such that, by virtue of the Word's indwelling in a single human body, the corruption which goes with death has lost its power over all."[28] To put his argument in negative terms, Athanasius is saying that if Jesus had not been born of a woman and therefore inhabited a human body and lived a human life, He could not have bestowed salvation on humanity through His death. Moreover, his belief in the divinity of Jesus is equally apparent through his reference to him as *the Word*. While this example and analysis is a simplified and condensed version of his theological outlook, it nevertheless illuminates his position as opposed to that of the Arians. With regard to his philosophy in its entirety, Rusch delineates that his "work enabled a great number of the moderates to come together with Athanasius and his followers. . . . Athanasius saved Nicaea."[29] The formula proposed by Athanasius, of which the preceding comprised an important part, temporarily solved the Christological dilemma that plagued the early church. However, misinterpretation of the creed in a different capacity soon created further unease and the need for another ecumenical council.

In the period between the Council of Nicaea and the Council of Constantinople, two new heresies threatened the Nicene doctrine and its devotees. The first of these is known as Apollinarianism, after Apollinarius of Laodicea. A friend to Athanasius, his theology was based in the idea that "Christ's human nature differed from that of other men in one all-important respect: the divine Word or Logos replaced the natural mind."[30] He presented Jesus as human only in bodily form in what Chadwick refers to as "an

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[26] Rusch, 22.
[27] Athanasius, *Orations Against the Arians*, *Book 1*, in *The Trinitarian Controversy*, ed. William G. Rusch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 69.
[28] St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, trans. and ed. by a religious of C.S.M.V., St. Vladimir's Seminary Press Popular Patristics Series, rev. ed. (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977), 35.
[29] Rusch, 22.
[30] Chadwick, 148.

extreme anti-Arian reaction."[31]  The question then becomes whether or not this Christological paradigm contradicted the one proposed by Athanasius, which is mentioned above.

Theoretically, if the Athanasian Christology required Jesus to be fully human for the preservation of salvation, then a fully human consciousness would be a formulaic necessity.  However, J.N.D. Kelly points out that "the fact must be faced that his thought simply allowed no room for a human mind."[32]  Nevertheless, continues Kelly, "[S]ome scholars, while conceding his lack overt of interest in Christ's human mind, have pointed to the fact that he nowhere expressly denies the existence of one."[33]  So the Apollinarian position did not explicitly counter the Athanasian; on the contrary, it seemingly complemented it in certain respects.  In his *On the Union in Christ of the Body with the Godhead*, Apollinaris outlines his basic ideology: "[A]nd the nature of the flesh is not altered by its union with what is coessential with God and by its participation in the title of *homoousios*, even as the nature of the Godhead is not changed by its participation of a human body and by bearing the name of a flesh coessential with us."[34]  Athanasius, like Apollinaris, was primarily concerned with the unquestionable habitation of God in a human form.  Apollinaris simply expanded on this idea in such a way as to distinctly state that the form, being the only genuinely human element, was coupled with the divine and unalterable psyche of God.  Although Apollinaris merely advocated a perspective that Athanasius chose not to address, his Christology would be deemed heretical in the approaching Council of Constantinople.  In addition to the Apollinarian dissent, a heresy centered on the Holy Spirit emerged between the first two ecumenical councils.

As previously stated, the Nicene Creed was principally written in response to issues concerning the relation between Jesus and God.  Mention of the Holy Spirit emerges only once in the text, prompting Pelikan to assert that "the doctrine of the Holy Spirit had been disposed of in lapidary brevity: 'And [we believe] in the Holy Spirit.'"[35]  This lack of emphasis prompted Macedonius of Constantinople, who "led a group which denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit and rested their case. . . partly on the absence of any declaration on the subject in the Nicene creed of 325."[36]  The supporters of this belief were called Macedonians, after their founder, and "[T]hey were also called Pneumatomachians, fighters against the Spirit, and were especially strong in Constantinople, Thrace, Bithynia and along the Hellespont."[37]  Regardless of the moniker by which they were referenced, this group clearly had a large following and presented a problem to the Orthodox.  As such, the Nicene faithful set out to discredit their theological constructs, and Athanasius was among those who made such an attempt.

Against the Macedonians, Athanasius undertook the task of logically confirming the divine status of the Holy Spirit within the Godhead.  In order to do so, he argued that "the Son bestows the Spirit. . . . Therefore, the Spirit belongs to the essence of the Son as the Son belongs to the essence of the Father."[38]  Citing the work of historian G.L. Prestige, Davis notes that this explanation of the Trinity is a justification of the Nicene term *homoousios* insofar as "their 'substance' is identical; if you analyze the meaning connoted by the word God, in whatever connection, you arrive in every case at exactly the same result, whether you are thinking of the Father or of the Son or of the Holy Spirit."[39]  As is mentioned above,

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Kelly, 287.

[33] Ibid., 288.

[34] Apollinaris of Laodicea, *On the Union in Christ of the Body with the Godhead*, in *The Christological Controversy*, ed. Richard A. Norris, Jr. (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1980), 103.

[35] Pelikan, 211.

[36] Chadwick, 146.

[37] Davis, 107.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., 90.

*homoousios* in the Nicene sense meant "of one substance," and was only applied to the Father and the Son. Athanasius thus expanded the canon of Nicaea to include the Holy Spirit as an essential component in the divine triad. Unofficially expanding the doctrine, however, was not sufficient ammunition with which to attack the heretics. While his work was indeed represented in the forthcoming Constantinopolitan Creed, likely the most significant Macedonian refutation came from three men known as the Cappadocian Fathers.

Athanasius, who fought with such passion against those he labeled heretics, died in 373 C.E., just eight years before the Council of Constantinople. In his wake "[T]he mantle. . . passed to the 'Cappadocian Fathers' – to Basil of Caesarea, his friend Gregory whose father (not he) was bishop of Nazianzus, and Basil's younger brother Gregory, who became bishop of Nyssa."[40] As this statement implies, the Cappadocian Fathers widened the Athanasian views regarding the Trinity. This was a necessary course of action "because homoousios left the question of the One unanswered and the creed neglected to codify a term for the Three. . . .What was needed was a term for the One and another for the Three. A term for the latter was hypostasis. . . an obvious term for the former. . . was ousia."[41] This formula was wholeheartedly embraced by the Cappadocians, each of whom contributed to its expansion in a significant manner, beginning with Basil of Caesarea.

Basil fundamentally sketched the Trinitarian framework as delineated above. In terms of defining the constituent parts, Davis reveals that "[O]usia meant for him the existence or essence or substantial entity of God; whereas hypostasis signified the essence in a particular mode, the manner of being of each of the three persons."[42] The Godhead, therefore, is a single nature composed of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each is distinct, but all are equal and do not exist independently of one another. Recall that Arius had professed a belief in three *hypostases* and that this suggestion was deemed heretical at the Council of Nicaea. The difference between these theologies lies in the fact that Arius did not endorse or even mention a unifying nature, or *ousia*. Basil prepared the doctrine for his younger brother, Gregory of Nyssa, who increased the exposition of *hypostases* within *ousia*.

Cognizant of the fact that the Trinitarian formula proposed by his older brother was confusing and thus open to misapprehension, Gregory of Nyssa sought to clarify the specifics of the word *hypostasis*. In his *On the difference between* ousia *and* hypostasis *1-4*, Gregory writes:

> What is predicated of an object in its particularity is indicated by the term *hypostasis*. . . . It is not an indefinite notion, like *ousia*, the general character of whose meaning excludes concrete existence (stasis); rather it gives particular and specified existence to what is general and unspecified as it occurs in a particular object with the help of the particular characteristics to be observed in that object.[43]

In essence, Gregory is arguing that each of the three members in the unified Godhead performs individual tasks and has an explicit role to fulfill with regard to humanity. Regarding the roles, Gregory identifies them in the same capacity as Athanasius had before him: "the Father is the source from whom comes the Son, the one through whom all things exist, and it is possible to conceive of the Son only in inseparable conjunction with the Holy Spirit; for no notion of the Son is possible unless one is first enlightened by the

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[40] Chadwick, 148.
[41] Pelikan, 218-219.
[42] Davis, 112.
[43] Gregory of Nyssa, *On the difference between* ousia *and* hypostasis *1-4*, in *Documents in Early Christian Thought*, ed. Maurice Wiles and Mark Santer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 32.

Spirit."[44]  The Father is the ultimate creator, the Son is redeemer, and the Spirit is the medium through which humans comprehend their redemption.  This brilliant Trinitarian model was utilized by Gregory of Nazianzus, the third of the Cappadocians, who also challenged Apollinarianism.

In addition to promoting the doctrine of 3 *hypostases* in one *ousia*, Gregory of Nazianzus sought to clarify some of the ambiguities therein.  Concerning the Holy Spirit, he "addressed the question of why the Spirit has not been recognised as God in the gospels."[45]  The lack of scriptural proof for the divinity of the Holy Spirit hindered the attractiveness of the formula, and in *A.D. 381: Heretics, Pagans, and the Dawn of the Monotheistic State*, Charles Freeman indicates that Gregory responded by stating that "the doctrine of the Trinity has been subject to progressive revelation.  First, God the Father has to be revealed, in the Old Testament; then, through the gospels, Jesus the Son; and finally the Holy Spirit, who appears to enthuse the disciples after the Passion and through the fiery tongues at Pentecost."[46]  While Gregory of Nazianzus undoubtedly took some liberties in this explanation, it nonetheless satisfied many of those who were uneasy about the Cappadocian paradigm.  Furthermore, he worked to disassemble the theological construct of Apollinaris.

The Apollinarian heresy is mentioned above, and essentially stated that Jesus never possessed a human mind.  Operating under the principle that Jesus had to be fully human in order to save humanity, as Athanasius had done, Gregory of Nazianzus reasoned that "[I]f the Godhead took the place of the human intellect, how does God touch the rest of mankind, for soul and flesh alone, without intellect, the most essential part of man, do not constitute man."[47]  Every part of Jesus, therefore, had to be human if He was to properly complete the task for which he became human in the first place.  In his *Third Theological Oration concerning the Son*, Gregory used scripture to argue for this theory.  In terms of the full humanity and full divinity of Jesus, he writes that "He prays, but he listens.  He weeps, but he stops tears.  He asks where Lazarus is, for he was a human being; but he raises Lazarus, for he was God [John 11:34, 35, 43]."[48]  This passage infers a refutation of Apollinarianism through the recognition of emotion in Jesus, which requires a human psychology.  Moreover, without mentioning the Spirit it nevertheless strengthens his Trinitarian model insofar as both Father and Son exert their unique attributes in the actions of the human Christ.  In the midst of this dialogue, neither the heretics nor their detractors would acknowledge the ideologies of the other, thus necessitating a new council to reexamine the existing Orthodox doctrine.

The Nicene exposition of the Holy Spirit invited divergent analyses which, upon advancement, were labeled heretical.  Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers remedied the situation to the best of their abilities, yet "[I]f one was going to accept a Nicene Trinity in which the three persons of the Trinity were of equal status, then the creed passed at Nicaea would have to be rewritten to give the Spirit a suitable divine role."[49]  With this course of action in mind, "Theodosius proceeded to convoke a regional council. . . . In May, 381, 150 eastern bishops assembled in the imperial palace at Constantinople, among them, Gregory of Nazianzus,. . . Gregory of Nyssa."[50]  The Emperor Theodosius was a staunch supporter of Nicaea, and thus "the Council of Constantinople simply restated the basic tenets of the Nicene faith, but it added new provisions to deal with problems not yet envisioned at Nicaea."[51]  Chief among these was the

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[44] Ibid., 34.
[45] Charles Freeman, *A.D. 381: Heretics, Pagans, and the Dawn of the Monotheistic State* (Woodstock and New York: The Overlook Press, 2008), 87.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Davis, 106.
[48] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Third Theological Oration concerning the Son*, in *The Trinitarian Controversy*, ed. William G. Rusch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 145.
[49] Freeman, 68.
[50] Davis, 119.
[51] Ibid., 124.

Holy Spirit, but all did not look favorably upon its inclusion. Davis notes that those in attendance "attempted to conciliate the Macedonian faction on the basis of a creed embodying the faith of Nicaea. In this the bishops failed, and Eleusius of Cyzicus led the thirty-six Macedonian bishops out of the Council."[52] The heretics demonstrated their persistence even prior to the conclusion of the council. Nevertheless, the remaining bishops did in fact modify Orthodox doctrine.

With the Nicene Creed as its foundation, the Constantinopolitan Creed includes various amendments to the actual text. The Christological affirmations essentially remain unchanged, but the Holy Spirit is incorporated in passages such as:

> Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and became incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man. . . . And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, Who proceeds from the Father and Son and is jointly worshipped and jointly glorified, Who spoke through the prophets.[53]

The recognition of the Holy Spirit as "the Lord," yet functioning in a capacity distinct from both Father and Son, crushed the Macedonian position and solidified the orthodoxy of the Cappadocian view of the Godhead as 3 *hypostases* in one *ousia*. While there is no damnation of Apollinarianism extant in the creed, the bishops "issued four canons."[54] These were designed to address matters that the bishops had decided upon, and a large part of the first "lists the heresies to be anathematized. . . .Finally, it is the turn of the Apollinarians."[55] The Orthodox cursed those who denied the divine nature of the Holy Spirit and a rational mind in Jesus; however, the Macedonians, citing insufficient exegesis of the Holy Spirit in the Nicene Creed, refused to accept the decisions of the council and "continued into schism."[56] As for the Apollinarians, their brand of heresy had not even been specifically mentioned in the Constantinopolitan Creed. Nonetheless, the bishops succeeded in defending Nicaea and elevating the status of the Spirit.

In the minds of the Orthodox bishops, the Nicene Creed cemented Christology, and the doctrine of the Council of Constantinople established the correct conception of the Trinity. However, Pelikan states that these victories would be short-lived because "the shape taken by Cappadocian trinitarianism served to move the discussion from the relation between the One and the Three to the relation between the divine and the human in Christ, with which, in one way, the controversy had begun."[57]

New heretical ideas surfaced following the Council of Constantinople, and would be attended to in the Council of Ephesus in 431 C.E. As is noted in the previous quote, these heterodoxies marked a return to Christological concerns. Vital to the Orthodox perceptions of the forthcoming heretics was the third century view called Adoptionism, the followers of whom Davis defines as "theologians who sought to ensure monotheism by describing Jesus as a man gifted by the Father with divine powers."[58] Among the most well known of the Adoptionists was Paul of Samasota, who propounded the belief that "[T]he Logos, the expression of God's immanent rationality, descended upon the man, Jesus, born of Mary, but their mode of union was simply a coming together."[59] Essentially, Paul argued that Jesus was merely inhabited by God and thus was not actually God. Furthermore, it appears as though his theory leaves

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[52] Ibid., 119.
[53] Reprinted in Davis, 122.
[54] Davis, 126.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Pelikan, 224.
[58] Davis, 326.
[59] Ibid., 40-41.

little room for the role of the Spirit in the conception of Jesus within Mary insofar as Jesus joined with God sometime after his birth. In response to Paul, a group of "bishops assembled in Antioch in 268 and deposed him and condemned. . . his adoptionist teaching."[60] While the dates of these events far precede those of the ecumenical councils, in the fifth century charges of Adoptionism, among others, would be leveled at a theologian named Nestorius.

The renewed focus on Christology after the Council of Constantinople created dissension among Christians. Regarding this point, Pelikan explains that "[R]anged against each other in the debate over this issue were the theological traditions represented by Alexandria and by Antioch."[61] The individuals most intimately involved in the Christological dispute were Nestorius and Cyril, where "Nestorius represented the Antiochene tradition, Cyril, the Alexandrian."[62] Nestorius was heavily influenced by Theodore of Mopseustia, who espoused a belief that "[T]he coming together of the Word and man resulted in a single person or *prosopon*, that is, one individual object of perception, one subject who could be addressed now as God, now as man."[63] His belief was regarded by some as dualistic, and the evidence for such an accusation came from his own compositions. In his *On the Incarnation*, Theodore writes that "we say that the essence of God the Word is his own and that the essence of the man is *his* own, for the natures are distinct."[64] This construct varied from that of 3 *hypostases* in one *ousia*, or nature, embraced by the bishops at the Council of Constantinople. This position was equally dangerous, states Kelly, because "he sometimes thought of the Holy Spirit as the medium. . . thereby veering perilously close to adoptionism."[65] Regardless of the potential heretical implications, this doctrine paved the way for Nestorius, through whom the battle between Antioch and Alexandria reached its fifth-century pinnacle.

Although the Christological framework endorsed by Nestorius owed much to Theodore, his included modifications and different points of emphasis. Additionally, his theology ignited a controversy that demanded another ecumenical council. Nestorius received the position of patriarch of Constantinople and, concerning his intentions, Davis clarifies that "[A]t his installation in 428, he launched an attack on all heretics. . . . Ironically, however, this hammer of heretics was himself about to be accused of heresy."[66] This claim was based on two suppositions in the Nestorian theology: the harmony of God and man in Christ, and the proper designation of Mary.

Despite the existence of a dual nature of God and man in Jesus, Theodore had believed that "the person effected by the union is one."[67] Nestorius, however, chose a different definition; he "preferred the term conjunction rather than union in order to avoid any suspicion of confusing or mixing the natures."[68] The goal here was to prevent the implication that the joining of natures somehow reduced or depreciated either the human or divine nature in Jesus. Within this arrangement lay the basis for the second heterodox position championed by Nestorius.

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[60] Ibid., 41.
[61] Pelikan, 227.
[62] Davis, 142.
[63] Ibid., 144.
[64] Theodore of Mopseustia, *On the Incarnation*, Book VIII, Fragment 8, in *The Christological Controversy*, ed. Richard A. Norris, Jr. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 120.
[65] Kelly, 308.
[66] Davis, 139.
[67] Theodore of Mopseustia, in *The Christological Controversy*, 120.
[68] Davis, 146.

Throughout the history of Christianity, Mary has indeed played a fundamental role in Orthodox belief. She was most often referred to as "Theotokos, the title of Mother of God."[69] In reference to her relationship to God, the theory behind this moniker resonates of Athanasian thought: "to be the Savior, he had to be God as well, and as his mother she had to be 'Mother of God.'"[70] Nestorius, however, drawing in part from the views of Theodore whom he ultimately supported, proclaimed that "[A] creature did not produce the Creator, rather she gave birth to the human being, the instrument of the Godhead."[71] He envisioned Mary as only the mother of the person in which the two natures combined, and therefore "[H]is own preferred term was Christotokos."[72]

As is mentioned above, Nestorius was determined to eradicate heresy, and this goal required the use of Christotokos because "to say that Mary is Theotokos either smacked of Arianism, for it seemed to imply that the Son was a mere creature born of a woman, or of Apollinarianism, for it could be understood to mean that the manhood of Jesus was completed by the presence of the Word."[73] He was attempting to avoid and denounce the heterodoxies of these men, and he continued with:

> That which is formed in the womb is not in itself God. That which was created by the Spirit was not in itself God. That which was buried in the tomb was not in itself God. If that were the case, we should manifestly be worshippers of a human being and worshippers of the dead. But since God is within the one who was assumed, the one who was assumed is styled God because of the one who assumed him. . . God has been joined to the crucified flesh, even though he has not shared in its suffering.[74]

Here he seems intent upon refuting Sabellianism insofar as he separates God and man with regard to the experience of pain during the crucifixion. However, because of his assertion that Mary only gave birth to the person in whose body God dwelled, those who disagreed accused him of subscribing to, among other things, Adoptionism.[75] In a genuine effort to avoid divergence from orthodoxy, Nestorius inadvertently immersed himself in a heresy of his own creation. An attack was immanent, and Cyril of Alexandria took the helm.

The Antiochene doctrine as primarily developed by Theodore and Nestorius contrasted with the Alexandrian theological conception of Cyril, who objected to a number of their precepts. He feared the dualistic feature of Antiochene Christology, to which he responds that "[W]e do not worship a human being in conjunction with the Logos, lest the appearance of a division creep in by reason of that phrase 'in conjunction with'. . . the one Lord Jesus Christ must not be divided into two Sons."[76] The Nestorian theory, cited above, claimed that a union of natures led to the possibility that one could become indistinguishable from the other. Cyril did not accept this position, and instead states that "[T]he term union in no way causes the confusion of the things it refers to, but rather signifies the concurrence in one

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[69] Ibid., 140.

[70] Pelikan, 241.

[71] Nestorius, *First Sermon against the Theotokos*, in *The Christological Controversy*, ed. Richard A. Norris, Jr.
    (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 124-125.

[72] Pelikan, 242.

[73] Davis, 145.

[74] Nestorius, in *The Christological Controversy*, 130.

[75] Davis, 145.

[76] Cyril of Alexandria, *Second Letter to Nestorius*, in *The Christological Controversy*, ed. Richard A. Norris, Jr.
    (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 134.

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reality of those things which are understood to be united."[77]  God and man, therefore, fused into one entity, and the result came to be known as "'the hypostatic union.'"[78]  For Cyril, this method eliminated the possibility of dual Sons in the Nestorian formula which he believed was composed of one *hypostasis* of the redeemer, and a separate *hypostasis* of the man in whom the redeemer resided.  The word union stressed the fusion of natures into Jesus, who thus must be recognized as singular. Additionally, he used this line of reasoning to attack the Nestorian defense of Christotokos.

Like Athanasius before him, Cyril argued that the incarnation was vital because Jesus needed to be both God and man for the salvation of humanity.  This assertion, however, illuminates a potential flaw in his theological model.  He believed that the united natures were respectively human and divine, but that the union essentially produced a single nature.  This leaves little room for an argument that Jesus maintained his status as both God and man.  To explain this, he proposes that "[T]he manner of this union is entirely beyond conception."[79]  In this reasoning, or lack thereof, he used the tangibly weak argument of human incomprehension to push his insistence that Jesus was fully God and fully human even after the union took place.  Subsequently, the act of the incarnation "evidently and entirely depended on birth from a woman."[80]  According to this theory, Mary must be known as "'God's Mother" [*theotokos*], not because the nature of the Logos or the deity took the start of its existence in the holy Virgin but because the holy body which was born of her, possessed as it was of a rational soul, and to which the Logos was hypostatically united, is said to have had a fleshy birth."[81]  The union of God and man had taken place prior to the appearance of Jesus in human form, and therefore Mary did indeed give birth to God.  Davis interprets this to mean that "the Word appropriated to himself the birth of his own flesh; thus Mary is rightly called Theotokos."[82]  Through all of these arguments against Nestorius, Cyril believed that he had sufficiently proven the heterodox undertones of the Antiochene position.  Yet acceptance of his doctrine was not official until the Council of Ephesus, and even then he had to accept an incomplete victory.

The Council of Ephesus in 431 C.E. was not as uniform in procedure as the two preceding ecumenical councils.  Prior to the date on which it was to begin, "Cyril and Nestorius harangued their followers but refused to communicate with each other."[83]  Upon news that the supporters of Nestorius were delayed in reaching Ephesus, Cyril "announced on June 21 that he was calling the council into session the following day."[84]  What followed were various meetings essentially led by Cyril; in this situation, Nestorius hardly had the chance to properly defend his position.  However, the Emperor Theodosius was soon informed of the proceedings as they had transpired thus far, and he "decided to convene a conference of eight delegates from each faction so that he could form his own opinion of the matter."[85]  It is not surprising that Cyril and his faction had condemned Nestorius, and Theodosius evidently did not object to this because, in the end, "[T]he reaffirmation of the Nicene Creed at Ephesus was. . . arranged to constitute a vindication of Cyril's theology of the hypostatic union and a condemnation of Nestorius's theology."[86] An examination of the doctrine produced at Ephesus highlights this decision.

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[77] St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, trans. John Anthony McGuckin, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press Popular Patristics Series (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 73.
[78] Pelikan, 247.
[79] St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, 77.
[80] Ibid., 59.
[81] Cyril of Alexandria, *Second Letter to Nestorius*, in *The Christological Controversy*.
[82] Davis, 151.
[83] Ibid., 154.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., 159.
[86] Pelikan, 261.

The bishops agreed upon a statement of the faith that they believed to be in line with that of Nicaea. Again, like the text from Constantinople, evidence of modification is apparent in the following excerpt:

> [P]erfect God and perfect Man, consisting of a rational soul and a body begotten of the Father before the ages as touching his Godhead, the same, in the last days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, as touching his Manhood; the same of one substance with the Father as touching his Godhead, and of one substance with us as touching his Manhood.  For of two natures a union has been made. . . .
>
> In accordance with this sense of the unconfused union, we confess the holy Virgin to be Theotokos, because God the Word became incarnate and was made man, and from the very conception united to himself the temple taken from her.[87]

Through the acceptance of this doctrine, the Orthodox recognized that there were in fact two natures in Christ, one human and one divine, but that these were unquestionably united into a single entity, which supported the Nicene belief that Jesus was "of one substance with the Father."[88]  Moreover, Mary was officially titled Theotokos insofar as the union had occurred prior to the corporeal birth of Jesus.

Pertaining to Christology, the Nestorian position had not deviated irreconcilably from the Cyrillian; they both acknowledged two natures and one *prosopon*.  According to Nestorius, the natures conjoined; for Cyril, they fused through a union, and only through that union could Christ be simultaneously recognized as a fully human and fully divine being.  So, according to Cyril, a mere conjoining did not represent unification and could result in the existence of two Sons, which in turn could jeopardize the overall singularity of God.  In this sense, the doctrine of Ephesus did indeed justify Cyril through the insertion of the word "union," and, as Davis notes, Theotokos meant that "[F]or the common people, Christ had defeated heresy; Mary, Mother of God, had triumphed over Nestorius."[89]  As a result of these proceedings, Nestorius was excommunicated and "[H]is supporters were forbidden to read or transcribe his books which were to be searched out and burnt."[90]  While the bishops of the Council of Ephesus endorsed a doctrine of faith which was far more Cyrillian than Nestorian, this declaration was insufficient to prevent further controversy.

Following the Council of Ephesus, the doctrine of the two natures in Christ became the object of speculation.  Due to the fact the idea of two natures in one *prosopon* had initially been developed by Theodore and Nestorius, it was considered to be a product of the Antiochene tradition.  In the "hypostatic union" proposed by Cyril, "'[O]ne hypostasis' and 'one nature' were phrases which, for him, signified the fact that the humanity belonged so intimately to the Logos that there was actually only one subject or subsistent reality in Jesus."[91]  Cyril accepted the existence of two natures, but also believed that their union formed a single entity.  In order to acknowledge the doctrine of Ephesus, which did not mention the union as an act which produced a single nature per se, he eventually allowed "that one can distinguish attributes proper to Christ's humanity from attributes proper to his deity – it being affirmed at the same time of course that Jesus is Logos-made-flesh."[92]  His shift in theology, however minor it may appear, was viewed by some as abandonment of the Alexandrian tradition and "cost Cyril credit with certain of

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[87] Reprinted in Davis, 161-162.
[88] See Nicene Creed, reprinted in Davis, above.
[89] Davis, 156.
[90] Ibid., 163.
[91] Richard A. Norris, Jr., *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 28.
[92] Ibid.

his extreme supporters."[93]  Others, such as a man named Eutyches, clung to an "extreme of the doctrine of hypostatic union."[94]  Given the transfer to Antiochene orthodoxy and the decisions made at Ephesus, the case of Eutyches proved to be problematic.

Eutyches championed the Alexandrian spirituality as outlined by Cyril prior to his acceptance of the distinction between the two natures.  Davis explains the particulars of the Eutychian theory as:

> Devoted to Cyril's theology. . . Eutyches began to teach that before the Incarnation Christ was of two natures, but after it there was one Christ, one Son, one Lord in one *hypostasis* and one *prosopon*. . . . Yet he conceded that Christ was born from the Virgin who was consubstantial with us and was perfect God and perfect man.  However, the flesh of Christ was not in his view consubstantial with ordinary human flesh.  Yet he acknowledged that Christ's humanity was a full humanity.[95]

From a practical standpoint, this argument simply does not make sense.  In order for Jesus to be completely human, not only would he have to share the same physical characteristics as all other humans, but he would have to maintain the rationality of a human psyche, therefore requiring a second nature.  For this reason, Davis further describes him as "a confused and muddled thinker. . . . To affirm two natures for him was to affirm two concrete existences, two *hypostases*, two persons in Christ."[96]  Eutyches harbored a different definition of *hypostasis* than had been indoctrinated at the Council of Ephesus and indeed the Council of Constantinople.  His theories were hazardous insofar as they threatened the Orthodox understanding of Christology which they, the Orthodox, had fought so hard to establish and preserve; hence, efforts were generated to counter his notions, the most efficient of which was actuated by Pope Leo I.

In his *Letter to Flavian of Constantinople*, otherwise known as his Tome, Pope Leo describes Eutyches as "an extremely foolish and altogether ignorant old man."[97]  As such, he set out to discredit Eutychian theology and reestablish the Orthodox view regarding the union of God and man in Jesus.  In keeping with the doctrine of Ephesus, he states in his Tome that "the characteristic properties of both natures and substances are kept intact and come together in one person. . . and the nature which cannot be harmed is united to the nature which suffers."[98]  While he is clearly attacking the Eutychian exertion of a single nature in Christ, he also proceeds to rebut the idea that the flesh of Jesus differed from other humans:

> In this way, as our salvation requires, one and the same mediator between God and human beings, the human being who is Jesus Christ, can at one and the same time die in virtue of the one nature and, in virtue of the other, be incapable of death.  That is why true God was born in the integral and complete nature of a true human being, entire in what belongs to him and entire in what belongs to us. . . . What he did was to enhance humanity not diminish deity.[99]

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[93] Ibid.
[94] Pelikan, 259.
[95] Davis, 171.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Pope Leo I, *Letter to Flavian of Constantinople*, in *The Christological Controversy*, ed. Richard A. Norris, Jr. (Philaddelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 145.
[98] Ibid., 148.
[99] Ibid.

The reconfirmation of orthodoxy as established by Leo was founded in his absolute belief in the "unity of person, which must be understood to exist in a twofold nature."[100]  Additionally, in his Tome, Leo satisfied the proponents of both of the primary Christian traditions because "[T]he Antiochenes could find here insistence on the reality and independence of the two natures; the Alexandrians, Cyril's basic insight that the person of the Incarnate is identical with that of the Divine Word."[101]  Despite his theological and intellectual superiority, however, Leo was unable to contain the Eutychian heresy on his own.

The Council of Chalcedon was initially supposed to take place in Ephesus.  While the bishops did in fact convene there, the proceedings turned into an irresolvable quarrel, and were moved to Nicaea.  This attempt also failed due to the incursion of invaders and the subsequent inability of the Emperor to abandon his location.[102]  After this series of setbacks, the council was finally officially convened "at Chalcedon on October 8, 451."[103]  The bishops wasted no time in excommunicating Eutyches.  As for his supporters, they "were asked to condemn Eutyches and accept the Tome.  When they refused, they were handed over to the jurisdiction of the patriarch of Constantinople."[104]  Following these judicial procedures, the attendees dictated an official *Definition of the Faith*, the conclusion of which reads that Jesus was:

> Born from the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, as touching the manhood, one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way abolished because of the union, but rather the characteristic property of each nature being preserved, and concurring into one Person and one subsistence, not as if Christ were parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from the beginning spoke concerning him, and our Lord Jesus Christ instructed us, and the Creed of the Fathers has handed down to us.[105]

This canon of orthodoxy promoted the theological stances of both Cyril and Leo, and also explicitly states that they are in line with the Nicene Creed.  There now existed a doctrinal denunciation of Eutyches, and the mention of Theotokos, like at Ephesus, was obviously aimed at Nestorius and his followers.  It would seem that, with the exception of those labeled as heretics, the institution of this doctrine should have satisfied the adherents to all of the Christological traditions hitherto mentioned.  However, an assessment of the aftermath of Chalcedon again proves that this was simply not the case.  Some of the old heterodoxies did not pass from existence, and new ones were soon to emerge.

Though they do not appear to have posed any further threat to orthodoxy, the Nestorians persisted throughout the centuries that followed, and indeed continue still.  Davis offers a breakdown of numbers, and writes that "[I]t is estimated that some 80,000 Nestorians live in the Mid-east, 5,000 in India, and 25,000 in North and South America.  They refuse to accept the title of Mary as Mother of God and revere Nestorius as a saint."[106]  Their condemnation at Ephesus and Chalcedon, and the doctrine demanded in place of their own were not adequate measures to ensure their conversion.  As for heresies not yet conceived at the time of Chalcedon, a particular one would materialize as a direct result of the decisions made at the fourth ecumenical council.

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[100] Ibid., 151.
[101] Davis, 176.
[102] Ibid., 180.
[103] Ibid., 181.
[104] Ibid., 184.
[105] Reprinted in Davis, 186.
[106] Davis, 167.

The Council of Chalcedon did not mark the end of heretical eruptions. In fact, Davis notes that quite the contrary is true because "[A]s with the Creed of Nicaea, one hundred and twenty-five years before, the definition of Chalcedon was not the end but the intensification of the controversy."[107] Despite the endurance of the Nestorians mentioned above, Pelikan explains that "[T]he principal opponents of orthodoxy in the continuing debate after Chalcedon, however, were not the remnants of Nestorianism, but the several parties of 'Monophysites.'"[108] Recall that Cyril, although eventually receptive to the idea of two natures, had originally expressed a belief in the single nature, not person, resulting from their union. The Monophysites championed this "Cyrillian formula – one incarnate nature (*physis*) of the Divine Word."[109] The union abolished the two natures, leaving only one, which was still somehow human and divine. The Monophysites objected to Chalcedon for a number of reasons, and chief among them were "that in the Definition of Chalcedon no mention was made of the hypostatic union; nor of the phrase 'out of two' to show that Christ existed out of two disparate elements, the divine and the human, but not 'in two' natures which would be to separate the One Christ into two persons, as did Nestorius."[110] So, while the Nestorians did not continue to overtly threaten orthodoxy, the Monophysites maintained that the Chalcedonian doctrine was, in principle, Nestorian. The bishops at Chalcedon, through no real fault of their own, were unable to establish a doctrine that would solidify orthodoxy and silence the heretics. The fourth ecumenical council, like the first three, proved to be an insufficient method by which to eradicate or even restrict heresy.

A summation of the argument presented here must be predicated on the fact that divergences in Christianity can be traced back to the letters of Paul, which are the first known Christian writings. However, a systematic and officially sanctioned attempt to condemn heretics and codify a universal doctrine of the faith was not carried out until the fourth century with the convening of the Council of Nicaea. Through the beliefs promoted at this council and those that followed, a theological construct could be viewed as either orthodox or heterodox. Although the dividing line between these two was often so thin that it appeared virtually nonexistent, the slightest deviation from the conciliar consensus resulted in the accusation of heresy. The bishops who determined orthodoxy, however, did not reach their goals with any degree of regularity.

The Council of Nicaea, the first of its kind, was called primarily to address the problem of Arianism, which was quickly spreading through the Empire. While the bishops in attendance did indeed refute Arius and brand him as a heretic, their established doctrine was insufficient to either detract his followers or prevent the appearance of new heterodox positions. This pattern continued throughout the 126 years that contained the first four ecumenical councils, and even beyond. The bishops responded to specific heretical groups that either surfaced or reappeared between the councils. In addition to Arianism, Nicaea also addressed Sabellianism. Constantinople I dealt with Apollinarians and Macedonians, Ephesus with Adoptionism and Nestorianism, and Chalcedon with the incoherence of Eutyches. Furthermore, one particular group labeled as heretics, the Nestorians, still exist even today. Overall, the Orthodox too often propounded beliefs rife with inconsistencies, and therefore essentially invited misinterpretation. Additionally, the modification of their doctrine as means to counter the predicaments presented by a particular heterodox tradition served only to highlight the instability of their own theological precepts. When considered in conjunction, these factors demonstrate the inefficiency of the first four ecumenical councils to suppress either the rise or spread of heterodox Christian beliefs.

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[107] Ibid., 194.
[108] Pelikan, 268.
[109] Davis, 196.
[110] Ibid.

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