

GUARDING AND REFINING: THE DOCTRINE OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST IN CHURCH HISTORY

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; But, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ.

Ephesians 4.14-15

Ephesians 4 envisions an historic process whereby the whole church grows in knowledge and maturity into the fullness of Christ (v 13). But, to do so it must speak the truth concerning God's revelation in Christ in order to stand in the face of various winds of false doctrine that blow.

The problem is that these winds are subtle and shifting, blowing from different directions. The various facets of the revealed truth of God in Christ must be continually reflected on, stated and restated in such a way as to specifically show the falsehood in each new assault. As it does so, the church guards and refines the truth it has received, deepening its understanding of it in the process. It secures the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. It is this sustained and vigorous faith, working its way into every area of life, that will bring the church to Christ's stated goal of maturity.

We will look at the process of guarding and refining faith's confession in the crucial area of faith's object: the person of Christ.

The Heart of the Matter: Deity and Humanity

The doctrine of the person of Christ (i.e., who Christ is) is formed around the twin truths of his deity and his humanity. These truths are integral to the New Testament and the salvation it proclaims.

Faith relates to the truth of Christ

From the outset, the apostolic gospel proclamation draws people to relate to a saviour who is both divine and human by focusing on the risen Christ (Acts 2.24-36; 3.15, 21; 4.33; 10.38-43; 13.30-37; 17.30-31). In resurrection Christ has overpowered death itself and ascended to the heavenly seat of God; hence he must be divine. But, if he is risen, he has also walked this earth and died; thus he is truly human as well.

By proclaiming a risen saviour, the gospel orients believers to his two-fold nature. Faith fixes itself upon the one who is both God and man. Because of this, all believers have a built-in instinct to relate to Christ as both divine and human. This is the case despite the fact that they may not be able to articulate the biblical truth clearly or even accurately.

The inability of the natural mind

Though the gospel orients believers to Christ as both God and man, this two-fold truth has proved to be a stumbling block to the natural, unregenerate mind. The natural mind's ways of understanding deity and humanity are at odds with biblical revelation, hence it is unable to conceive of one person being both as revealed in Christ. The tendency is to exclude or compromise one or the other, or else to not allow them to fully come together. Even when natural reason genuinely attempts to reconcile deity and humanity in Christ, it is unsuccessful. Thus those outside the faith, and even believers who are conditioned by unbiblical ways of thinking, cannot help but distort the truth of who Christ is. The doctrine of his person is

subordinated to human thought and captured to serve its own ideals, interests, prejudices and limitations. Each attempt creates a flawed Christ: an insufficient object for saving faith.

Such distortion of the person of Christ qualifies as a heresy. The word *heresy* simply means “choice.” It became used to denote the denial of any defined doctrine. Today the term is commonly reserved for the denial of doctrines crucial to gospel faith. This includes the doctrine of the person of Christ.

Centuries of struggle

The church had to struggle continually with heresies regarding the person of Christ for several centuries before coming to some closure. Even then, still more subtle and refined challenges continued to resurface periodically and some of the same earlier heresies were revived. Most of these still persist in one form or other today.

Though many throughout history stumbled in their attempts to formulate the truth of who Christ is, the challenge was effectively met. The church has been able to stand on its formulations of the first few centuries and the faithful have been able to see that these adequately represent and encapsulate the truth of biblical revelation. They have served to both guard and refine the doctrine of the person of Christ. Though these formulations do not satisfy every line of human inquiry (nor could they do so and still be true to scripture (1Cor 4.6)), they sufficiently describe the boundaries within which faith can grow and flourish.

PART I. THE 2ND CENTURY: THE CHALLENGE ARISES

From the apostolic to the post-apostolic era

Distortion and outright denial of the person of Christ already surfaces in the New Testament. John speaks of those who deny that the man Jesus is the Christ (1John 2.22-23), or, from another angle, that the divine Christ has become fully incarnate (4.1-3). He clearly sees these views as arising outside of the faith (2.19; 4.5).

At the close of the apostolic era and into the second century these heresies multiply. One of the earliest post-apostolic responses we have is that of Ignatius, the martyr bishop of Antioch. In the following passage from his *Letter to the Ephesians*, probably c. 107, he vigorously affirms Christ's two-fold nature and its saving significance:

There is one Physician who is possessed both of flesh and spirit; both made and not made; God existing in flesh; true life in death; both of Mary and of God; first passible and then impassible - even Jesus Christ our Lord.

Rejecting apostolic revelation

The tendency to view Jesus as either human or divine only can be seen at the outset of the post-apostolic age in two groups known as the Ebionites and the Gnostics. It is important to note that at this early point heresies involve the disregard or outright rejection of at least some apostolic writings. The church had not yet formally recognized the fixed body of genuine apostolic writings that was to be regarded as scripture.

Denial of Christ's Deity: The Ebionites

A challenge from Judaism

The Ebionites (probably from the Hebrew word for *poor*) were Jews who regarded Jesus as a man only. They held that he became the messiah on account of his strict observance of the Old Testament Law. He became conscious of this role at his baptism when he received the Spirit to empower him for his work as a prophet and teacher.

The Ebionites, along with most Jews (and many Christians, as we will later see), wrongly assumed that the Old Testament revelation of the Lord is One (Deut 6.4) implied a quantitative, mathematical statement about God's personhood – i.e., that God is a single person. Thus their theology led them to reject the deity of the Son. As a result, the Ebionites were closed to many of the apostolic writings. They apparently used a Hebrew language version of a Gospel (which bore some relation to Matthew) and they refused to recognize the apostleship of Paul, whom they regarded as an apostate from the Law.

Contemporary forms: the quest for a merely human Jesus

The Ebionites were small in number and influence, and few if any others at this time followed a merely human Jesus. Furthermore, throughout the debates of the following centuries, the nature of the apostolic revelation of Jesus was such that virtually no one who argued from it asserted, as the Ebionites did, that Jesus was a mere man. Almost all acknowledged that he was of a different order of being. The question was whether he was equal with God the Father.

To seriously assert again that Jesus was merely human would require a radical dismantling of the accepted apostolic writings (i.e., the New Testament). Such a move began in the 18th century with the proposal that many New Testament ideas (including the deity of Christ) were not true to the original teachings of Jesus

himself and rather sprang from outside sources. As a result, critics began to peel away whatever was contrary to their concept of the original message. The selective discarding of biblical revelation allowed for a merely human Jesus who is proclaimed by many liberal theologians and scholars of religion. Furthermore, this tradition has given impetus to an increasingly popular view that Jesus was essentially in line with the Judaism of his time and was merely out to reform it. By this route, certain schools of thought have come back full circle to the Ebionite Jesus.

Denial of Christ's Humanity: The Gnostics

A challenge from paganism

Gnosticism (from the Greek word for *knowledge*) was a highly imaginative and fantastic synthesis of various pagan religious and philosophical ideas. It incorporated Christ into its system and threatened to steal him away from the Gentiles. It was also popular with a surprising number of (obviously unorthodox) Jews.

Gnosticism held Christ as divine, but only as one member among an entire hierarchy of divine beings. Thus even its view of his deity was radically unbiblical.

Gnostics outright denied the humanity of Christ. They were hampered by a spirit-matter dichotomy common to Greek philosophy. It maintained that only spirit was good and that matter was inherently evil. Salvation was liberation from the material realm, hence the divine had to be distanced from the material at all times. This meant Christ could not be truly human. As a result, Gnostics held either (1) a *docetic* (from the verb *to seem*) view of Jesus' humanity, regarding it as illusory or immaterial; or (2) an Ebionic view, wherein a normal man, Jesus, merely came under the influence of the divine Christ spirit for a time.

Gnostics denied the apostolic affirmation of the goodness of the God of the Old Testament, believing him to be an evil being for creating the material world. They ignored many apostolic writings and depended on spurious ones such as the Gospel of Thomas and others.

Contemporary forms: an easternized Jesus

A Gnostic-type of view of Jesus surfaces whenever he is interpreted in light of Eastern religions and philosophies. These beliefs tend to be *monistic* – they acknowledge only one true reality, in their case only spirit or mind. As with the Gnostics, they generally deny the legitimacy or goodness of the physical realm and are engaged in trying to escape it. As a result, any saviour or ideal figure dwells only in the realm of spirit. He possesses no real humanity himself. This Jesus can be found today in New Age circles as well as in professing 'Christian' groups such as Christian Science and the Unity School of Christianity.

The Response of the Church

Crude forms of heresy

The Ebionites and Gnostics represent a crude form of heresy, clearly denying apostolic proclamation and blatantly substituting Judaism and paganism respectively as their basis for interpreting Christ. In the second century, when the extent of the apostolic writings had not been universally and formally agreed upon, these heresies were a serious threat. As the church began to affirm the genuine apostolic writings it became evident that the Ebionites and the Gnostics stood outside the faith as defined by those writings. This development effectively excluded these heresies from the church fold.

As mentioned, it is important for our study that we see Ebionism and Gnosticism standing at the head of two streams of thought which will continue to challenge the biblical doctrine of the person of Christ. Views

that deny his full deity and humanity will become increasingly sophisticated, as they must claim to be the true interpretations of the acknowledged apostolic writings.

The humanity of Christ particularly affirmed

In the second century Gnosticism and a similar heresy called Marcionism (after its teacher Marcion), both of which denied the humanity of Christ, were the greater threat rather than Ebionism. This was due to their wider popularity and influence.

Since it was the humanity of Christ that was most threatened, this aspect of his person was most strongly defended and settled, for the time being. This was a natural result of affirming the apostles' witness to Jesus with whom they had physical contact.

Ireneaus' Rule of Faith

The emphasis on Jesus' humanity in this period is reflected in the creed, or rule of faith, written c. 170 by Ireneaus, bishop of Lyons and a leader in opposing heresies. The majority of the assertions concerning Christ are taken up with affirming his humanity.

*...The faith in one God the Father Almighty, who made heaven and earth and the seas, and all that is in them;
And in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God,
 who became flesh for our salvation;
And in the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets proclaimed the dispensations
 and the virgin birth,
 and the passion,
 and the resurrection from the dead,
 and the bodily assumption into heaven of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord,
 and his appearing from heaven in the glory of the Father
 to comprehend all things under one head,
 and to raise up all flesh of all mankind,...
 ...that he may execute righteous judgment over all...*

The Old Roman Creed – Apostles' Creed

Another example of the stress on the humanity of Christ is found in what is known as the Old Roman Creed. The earliest appearance of this creed is in a question format in the *Apostolic Traditions* (late second or early third century) written by the theologian, Hippolytus:

- 1. Do you believe in God the Father Almighty?*
- 2. Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the son of God, who was born by the Holy Spirit from the virgin Mary, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and died, and rose again on the third day living from the dead, and ascended into the heavens, and sat down on the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the living and the dead?*
- 3. Do you believe in the Holy Spirit in the holy church?*

The so-called Apostles' Creed, which became such a standard in the West, is plainly an elaboration of this Old Roman Creed. It retains the early emphasis on the fact of Jesus' humanity.

Christ's deity to now become the focus

Notice that in both Ireneaus' Rule and the Old Roman Creed the finer points concerning the nature of Christ's humanity are not addressed. It is merely affirmed that he was indeed a flesh and blood man. Though the full humanity of Christ continued to be compromised by some over the next period, it does not become the primary focus of attention again until the second half of the 4th century when it will be explored in more depth. As we enter the 3rd century it is the deity of Christ that is front and centre.

PART II. THE 3RD AND 4TH CENTURIES: FOCUS ON THE DEITY OF CHRIST AND ON THE TRINITY

By the third century the extent of the genuine apostolic writings (the New Testament *canon*) was largely recognized and affirmed. These clearly regarded Jesus as a real flesh and blood man and so the emphasis of the debate over his person shifted to his deity. This raised the subject of the trinity. In fact, the debates of the third and fourth centuries are often referred to as the trinitarian controversy.

The Central Problem

The central problem behind the controversy is that the Old Testament revelation of the Lord is One was wrongly understood to be a quantitative, mathematical statement about God's *personhood* – i.e., God is a single person. On the contrary, the revelation to Moses instead concerned God's absolute *uniqueness* – he is the *only* "One" and hence is wholly *unlike* any other being. This is why he can have no rivals and why no image can be made of him. The revelation actually concerns what God is *not* like, and shuts off any speculation as to his actual nature. In fact, the assumption that he is mathematically single in his being says nothing special about God. It only makes him like everything else and so invites idolatrous views of God. The fact is that God's revelation that he is unique left the actual nature of his person shrouded in the secrecy of Mt. Sinai's dark cloud.

Gospel and trinity

When God's personhood was finally revealed in Christ, it turned out that it was truly unlike anything in creation and so was foreign to the natural mind: God was Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Though the natural mind was unable to comprehend and relate to the biblical tri-personal God, the gospel led believers to him in Christ. It did so by calling people to faith in a fully divine Christ, risen and enthroned, but also to one who is the divine Son in relation to the divine Father and one who gives the divine Spirit to make real in us the divine relational life that exists between Father and Son. In this way people were led to relate to, and hence know, a plural aspect in the Godhead. Faith in Christ brought people into an experience of the tri-personal God.

Philosophical interference

Though the gospel led believers to know the tri-personal God, the church had to contend with the prevailing uni-personal view of God that was passed on from Judaism. This view in turn was further reinforced by Greek philosophical thinking (which had also influenced Judaism), which was generally absorbed with reducing all to the singular, divine One. It didn't help matters that a number of the various philosophical schools even had their own 'trinities.' For example, Neo-Platonism spoke of *One, Mind* and *Soul*. However, this trinity was an impersonal, graduated hierarchy. The One was the mathematically singular, indivisible source of all being, and was considered 'God.' Mind was a derived emanation from the One, and Soul in turn was derived from Mind. It is not hard to see how such thinking could interfere with understanding and expressing the full deity of the distinct person of Christ (and of the Spirit) especially considering that most theologians addressing the issue had been trained in one Greek philosophical school or another.

Philosophical thinking hindered the understanding of the apostolic revelation of the deity of Christ and the tri-personal nature of God. The problem was further compounded by the fact that some of the key figures pressing the controversy in the church seem to betray an absence of genuine gospel faith and thus lacked the instinctual orientation to Christ's two-fold nature. They did not receive the revelation of God in Christ. As a result, their unregenerate mind could only produce a heretical alternative.

Heretical Alternatives

Regarding the person of Christ, there are essentially two alternatives available to those who hold the erroneous (though natural) assumption that God must be uni-personal:

1. The Son must not be God in the same way the Father is. This view denies the *unity* of the members of the trinity, and thus denies the true deity of Christ. The Son in his being is subordinate to that of the Father. The two heresies in this category are:
 - **Dynamic Monarchianism**
 - **Arianism**
2. The Son must be one and the same as the Father is. This view denies the *distinction* between the members of the trinity. The Son is only an apparent manifestation or mode of the One, as is the Father. The heresy in this category is:
 - **Modalist Monarchianism or Modalism**

With respect to the trinity, these heresies denied either the unity or the distinction of the Father, Son and Spirit. Holding these two aspects, unity and distinction, together would be crucial to formulating the truth of the trinity, as we will later see. We will now look at the heresies in the order they appeared.

Unity Denied: Dynamic Monarchianism

The first form, Dynamic Monarchianism, was the heir of Ebionism. It tried once again to assert that since God is One, Jesus must be a man only. *Monarchianism* comes from the Greek for “single ruler.” The term *dynamic* comes from the Greek word for power. Dynamic monarchianists held, as did the Ebionites, that at his baptism a merely human Jesus was endowed with special power from the uni-personal God. Unlike the Ebionites, though, they had to contend with the majority of the apostolic writings, which were now accepted as authoritative, and the assertions of Christ’s deity contained therein. This obvious difficulty held Dynamic Monarchianism back from widespread popularity.

Dynamic Monarchianism was brought by a merchant named Theodotus to the church at Rome c. 189-198 under the bishop, Victor (who later condemned Theodotus as a heretic). It was further developed and popularized by Paul of Samosata who was the bishop of Antioch from 260 until 268, at which time he was condemned and deposed.

The divine factor

Dynamic Monarchianism sought to understand the divine, apostolic Jesus as a man who achieved union with God. Due to the influence of Greek philosophy it held that that the divine Logos was an impersonal force from God that indwelt Jesus. Jesus became completely obedient and his will was united with God’s in a bond of perfect love. As a result, Dynamic Monarchianism is sometimes referred to as *Adoptionism*, although this term is technically reserved for another, later heresy. It is also commonly described as adoptionist in nature.

The teaching held that Jesus, in his union with God, revealed God to the people and earned saviourhood and the title *Son*. Hence he is worshipped. Paul of Samosata was fond of interpreting Phil. 2:9 (“therefore God...bestowed on him the name which is above every name”) in this light. In this way dynamic monarchianists sought to explain the divine element in Jesus in terms of a process which began from below, so to speak, with ordinary humanity as its starting point. Some developed a doctrine of the gradual

post-resurrection deification of Jesus. Because Paul of Samosata claimed that Jesus later attained this status, he justified using phrases such as “God born of a virgin” and “the Godhead of Christ.”

Paul of Samosata and the other dynamic monarchianists struggled mightily, though, with the evidence for the essential, pre-incarnate deity of Christ. Take the virgin birth, for example. Though they never denied it, they could also never explain it if, as they claimed, Jesus was born an ordinary man. In the end the idea that a man could become God while not essentially being God was too difficult to accept in the light of the Old Testament scriptures and the apostolic revelation.

Contemporary forms: Unitarianism and pantheism

It is easy to see how Dynamic Monarchianism is the forbearer of unitarian liberal theology (what we commonly call Unitarianism). In fact, many of these theologians greatly admire Paul of Samosata. The notion of Jesus as a mere man who shows us the way to unity with God is appealing to natural religious inclinations.

The concept of the gradual deification of Jesus, as a pattern that we can follow, is also in line with popular pantheistic (“all is God”) beliefs, both of Paul’s day and ours. Fundamentally, though, the idea that fallen, sinful man can be indwelt by God and deified is directly opposed to the apostolic revelation. In the New Testament humanity and deity are joined only in Christ. The reason for this is that his humanity, although complete, is unlike ours in that it is unfallen. It is not derived from Adam (*viz.* the virgin birth). Furthermore, Jesus’ humanity was kept sinless solely by being joined to the deity that was always his as the eternal, essential Son of God. In light of this, our only salvation is to die in Christ to what we are as fallen human beings and in faith to receive the divinely incorruptible humanity that was achieved in the person of Christ alone.

Distinction Denied: Modalist Monarchianism or Modalism

Modalist Monarchianism, or Modalism, took the opposite approach to solving the problem that was created by the common unbiblical view of the unity of God. In contrast to Dynamic Monarchianism, Modalism took as its starting point the full deity of Christ. However, the uni-personal understanding of God caused it to assert that the Son and the Father must then be one in the same. They merely appeared in different expressions or modes.

Logically, modalism must hold that since Father and Son are the same, the Father (while in the Son mode) actually suffered and died on the cross. Thus it was also known as *Patripassianism* (“passion” or “suffering of the Father”). Some modalists, as we will see, tried to moderate this implication.

Modalism was the more popular form of Monarchianism since in one sense it affirmed the deity of Christ. It held the field in Rome c. 210-230, influencing several bishops, and was also widespread in Egypt. The first major proponents were two men from Asia Minor, Praxeas and Noetus.

Struggling to deny distinctions

Praxeas was fond of crudely isolating three passages in particular to his advantage: “I am God, and beside me there is none else” (Isaiah 14.5), “I and the Father are one” (John 10.30) and “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14.9). Tertullian commented that Praxeas treated these three passages as if they were the whole Bible.

Despite Praxeas’ efforts, there are so many passages that speak of distinction and communication between the Father and Son that he was hard pressed to defend his views. Furthermore, as Athanasius pointed out, the terms *Father* and *Son* are relational. Therefore with a uni-personal God the whole idea of Fatherhood and Sonship is meaningless and disappears. Modalism was also accused of being pantheist since when God

was incarnate in the Son mode he was completely located in, and identified with, this creation, and his entire person was subject to its processes.

In response to these criticisms, Praxeas attempted to differentiate between Father and Son in Jesus – the Father being the divine element and the Son being the flesh that he took on (thus in effect regressing into Dynamic Monarchianism). In this way he claimed that the Father died but did not die. Such a separation between Father and Son, though, clearly abandons the basic point of modalism.

Noetus, in responding to the prologue of John's gospel, which speaks of Christ as pre-existently distinct from the Father, had to explain the passage in terms of allegory.

Sabellius

The most developed and influential form of Modalism was that of Sabellius who came to Rome from Egypt c. 220. He took up the earlier doctrines and incorporated them into his own neat scheme. He taught that God revealed himself in three successive forms – Father, Son and Spirit – in three corresponding historical periods – Old Testament, New Testament and church age.

The relegation of Christ to a mere temporary revelation (for which Sabellius appealed to passages such as 1Cor. 15:28) proved to be an affront to the believer's relationship to the divine Christ, which was brought about through the gospel. This violation of the basic Christian instinct of faith was a major factor against the wider acceptance of Sabellianism in the church. It was condemned in 261 but enjoyed subsequent revivals in the fourth century.

Contemporary forms: abandoning the Father

Modalism has appeared in various guises throughout the ages. It appears today in movements such as the United Pentecostal Church and others. It compromises the eternal, unchanging nature of God and destroys his Fatherhood. Either Jesus or the Spirit is focused on and God the Father is abandoned. It reaps the fruit of its pantheistic seeds as God becomes identified with the world and its processes, and the anchor in eternity is lost.

Unity Denied Again: Arianism

The third major heresy of this period, Arianism (named after its founder, Arius), broke out in the fourth century. It was the most widespread and hence dangerous of the heresies.

The angelic Jesus

On the face of it, Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria, was reacting against Sabellianism. He wanted to maintain the distinctiveness and individuality of the Son, which was lost in Modalism, but yet preserve the unity of God, which he (along with the monarchians) understood as uni-personal. In this he swung back over to the side of denying Christ his full deity. However, Arius' answer was not to make Christ a mere man, as in Dynamic Monarchianism, but rather to make him an angelic creature.

Arius' use of scripture

Arius held that the Son was the first and greatest creature of the Father. To support his assertion that the Father alone is eternal God he used John 17:3 ("the only true God") and 1Tim 6:16 ("who alone possesses immortality"). To support his view that the son was created he cited Col 1:15 which speaks of the Son as "first-born over all creation," a term which actually refers to one's hereditary authority and temporal priority, not one's origins.

Proverbs 8

The passage that Arius got the most mileage out of was Prov 8.22-31. Because of the amount of speculation this passage sparked, we will consider it a little more closely.

The subject speaking in the passage is a personified wisdom (v 12) who carries out the work of creation (v 30). V 22 reads in the Greek LXX, “The Lord created (Gk. *ktidzō*) me at the beginning of His way...” (cf. RSV; NEB; NIV “brought me forth”), though NASB and KJV look to the normal meaning of the Hebrew original and translate “possessed” (it is not the same as the words, “create” or “make,” in Gen 1). Less ambiguously, though, vv 24 and 25 read “...I was brought forth (or begotten).” In the NT it is Christ, like the personified wisdom here, who is revealed as the agent of creation and as the wisdom of God (1Cor 1.24; see also the closely related term *Word* (Gk. *logos*) in John 1). For this reason Prov 8 was commonly understood to refer to the origins of the second person of the trinity. The early Apologists and the orthodox theologians who followed them generally understood the passage as indicating the point of generation of God’s Word or Logos as a distinct subsistence out of the Father’s own being. Arius took it to refer to his creation.

The whole debate can be cut short, though, in that it is a dubious move to go from personification to person in Prov 8. For one thing, the trinity is only revealed in the coming of Christ, the Son of God. While it is easy to read the person of the Logos-Son back into Prov 8, personifications of wisdom (or, elsewhere, of the Spirit) can at most be taken only as hints or pointers to the fact of tri-personality in God. They cannot be taken as revealing information about the divine persons. For another thing it is inconsistent to take Prov 8 in this way. Proverbs also personifies wisdom as a woman (e.g. 1.20-33; 3.13-18; 9.1-6), but it is universally taken as metaphor, not as information regarding the person of the Logos. We do not take it that the Logos is female or that the Logos is out shouting in the street (1.20). Rather we understand that God’s wisdom is being communicated for those who will hear just as a merchant woman can be clearly heard in the streets. While it is true that from a NT perspective we can see that the ultimate form of this communication is the revelation of the Son himself, we do not take specific information about his person from the metaphorical personification. In the same way the point in ch 8 of the personification of wisdom as one born or established before creation is that God’s wisdom is of course prior to creation and that creation is founded by it. Hence the only right way to think and live in creation is by God’s wisdom. Again, from the NT perspective, this means to live by Christ. The way wisdom is portrayed as prior to creation is by the depiction of wisdom as begotten before creation. This is not to be taken as a literal description of the origins of the Logos (or even the origin of wisdom – as if God first lacked wisdom then created it) any more than the female metaphor is to be taken as a description of the gender of the Logos.

The only text where the word *begotten* is clearly used with reference to the Son is the messianic Psalm 2. V. 7 reads, “You are my Son, today I have begotten You”. But here it does not refer to his origin (he is already a man, he is not born that day), rather it refers to his enthronement in which he is manifest to all as supreme ruler. This is supported by the two NT passages that quote this text, Ac 13.33 and Heb 1.5, which both apply it to the resurrection – the event in which Jesus’ sonship, or status as God’s heir who inherits all, was made manifest to the world.

Implications of Arius’ ideas

The implications of Arius’ ideas are disastrous for the biblical doctrine of God. For one thing, since, as Arius claimed, “there was [a time] when he (i.e., the Son) was not,” God is not Father eternally. He only becomes so in time. Therefore God undergoes change – he is not immutable. Furthermore, Arius held that when the Father created the Son he communicated to him only a secondary form of deity. In this way the Son, or personal Logos, could be called God in a sense but not *the* God (this was his explanation of John 1.1). In fact, Arius could refer to him on occasion as a “second God” (again, terminology unfortunately shared with some speculative theologians). In this he falls into a pagan polytheism (belief in multiple gods) as the unity between Father and Son is shattered.

The influence of the common eastern spirit-matter dichotomy, wherein matter is evil and only spirit is good, is evident in Arius’ view of creation. Like the Gnostics, Arius believed that God as transcendent

spirit could not directly create something as unholy as matter, so he created the Son as an intermediary being to be the agent of creation (a very Greek, but very unbiblical concept). This being who could give rise to matter was not eternal and not of divine essence. Furthermore, he could potentially fall into sin and could not comprehend the Father. As Athanasius would point out, such a 'second God' could in no way bridge the gap between humanity and the One God.

The influence of Arianism

Despite his clearly unbiblical teaching, Arius won many converts, including a number of leaders. No doubt, a good number of these converts lacked genuine gospel faith, but he seemed to influence many of the faithful as well. He was assisted in this by the still widespread fear of Sabellianism. Arius was also a great popularizer, encapsulating his theology in songs and catchy phrases. He appealed to common sense and took pride in making the person of Christ understandable to the average outsider (as we have seen, by rendering Christ in terms of popular pagan belief).

In addition, this was now the era of Christendom in which the authority of the state and the institutional church became intertwined, and the emperors took considerable interest in the affairs of the church. More than one emperor sided with Arianism for various reasons, giving it the support of the state. It was not until the Council of Constantinople in 381 that Arianism was decidedly and effectively put down by the church.

Contemporary forms: no real Saviour

As we have seen, Arianism lent itself readily to polytheism. However, whenever Arianism resurfaces in Christianized areas where polytheism has disappeared, it tends instead toward a practical unitarianism. The Father alone is the One God. No matter what exalted language is applied to Christ, he is less than the One God. As a result, there is no biblical (i.e., divine) Saviour, only a messenger or example. He may be portrayed as an offering or ransom, but to what end? There is no one to effectively bestow eternal life by bringing humanity into union with God.

The Jehovah's Witnesses hold the most widespread modern form of Arianism. They identify Jesus with the archangel Michael and follow a scheme of works salvation.

Doctrinal Responses

The effect of these heresies on the church was tumultuous. They prompted various doctrinal responses, not all of which were helpful. The situation was further worsened by political ambitions and feuds between some of the more carnal church leaders. Through it all, though, the church managed to adequately articulate and establish the biblical truth of the person of Christ, no doubt by divine grace and guidance.

The key: both unity and distinction

The key to establishing the deity of the person of Christ is to affirm his *unity* with the Father, while also maintaining his *distinctness*. The heresies we have looked at denied one or the other. The two aspects of unity and distinction had to be sufficiently accounted for and formulated to uphold the biblical revelation of Christ in the face of the heretical challenges. The doctrinal struggle of this period revolved around this dual objective.

The speculative and the non-speculative

One of the major differences in the respondents was between those who sought to simply put forth the biblical assertions and categories as they understood them and those who were more speculative. For example, the more speculative were not content to assert the essential sonship of Christ but rather sought to explain how and when he originated, or was "generated," from the Father. This despite the fact that with

respect to the idea of *son*, the Bible places the focus on the position (that of heir) and relationship involved, and not derivation or generation. Such speculation, as we will see, created its own problems.

Theological language

In order to effectively respond, it was necessary to precisely zero in on that aspect of the truth that would flush out and refute the heresy. In the course of doing this, convenient labels and handles were sought to describe and summarize biblical doctrine and to effectively apply it against the philosophically minded heresies. Hence the development of the language of theology and dogma – terms such as *trinity* and *person*. These terms are not without their problems, as they are liable to unbiblical interpretation, but by and large they have proved useful and effective when biblically defined.

A relatively straight-forward formulation – Gregory Thaumaturgus

One example of a less speculative formulation of the deity of Christ and the tri-personal God is the creed of Gregory Thaumaturgus, c. 260-270, a pupil of Origen who became bishop of Neo-Caesarea in Pontus. He wrote against Monarchianism (although his creed may contain later additions reflecting the Arian controversy). His creed uses a minimum of extra-biblical language, though it includes the term *trinity*, and incorporates the idea of the generation of the Son. Notice the way Gregory asserts both the deity and the distinctiveness of Christ as he outlines trinitarian doctrine.

Creed of Gregory Thaumaturgus

There is one God, the Father of the living Word, (who is his) subsisting Wisdom and Power and eternal Impress (Image): perfect Begetter of the Perfect [Begotten], Father of the only begotten Son.

There is one Lord, Only of Only, God of God, the Image and Likeness of the Godhead, the efficient Word, Wisdom comprehensive of the system of all things, and Power productive of the whole creation; true Son of the true Father, Invisible of Invisible, and Incorruptible of Incorruptible, and Immortal of Immortal, and Eternal of Eternal.

And there is one Holy Spirit, having his existence from God, and being manifested (namely, to mankind) by the Son; the perfect Likeness of the perfect Son: Life, the Cause of the living; sacred Fount; holiness, the Bestower of sanctification; in whom is revealed God the Father, who is over all things and in all things, and God the Son, who is through all things: a perfect Trinity, in glory and eternity and dominion, neither divided nor alien.

There is therefore nothing created or subservient in the Trinity, nor super-induced, as though not before existing, but introduced afterward. Nor has the Son ever been wanting to the Father, nor the Spirit to the Son, but there is unvarying and unchangeable the same Trinity forever.

The West: Tertullian

One of the key figures of this era was Tertullian, a presbyter from Carthage in North Africa. He wrote in the period from 195 – 200, mostly against the Monarchians. He particularly asserted the distinctiveness of the Son in response to the Modalists.

In spite of his overt rejection of Greek philosophy (“*What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?*”), Tertullian had a speculative streak. In particular he felt it necessary to explain the origins of the Son. In this he was following up on the *Logos* doctrine of Justin Martyr and other earlier theologians known as the *Apologetists*. Like them, Tertullian employed Proverbs 8 to this end and used the problematic language of “generation” – that the Son was begotten in the sense of brought into being – which worked its way into most of the creeds.

Following some of the apologists, Tertullian tended to speak of the deity of the Son as derived or secondary, a line of thinking (known as subordinationism) which Arius later seized upon to disastrous effect.

Tritarian terms: the Latin-speaking West

An important contribution Tertullian made was to give the West (primarily Italy and N. Africa) terms to indicate the tri-personal nature of God. This region of the empire was distinguished from the East in that Latin had replaced Greek as the primary language. One such term coined by Tertullian in Latin was *trinitas* (“trinity”).

As we have noted, unity and distinction in the Godhead are the two key aspects in understanding the deity of Christ. We will briefly look at the terminology Tertullian developed to address these.

Tertullian addressed the unity of the Godhead by saying the members possessed the same *substantia* (“substance”). He used this word to translate the Greek *hypostasis* (“being, nature, essence”) found in Heb. 1:3 with reference to God (“He [the Son] is the exact representation of His [God’s] *hypostasis*”). By this he meant that the Son possessed the same attributes as the Father (though Tertullian believed the Son was generated and the Father was not). For Tertullian the primary reality of God was singular, i.e., God’s unity in the face of his tri-personal nature. Thus for Tertullian the term *hypostasis* pointed to the unity or commonality of attributes in the Godhead, which he labeled *substantia*. The unity of Christ with the Father could now be expressed by saying they shared the same *substantia* or substance. As we will see, the East tried to use *hypostasis* in a fundamentally different way and this would cause considerable confusion and difficulty. Furthermore, the term *substance* itself is somewhat problematic, possibly implying the divine members are made from an impersonal constituent element. To his credit, Tertullian’s belief in the unique, eternal nature of God did not allow for any confusion between divine substance and created substance. However, as we will see, any idea of a divine constituent element or substratum undermines the biblical doctrine of God.

To identify and distinguish the individual members of the Godhead Tertullian chose the term *persona* (“person”), which was used to indicate a party to a legal action. It allowed for the expression of the distinction between divine members: they were distinct *persons*. The word had been borrowed, though, from the theatre where it indicated the mask or outward appearance of a character. This, too, would prove a stumbling block to the eastern church, who saw in it the Modalism of Sabellius.

Though these terms would spark theological controversy, they allowed for considerable peace and stability on the matter in the Latin-speaking West. There they were generally accepted as a way to formulate the unity and distinction of the divine members.

The East: Origen

Origen was a Christian scholar from Alexandria in the East who wrote c. 218 – 250, often against Monarchianism. He had a highly speculative nature that could lead him astray. In fact, when the implications of some of his theories later hit home, they were condemned as heretical.

The influence of Neo-Platonism

Origen continued working on the matter of the Son as begotten in the sense of generated. He felt it did more justice to the person of the Son to take this supposed act out of time and place it in eternity past. Hence the term “eternal generation.” This refinement worked its way into most of the creeds. His assumption that the Son was begotten was apparently reinforced by his Neo-Platonic philosophical background that led him to believe that the revelation of God on earth mirrored the heavenly reality. Since in the incarnation Jesus was begotten in time, he must have been begotten in eternity as well.

Despite his well-meaning effort in making Christ's 'generation' an eternal one, Origen's theology had even greater Subordinationist tendencies than Tertullian's. It seems Subordinationism inevitably follows when one presses the generation of the Son. Again, from his Neo-Platonic background, Origen formed the view that the Christian convert made first contact with deity in the person of the Spirit and then worked back through the Son to the Father, who is the ultimate goal of this process. Though he emphasized daily prayer to the Son, he advocated in "supreme moments of adoration" that one should look to "the highest object of thought...Him who is above all" (i.e., the Father).

Trinitarian terms: The Greek-speaking East

In spite of his philosophical baggage, Origen made important contributions in the area of theological terminology and formulation, in his case for the Greek-speaking East. Again, we will consider the terms he used to address the issues of unity and distinction.

With respect to unity, Origen spoke of the *ousia* ("essence, being") of God and advocated the use of the word *homoousios* ("same essence/being, consubstantial") to describe the Son's unity with the Father. *Ousia* thus corresponded to Tertullian's Latin *substantia* but without the materialist associations. *Homoousios* was to become a key word in the coming controversy.

In contrast to Tertullian, the primary reality of God for Origen (and for the East in general) was his plural, tri-personal nature – that he exists as Father, Son and Spirit. Accordingly, Origen saw in the *hypostasis* ("being, nature, essence") of Heb. 1.3 the distinct or differentiated personal being of God the Father. For him it meant that the Son was a distinct or differentiated divine being in exactly the same way God the Father was. Hence *hypostasis* became Origen's term to *distinguish* the members of the Godhead – the direct opposite way Tertullian had used it to refer to common attributes when he chose *substantia* as an equivalent. Origen's application of hypostasis to the distinct being of each of the divine members of the Godhead led him to speak of three *hypostases* in God. However, it appears that it was more natural at the time to take the term to refer to the underlying reality of God in the sense of the essential attributes shared by the divine members (as Tertullian had) rather than the distinct subsistence of each divine member (as Origen had). But both meanings circulated. This particular state of affairs regarding the term becomes significant in the coming controversy.

His legacy – good and bad

On the one hand, there were those who took up Origen's theology with essentially the same spirit – that is to affirm both the deity and the distinctness of the person of Christ. One example is Alexander, bishop of Alexandria 313 – 28 (predecessor of Athanasius). He taught that the Son is a distinct hypostasis, but that he is also co-eternal with the Father and that there is a perfect likeness between them.

On the other hand, there were those who took Origen's subordinationism in a more radical direction. This was the case with Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea 260 – c. 340. He taught that the Son was derived as an act of the Father's will and is thus not co-eternal. Furthermore, the Son is not even derived from the Father's own being since that would involve division in the indivisible One or *Monad*. Even though Eusebius refrained from calling the Son a creature, it is evident that his views share some aspects with Arianism. In fact, he became a diplomatic sympathizer of Arius in the coming Nicene controversy.

East vs. West

As we can see, the West tended to emphasize one of the key elements in expressing the person of Christ and the trinity – the *unity* of divine members. On the other hand the East tended to emphasize the other key element – the *distinction* of the divine members. All that was needed was for them to come together around an acceptable formulation. However, this would not be so easy.

Mutual mistrust

As a result of the fundamental orientation in the East to the plural aspect of God, Origen and his followers were highly suspicious of Tertullian's use of *hypostasis* (translated as *substantia*) to indicate only the unity, or common nature or attributes, of God. It appeared to them that the tri-personal nature of God was being compromised or made of lesser importance. In fact, to the East, the entire western theology was tainted with the Sabellian heresy. The situation was worsened in that the West was refusing to condemn a contemporary writer, Marcellus of Ancyra, who came perilously close to Modalism. Marcellus tended to depersonalize the eternal Logos/Word, characterizing him as God's active energy who only became Son at the incarnation. He spoke of this act (and the outpouring of the Spirit) as a temporary extension or expansion of the Monad until the time of the judgment. The fact that at the time the leaders in the West did not see fit to correct this theology indeed showed up a weakness in understanding the importance of the full (i.e., eternal) personal distinction of the Son.

On the other hand, Origen seems to have used the term *hypostasis* in a linguistically unusual way to indicate the distinct or differentiated divine beings of the Godhead, especially in speaking of three hypostases. This, of course, was opposite to the way Tertullian had understood the term in his translation *substantia*. To the West, with its fundamental orientation to the unity of the Godhead, Origen's usage of *hypostasis*, coupled with his subordinationist views (especially as they were radically pushed by some, such as Eusebius), sounded like tri-theism (belief in three Gods/gods). It did not help that some schools of philosophy also referred to their own 'trinity' in terms of three *hypostases*, and that many of the eastern theologians were clearly influenced by these philosophies.

The Eastern failure to acceptably formulate distinction

Compounding the problem was the fact that the East, for all its stress on distinction between the members of the Godhead, had not completely settled on terminology for this aspect of revelation. Recall that Origen, working in the Greek language, had offered two terms, *ousia* and *hypostasis*, to indicate unity and distinction, respectively, in the Godhead. However, while *ousia* caught on, *hypostasis* in this sense did not receive widespread acceptance. Athanasius (a key figure in the controversy), for one, did not use it this way. Apparently its common meaning at the time of "being, nature" made it more natural to use it as a synonym for *ousia* (as Tertullian had when he chose *substantia* as an equivalent). In fact, the Creed of Nicea would soon do just that.

While *hypostasis* was not widely adopted in the East to denote the individual members, neither was the Greek equivalent of Tertullian's Latin term *persona*. This Greek equivalent of *persona* is *prosōpon*. Unlike *persona*, *prosōpon* had not been appropriated in legal language in the sense of "person" (to denote an individual) and thus still simply meant "mask" or "face." To distinguish the members of the Godhead in such a seemingly superficial way only sounded modalist to most in an eastern church wary of Sabellianism.

The failure of *hypostasis* and *prosōpon* to win total acceptance left the East without a settled formula to specify the distinction in the Godhead that was so primary importance to their understanding. Until this was settled they could not fully accept a statement on the absolute unity of Father and Son without suspecting it of modalism. For this reason the East found itself unable to effectively exclude Arianism. Such a move would require an unequivocal declaration of the total unity of Father and Son regarding their deity. In the following debate there would be no peace, and no victory over Arianism, until a formula for distinction could be settled on to balance any emphasis on unity.

The mistrust and linguistic confusion between East and West, along with political rivalries, proved to be a great stumbling block to the church in its quest to define the faith in the face of heresy. But, would it be insurmountable?

A note on the being or nature of God

The hesitancy of the East to take a term for the being or nature of God (viz. *hypostasis*, *ousia*, *substantia*) and use it to refer to the unity or commonality within the Godhead in abstraction or apart from God's tri-personality raises an important point that we should pause to consider.

Eastern theologians were wary of modalism – belief in a uni-personal God. This concern would have to be eased by finding a suitably weighty way to affirm God's tri-personality as essential to his being. Of course, placing stress on the unity of God already implies the existence of a plural aspect that must be unified. There is no need to speak of unity if there is no plural aspect. But, the East was concerned that taking terms for the being or nature of God to describe his unity alone would render God's tri-personal nature as somehow secondary or only apparent.

Modalism, however, wasn't the only danger inherent in isolating the unity of God from his tri-personality and labeling it with terms such as *nature* or *being*. From time to time in church history another heresy surfaced, which regarded deity not as uni-personal, but as essentially *impersonal*. There were those who came to view deity as some abstract, impersonal quality that exists apart from, and over, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For this reason they were sometimes accused of inventing a fourth member of the Godhead, though it was in effect impersonal deity they advocated. For those reared in the Greek philosophical traditions of the impersonal One, it was in fact an easy error to fall into.

As we have seen, though, in order to contend with heresies it became necessary to distinguish the two concepts of common deity (i.e., unity) and distinct personhood within the Godhead, and to refer to them separately. Hence, separate labels were sought for these two aspects of God's being. It is vital, though, that one is never taken in isolation from the other. Tri-personality is essential to God's nature or being. Deity *is* tri-personal. What the Son shares with the Father is the fact that he is a distinct member of the triune Godhead as much as any set of divine attributes. When Heb 1.3 says that “[The Son] is the exact representation of [God's] nature (or being, Gk. *hypostasis*)” it is saying that Jesus revealed and manifested the tri-personal reality of God in his own person as much as the attributes of the divine persons.

The Council of Nicea

The Council of Nicea in 325 was a great watershed in the battle against Arianism and in the affirmation of the deity of Christ and of the trinity. Here about 220 bishops plus various associates gathered to settle the Arian controversy. Most were from the East since that was where Arianism flourished (remember the West had more stability on this issue). They set out to establish a formulation in the Greek language.

The emperor's new interest

The council was called by the emperor Constantine because the controversy was threatening to divide the empire. Constantine had recently ruled Christianity to be a legally acceptable religion and sought to use the widespread and well-organized church as a unifying force in the deteriorating empire. As a result, church membership and influence swelled, and the emperor took considerable interest in church affairs as they might affect political stability. In turn, some church leaders began to look to the state to enforce church decisions.

Constantine had little appreciation (at least initially) for the issue at hand here, believing it to be a mere “theological trifle,” but recognized its politically divisive potential.

Excluding heresy - the homoousios formula

At the council the Arians first submitted a creed that was promptly torn to pieces. Eusebius of Caesarea, a diplomatic sympathizer of Arius, then proposed an existing creed which was orthodox yet vague enough to accommodate Arianism.

Most in attendance would have accepted Eusebius' offering, but the keenly anti-Arian party led by Athanasius of Alexandria recognized the danger and managed to convince the council. They pointed out, for example, that a phrase such as "first-born of all creation," though biblical, was open to Arian interpretation. In the face of the heresy they pressed the need to identify Christ as fully divine just as the Father is.

A key move by the anti-Arians was the suggestion of *homoousios* ("same essence" or "consubstantial") to affirm the equality of Father and Son (just as it was used by Origen) and the phrase "of the essence (*ousia*) of the Father." It is clear from the context of the creed that *homoousios* does not merely express a unity of will or purpose (which Arius would affirm), but a unity of divine nature or attributes. The formula effectively condemned Arianism, a fact recognized by the majority present.

Constantine was quick to get behind the *homoousios* formula. He knew the majority opposed Arianism and he saw this as the best chance for peace. However, he did not realize the East's general difficulty at the time with such an absolute equating of Father and Son (even though *homoousios* originated with an eastern theologian, Origen). Constantine's ecclesiastical advisor, Ossius, was western in his theological outlook and eager to condemn Arius, and probably did not enlighten the emperor on this point. The overall desire to exclude Arianism, combined with the support of the emperor, brought the vast majority to endorse the *homoousios* formula.

The loss of hypostasis as a term for distinction

In their keen desire to affirm the deity of Christ the anti-Arians also seized upon the term *hypostasis* (in addition to *ousia*) to describe the unity of the Son with the Father. The anathema section at the end of the creed states that the Son is not of another "substance" (*hypostasis*) or "thing" (*ousia*) than the Father is. As noted, it was linguistically natural and normal to use *hypostasis* in this way, but in so doing the council ignored Origen's appropriation of the term to effectively *differentiate* Father and Son. In the effort to affirm the unity of being in the Godhead, the Greek speaking church was apparently left with no suitable terminology to describe the distinctions in the Godhead. This lack would forestall the full acceptance of *homoousios*.

Inclusion of the term begotten

As can be seen, the creed takes up the problematic term *begotten* in the sense of generated. It was generally felt the assertion that the Son was generated from the Father was necessary to effectively counter Paul of Samosata (that the Son was adopted) and Arius (that the Son was created). However, these heresies are already effectively excluded by the creed in that it specifically says the Son was "not made."

Creeds associated with Nicea

The creed advocated by Athanasius and the anti-Arians was passed by the council and is written below in the centre column (Creed of Nicea, 325) along with the creed first presented by Eusebius and the later so-called Nicene Creed.

The later Nicene Creed was announced by the Council of Chalcedon (451) as a revision of the Creed of Nicea. This revision was supposedly undertaken by the Council of Constantinople in 381, thus it is also referred to as the Niceano-Constantinopolitan Creed. However, the existence of this supposed revision appeared to have been news to many at Chalcedon. Thus it looks like the later creed may have had its own origins, though it substantially agrees with the earlier Creed of Nicea in affirming the deity of Christ. It further fills out the doctrine of the trinity by formulating the deity of the Spirit.

<p>CREED OF EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA 325 An existing creed offered by Eusebius at Nicea but rejected for being too vague. It formed the basis for the Nicene Creeds.</p>	<p>CREED OF NICEA 325 (sometimes called the NICENE CREED) Adopted by the Council of Nicea to address the Arian controversy.</p>	<p>NICENE CREED 381, 451(?) (OR NICEANO-CONSTANTINOPOLITAN CREED) A later formulation.</p>
<p><i>We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible.</i></p>	<p><i>We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible, and invisible.</i></p>	<p><i>We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.</i></p>
<p><i>And in one Lord Jesus Christ,</i></p>	<p><i>And in one Lord Jesus Christ,</i></p>	<p><i>And in one Lord Jesus Christ,</i></p>
<p><i>the Word of God, God of God, Light of Light, Life of Life, the only-begotten Son, the first-born of every creature, begotten of God the Father before all ages,</i></p>	<p><i>the Son of God, begotten of the Father, i.e., of the essence (ousia) of the Father, God of God, and Light of Light, very God of very God,</i></p>	<p><i>the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages, Light of Light, very God of very God,</i></p>
<p></p>	<p><i>begotten, not made, being of one substance (homoousios) with the Father;</i></p>	<p><i>begotten, not made, being of one substance (homoousios) with the Father;</i></p>
<p><i>by whom also all things were made;</i></p>	<p><i>by whom all things were made in heaven and on earth;</i></p>	<p><i>by whom all things were made;</i></p>
<p><i>who for our salvation was made flesh and made his home among men;</i></p>	<p><i>who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man;</i></p>	<p><i>who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man;</i></p>
<p><i>and suffered; and rose on the third day; and ascended to the Father; and will come again in glory, to judge the living and the dead.</i></p>	<p><i>he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence he cometh to judge the quick and the dead.</i></p>	<p><i>he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; from thence he cometh again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.</i></p>
<p><i>We believe also in one Holy Spirit.</i></p>	<p><i>And in the Holy Spirit.</i></p>	<p><i>And in the Holy Spirit, who is Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets.</i></p>

		<i>And in one holy catholic and apostolic church, we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen .</i>
	<i>[And 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 out of another substance (hypostasis) or thing (ousia), or the Son of God is created, or changeable, or alterable; they are condemned (anathema) by the holy catholic and apostolic Church”]</i>	

The Aftermath of Nicea

Not surprisingly, this was not the end of the controversy. As long as the East was unsettled in its formulation of distinction in the Godhead, it could not fully carry through its support of *homoousios*. It was just too wary of Modalism. There was work yet to be done. Despite the fact that the vast majority at the council signed the creed, the subsequent lack of real support for *homoousios* allowed Arianism to make a comeback.

The Arians

Some of the Arian leaders had been exiled; others had insincerely signed the creed to escape condemnation and exclusion. For the period following, those who remained merely avoided the Nicene terminology and soft-pedaled their views. Before long the climate changed amidst an anti-Nicene reaction. Constantine was impatient with the prolonged divide and became conciliatory toward the Arians. Exiled Arian leaders returned. Even while Constantine reigned, they succeeded in orchestrating the exile of Athanasius and others who insisted on the Nicene theology. Several of the following emperors were also sympathetic and even supportive of the Arians. As a result the Arian theology became more assertive and once again showed its true colours. In fact, the new generation of Arian leaders would become even more bold.

The Nicenes

Those in the East who were convinced of the absolute truth of *homoousios* and actively pressed the consubstantiality of the Son were relatively few. They were led by Athanasius who, though solidly backed by the West, became increasingly isolated in the East and suffered several exiles. Athanasius and his party were hampered in their struggle by (1) their reluctance toward the “three hypostases” formula (in part because the creed used *hypostasis* as a synonym for *ousia*) and (2) the support of Marcellus of Ancyra who was generally viewed as a Modalist by the East.

The middle party

In addition to the two opposing sides, there were a substantial number in the middle (as is often the case). Most of them merely wanted to keep peace and to avoid controversy. Many actually blamed the strife on extra-biblical terminology such as *homoousios*. The majority was typified by Eusebius of Caesarea. He rejected hard-line Arianism but was fuzzy enough regarding the deity of Christ that he could reach out to

the Arians and try to get them to modify their views just enough to be included in the fold. The weakness of his theology did not allow him to see *homoousios* as representing a crucial aspect of the faith.

There were others in the middle, though, who had genuine reservations about *homoousios* for the reasons already mentioned, but were still concerned to uphold the full deity of Christ. Instead of *homoousios* (“same in essence”) they chose to say the Son was *homoiousios* (“like in essence”). In saying the Son was like in essence to the Father they were trying to express the biblical truth that he shared divinity with the Father but was also distinct from him. As a result of their terminology this Homoiousian party has been somewhat unfairly labeled *Semi-Arian* by some (rather it was Eusebius of Caesarea and his type who were the real Semi-Arians). However, though the Homoiousians rejected Arianism, their formulation could not oppose it. They had made no clear statement that the Son was fully divine as the Father was. They would not say that the Son was of the exact same essence as the Father for fear of losing his distinctness. In the face of their theological paralysis, and the blindness of the Eusebians, Arianism flourished. In the words of the western scholar Jerome, “the whole world groaned and marveled at finding itself Arian.”

The turning point

Though the Arians rejoiced to gain imperial support, it led to their undoing. Under the wing of the emperor the new generation of Arian leaders boldly asserted the Son was *heteroousios* - of a “completely different substance” than the Father – and *anomoios* – “unlike” the Father. At this, even most in the conciliatory middle party recoiled. There was renewed motivation on the part of the majority to clearly define the deity of Christ in such a way as to exclude Arianism from apostolic faith.

Up until this time, even Athanasius himself had not pushed *homoousios* as a necessary term, he only insisted upon the truth it expressed. He had been in dialogue with the Homoiousians, and the two parties were slowly growing to see their common goal. However, Athanasius now saw insistence on the actual term *homoousios* as the most effective, and possibly only, way to exclude Arianism, and he took it up as a rallying cry. As at Nicea, the majority in the middle turned to the truth of *homoousios*, but this time with greater understanding and conviction.

Resolution

What, though, about the obstacles to *homoousios*? One of these had already been addressed in that the Nicenes and the West had recently made several statements correcting the deficiencies in the theology of Marcellus. The other obstacle was the absence of a formula for distinction in the Godhead. This lack in the creed had to be addressed. In fact it would be necessary to re-define the term *hypostasis* (used in the creed) to bring resolution. Though Athanasius had shown a growing openness to Origen’s use of *hypostasis*, the task of carrying it through was left to the theologians known as the Cappadocian Fathers (see below).

Once a formula for distinction was achieved, the *homoousios* movement gained momentum in the East and culminated in the Council of Constantinople in 381 where the Nicene formula was affirmed. This council held sway in the East and Arianism was effectively marginalized in the church (though it survived as the religion of some European peoples outside the empire who had been proselytized by Arian missionaries). Historically the church has recognized the importance of Nicea and the crucial truth of its pronouncements, whether or not formal conciliar authority is recognized.

Athanasius

Throughout this period it is Athanasius, archdeacon of Alexandria at the time of Nicea and subsequently bishop, who stands out as champion of the truth of Christ and the trinity. During the time from Nicea to Constantinople most of the church became Arian or “Semi-Arian” and the emperors usually sided with the majority. Athanasius stubbornly stood his ground and was exiled five times. His stance was characterized as *unus Athanasius contra orbem* (“one Athanasius against the world”).

When, after a time, the implications of Arianism began to hit home with many of the middle party, they again began to look to Athanasius and the formulations of Nicea. As noted, this movement culminated in the Council of Constantinople.

Salvation at stake

The force of Athanasius' argument centered on the implications of the issues for salvation. He saw that since man was uniquely created in God's image, only God himself could restore fallen man to fellowship by taking on humanity himself. He rightly maintained that only a Saviour who was fully divine and fully human could bridge the gap between fallen humanity and God. To quote a popular saying of his (which must be rightly understood): "[Christ] was made man that we might be made God." In other words, how could Christ give us real union with God if he did not have it for himself?

Athanasius was not speculative nor was he fond of non-biblical language. However, he saw that *homoousios* could adequately stand for the truth and effectively exclude Arianism, thus he promoted its use.

Athanasius also recognized the importance of the deity of the Holy Spirit, stating that only a divine Spirit could make us "partakers of the divine nature."

The Cappadocian Fathers

Three major figures who took up the mantle from Athanasius and helped carry the day at Constantinople were three theologians known as the Cappadocian (eastern Asia Minor) Fathers, Basil of Caesarea, his brother Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus.

The problem of terminology

A problem faced by the Cappadocians in the Greek-speaking East was the continuing fear of Sabellianism and the absence of a clear formulation to distinguish between members of the Godhead. These factors still made many in the East hesitant of Nicea, despite a growing awareness of the crucial truth of *homoousios*.

Hypostasis redefined

What the Cappadocians did was to again employ the term *hypostasis* ("being, subsistence") in the way Origen had originally used it (and the way a number of eastern theologians were still using it) – to indicate the distinct members of the Godhead, just as the Latin *persona* does. (Recall that Nicea had used *hypostasis* in the opposite way as a synonym for *ousia*, indicating the common divine essence or attributes shared by the trinity.) They pressed the *three hypostases* formula while at the same time insisting on the unity within the Godhead as expressed by the language of *one ousia* and *homoousios*. Their commitment to the one *ousia* or substance of God was such that Athanasius and the Nicenes could accept the *three hypostases* formula.

Some in the West, such as Jerome, balked at this re-definition of *hypostasis*, maintaining that it is always and only synonymous with *ousia*. Thus he resurrected the accusation of tri-theism when the Cappadocians again spoke of three *hypostases*. While it is true that some of the less helpful analogies of the trinity that were offered by the Cappadocians can certainly lend themselves to tri-theism, the spirit of their writing completely acknowledges the unity of God.

Resolution: East meets West

The *homoousios* movement now had *hypostasis* on board as a suitably profound term to express distinction within the being or essence of God. The way was now clear for East and West to come together around a formulation that adequately expressed both unity and distinction. The formula, "three hypostases in one

ousia” (equivalent to the Latin “three persona in one substantia”), was affirmed at Constantinople. Accordingly *hypostasis* does not appear in the later Nicene Creed (the entire anathema section is gone) so as to clear the air of its former meaning in the Creed of Nicea and to open the way for its new usage in theological language. It appears in its new sense in the Chalcedonian Definition (it is not phrased as a creed) of 451.

Hypostasis and prosōpon as “person”

Interestingly, once the East had *hypostasis* established to indicate the distinct divine persons, it could accept *prosōpon* (“face, mask”) to indicate the same reality. Both terms were now the equivalent of the Latin *persona* (“person”). This usage is enshrined in the Chalcedonian Definition (451) where the two terms are synonymous. It confesses that in Christ both the divine and human nature exist in “one *prosōpon* and one *hypostasis*” (i.e., “person”).

While the faithful in the East now had settled terminology, the actual meaning of “person” with reference to God, and in particular to the incarnate Christ, was far from settled. Just what constitutes the person of the incarnate Son who is both divine and human? This issue had, in fact, been part of the problem in finding terminology, and it would heat up in the debate to follow over the relationship between Jesus’ deity and humanity in the incarnation.

The Athanasian Creed – A Later Formulation

Another creed of note is the so-called Athanasian Creed, which is actually from the early fifth century, though probably evolved from earlier forms. It was attributed to Athanasius but its true authorship is unknown. It is a Latin document notable for the inclusion of the term *persona*, which was first used by Tertullian to refer to the individual members of the Godhead. It is also the most complete creedal formulation of the era, reflecting the Christological controversies up to the time.

The Athanasian Creed

Whoever wills to be in a state of salvation, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic [apostolic/universal] faith, which except everyone shall have kept whole and undefiled without doubt he will perish eternally.

Now the catholic faith is that we worship One God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is One, the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit; the Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated; the Father infinite, the Son infinite, and the Holy Spirit infinite; the Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet not three eternal but one eternal, as also not three infinites, nor three uncreated, but one uncreated, and one infinite. So, likewise, the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty; and yet not three almighties but one almighty. So the Father is God, the Son God, and the Holy Spirit God; and yet not three Gods but one God. So the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord; and yet not three Lords but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by Christian truth to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be both God and Lord; so are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say, there be three Gods or three Lords. The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made nor created but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and the Son, not made nor created nor begotten but proceeding. So there is one Father not three Fathers, one Son not three Sons, and Holy Spirit not three Holy Spirits. And in this Trinity there is nothing before or after, nothing greater or less, but the whole three Persons are coeternal together and coequal.

* * *

Through much struggle and turmoil the church managed to adequately formulate the deity of Christ and the trinity of Father, Son and Spirit. A protective hedge had been built around the faith on the deity side of the doctrine of the person of Christ. It remained to complete the hedge on the side of what it meant for him to become human.

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