

## The Birth of the Trinitarian Doctrine

In this lesson we will be discussing the roots of when the Trinitarian doctrine first came into existence, by briefly explaining to you the two councils of which eventually brought forth the Trinitarian Doctrine with its finality being close to the sixth century as well as pointing out some key elements about the people of those councils and the Emperors influence within those councils. This can be found by reading and studying the two councils that ultimately brought forth a Trinitarian point of view. This being the Council of Nicea and the Council of Constantinople.

It is important to first establish that the early Church father Tertullian who died in 220 AD wrote “The simple, indeed, (I will not call them unwise and unlearned,) **who always constitute the majority of believers, are startled** at the dispensation (of the Three in One), on the ground that their very rule of faith **withdraws them** from the world's plurality of gods to the one only true God”. He goes on to say “They are constantly throwing out against us that we are **preachers of two gods and three gods**, while they take to themselves pre-eminently the credit of being worshippers of the One God”. This can be found in his work “Against Praxeas” chapter 3. Sundry Popular Fears and Prejudices. The Doctrine of the Trinity in Unity Rescued from These Misapprehensions.

The first council, The Council of Nicea took place in 325 AD. Unlike what you may be thinking, this Council was not over a debate of a Oneness point of view versus a Trinitarian point of view. It was however because of a man named Arius who believed that the Son (Jesus) was created out of nothing before the world was called into being, and for that very reason was not eternal nor of the divine essence. For his argument he referred to Proverbs 8:22, which reads, “The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.” The Hebrew word translated for possessed, he said, could also have meant created or brought forth. Thus Arius, interpreted the passage that the Son was created at some point by God before the creation of the world. This was the reason for the first ecumenical council of the Church.

The council was called for by the Emperor Constantine who was seeking to put an end to the controversies that were taking place among the adherents of Christianity, so that he could use Christianity to strengthen his political power in his newly won empire. The purpose of the council was to try and determine the unity of beliefs of the Christian Church especially addressing the teaching of Arianism as well as covering a few other issues of importance.

The council convened in 325 AD in Nicea in Bithynia, which is modern day Turkey. It lasted for just about six weeks. It has been said that 318 bishops attended, but a more likely number is 225, including every Eastern bishop of importance, four Western bishops among them Hosius of Cordoba, who was the president of the council. On the second day of the council the Emperor Constantine declared himself to be the Bishop of Bishops this showing his political power and personal agenda.

As the Council began to unfold, it was found that there was mainly three points of view. The first group was a minority led by Athanasius who argued that the Father and the Son were of the same substance. The second group was the Arian group which believed the Son was of a different substance from the Father. And the third group was the majority, in which case the majority of them never fully understood the issues at hand but wanted peace. The majority of them never agreed with Arius, but they also never agreed with Athanasius. Thus later in history they received the nickname of Semi-Arians.

Finally Emperor Constantine, hoping to obtain the most unanimous decision possible, introduced a word called homoousios, which means of the same substance. This was considered controversial because it was used by some people to support a Oneness doctrine of the Godhead, known as Sabellianism, against those with a Trinitarian position.

Upon conclusion of this first Council, the position of Athanasius prevailed of which was of a Trinitarian mind set and Emperor Constantine sealed the victory by threatening to banish all dissenters. However there were two Bishops who would not sign the creed along with Arius. One of the two Bishops was Eusebius of Nicomedia and these men were placed in exile.

Emperor Constantine then declared that the decrees of the council were divinely inspired, declared them as laws of the empire, and made them punishable by death. The creed that was created from the Council of Nicea was not, however, the creed generally circulated today as the Nicene Creed.

In summary up to this point, this council was mainly those of a Trinitarian mind set concerning the Father and the Son being of the same substance, where as the Arians were of the mind set that the Father and the Son were of a different substance. During their debates, the Emperor Constantine introduced a word that those of the Trinitarian mind set did not like, because a group of people of the mind set that God was not only of one substance, but he manifested himself as the Son. So he was not two separate persons of one substance, but rather one person who manifested himself as the Son and the Father. These people were known as Sabellianism or Oneness people.

The original Nicene Creed that came out of this Council stated: We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, the only begotten of the Father that is of the essence of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, from the substance of the Father, by whom all things were made both in Heaven and on Earth; who for us men, and for our Salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost.

Remember this creed was to refute Arianism. And again, Arianism was those who believed that the Father and the Son were of a different substance. So the accomplishment of the first ecumenical council was to establish that the Father and the Son were of the same substance of which is of a Trinitarian mind set and that the Father and the Son were co-eternal.

Due to the fact that during this council, those of a Trinitarian mind set as they were trying to refute Arianism, were speaking in a manner that actually was supportive of the Oneness or Sabellianism mind set, which again is a belief that God was not only of one substance, but he manifested himself as the Son, so he was not two separate persons of one substance, but rather one person who manifested himself as the Son and the Father; this led to the bishops signing the creed so that they would not be exiled, but to continue teaching the Godhead the way that they always had, which was somewhere between the teachings of Arianism and Trinitarianism.

Over the course of the next sixty years there would continue to be a battle between the Arians and the Athanasians. Shortly after being exiled, Eusebius of Nicomedia, who was an Arian Bishop to Constantine, swayed Constantine's favor in support of Arianism instead of the Nicene orthodoxy. Athanasius, who had become Bishop of Alexandria, was deposed and Marcellus of Ancrya was appointed in his place. This taking place during the first synod of Tyre in 335 A.D. Marcellus of Ancrya leaned heavily toward the teaching of Sabellianism. Arius also was to return and would have been reinstated into the Church had he not died the night before. Constantine died in 337 AD and Constantine's son Constantius II, who was Emperor of the eastern part of the Empire who was also a supporter of Arianism, began deposing Athanasian bishops and replacing them with those who taught Arianism. These controversies spawned much fighting and bloodshed with many synods taking place.

After Constantius' death in 361 AD his successor Julian who was a pagan worshiper allowed all exiled bishops to return which caused much dissension among Christians. However, the Emperor Valens continued Constantius' policy. It would not be until the co-reign of Theodosius I and Gratian that the Arian controversy would ultimately be surrendered to that of Trinitarianism.

The second ecumenical council that convened was the council of Constantinople. This council was summoned by Emperor Theodosius I in 381 AD. It was convened to address the Semi-Arian/Macedonian controversy. The Semi-Arian/Macedonian controversy was a denial of the divinity of the Holy Ghost and that the Son was like the Father but not of the same substance with him. The Emperor Theodosius himself was a staunch supporter of the original Nicene Creed, so it was already biased. One of the major themes of this council was to settle the issue of the Holy Spirit to God. Is he an energy as some had said, was he an angelic being, or some other type of creature, or is he also a person?

This council had only about 150 bishops and 36 Semi-Arian/Macedonian bishops in attendance. It gave the bishop of Constantinople honour second only to that of the pope. Even though the Western church did not accept the ranking of Constantinople as second to Rome until the 13th century. It took close to nine hundred years before the West finally agreed that the bishop of Constantinople was second only to that of the pope. And this council was the first to declare unequivocally that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were three separate persons of God, being co-equal, co-eternal, and of the same essence and the Emperor made it law. This is how the Trinitarian Doctrine was born and was the first time the Holy Spirit was even considered a third person in the Godhead.

However it wasn't until some time in the fourth century that the Nicene creed came into existence. The Nicene creed we use today, based off of these two councils that were both completely biased and declared law by the Emperors of Rome, with adjustments to the creed as late as 589 AD at the Synod of Toledo, became the common doctrine of the Trinitarian today.

The Nicene creed in use today has in addition to "And in the Holy Ghost" from the council of Nicea: And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. 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.

In conclusion, what we should have learned from this condensed version of how the Trinitarian Doctrine was born, is that these councils were not divinely inspired, but rather were conducted in very controlled environments, with Emperors of Rome establishing them as laws, and they are the people who claimed these councils were divinely inspired. We also should have noticed that these Bishops were not all called by God, but rather Emperors of Rome were appointing them to positions while deposing others. To not be truly called of God is certainly playing a great role in all of these debates and it was man's wisdom that was bringing together this doctrine of the Trinity.

We also learned that the first council had nothing to do with Oneness versus Trinitarianism, but was repudiating Arianism and for this very reason, the original council defined scriptures, and built a defense system, that ended up supporting a Oneness point of view. So in the next council, they made the necessary changes to try to alter this point of view. It also set out to settle the issue of the Holy Spirit to God on what the Church would confess in regard to their belief of the Holy Spirit of God somehow missing the point that God is a Spirit and thus is the Holy Spirit not as three different individuals but as being God alone. This council also gave the bishop of Constantinople honour second only to that of the pope and this was not accepted until the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

It is scripture that must interpret scripture. You can not define your own doctrines outside of the Word of God and use a couple of verses to support your idea, but rather all scripture must work together to form the doctrine of God of which we then must correctly interpret these scriptures in harmony one with the other on the subject at hand. This is known as precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little". (Isa 28:10) This is to whom the Lord will teach knowledge and to whom he will make to understand doctrine. (Isaiah 28:9) This however was not applied at these councils nor was it applied for those that began teaching a plurality of essences in unity of one essence.