

Confession in Creeds

Fundamentals Series

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Confession in Creeds
Baptismal and Conciliar
to
Chalcedon

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Commission Press

A division of Allied Mission Church

Confession in Creeds: Baptismal and Conciliar to Chalcedon

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Published by Commission Press

A division of Allied Mission Church

PO Box 2515

Round Rock, TX, US 78680

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“So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word or by letter.”

- 2 Thessalonians 2:15

“Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

- 1 Timothy 4:16

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PREFACE

The booklet *Confession in Creeds: Baptismal and Conciliar to Chalcedon* commends the ancient creeds that underlie historical Christian consensus. Christians in every generation — of multiple ethnicities, languages, and nations — have a supreme identity. They are the Church, the habitation of God's Spirit, custodians and conveyors of divine truth, Christ's disciples to the nations. The Church is God's household and the Body of Christ. To the saints the faith has been entrusted once and for all.

In that great Church are the faithful of Allied Mission Church (AMC), though a small and recent part. That portion of AMC belongs, under Christ its head, to the historical, present, and future members of his Body in other smaller church bodies.

During the first five centuries, the Church developed creeds to transmit its faith and to reject heresies that threatened its unity and witness. These creeds are recognized by the main branches of traditional Christianity — Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant. The Church that worked hard and long to help shape the creeds was a relative uniform one (often fired in persecution), the evidence of Christ's headship and presence. Therein lies their value.

The *Confession* is a survey of the main creeds inclusive of the Council of Chalcedon in 451. It reveals that AMC originates from formative Christianity. It undergirds and upholds witness to Christ, and is thus a helpful discipleship tool.

THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God the Father Almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son,
our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy
Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered
under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and
was buried. He descended to the dead. On
the third day He rose again. He ascended
into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of
the Father, and he will come to judge the
living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.



The Apostles' Creed can fulfill a vital role as a rallying point when the church is under attack or — what is often more dangerous — ignored as irrelevant or patronized as a harmless curiosity. In Germany before 1933 it was customary in Protestant churches for the minister alone to recite the Creed in the Sunday service. But after 1933 congregations began to join in the recitation. Church members wanted this opportunity, in the face of Nazi attacks on the church, to confess their faith personally and publicly . . . It would also be health-giving in which the Creed is seldom if ever used to discover the thrill and inspiration of confessing together our common faith in a formula that binds us to our fellow Christians across national and denominational boundaries and across the centuries.

Source: C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Apostles' Creed: A Faith to Live By* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Nelson, 1993), 6-7.



The Apostles' Creed is an ancient summary of the Christian faith. It is widely accepted in many churches, especially those of Catholic¹ and Protestant heritage that both ultimately stem from the Latin or 'Western' branch and tradition of formative Christianity. Those Christian bodies from primarily Greek or 'Eastern' influence such as the Orthodox Church recognize it as worthy of honor.²

From earliest times, the apostles and their successors communicated the salient points of their witness as "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Acts 2:36; 5:42; Rom. 10:9).³ Other semi-formal expressions pair Jesus Christ with God the Father (1 Cor. 8:6; 1 Tim. 2:5); in fact, this 'binitarian' couplet is a standard salutation and phraseology of the apostles' epistles.⁴ Based on Jesus' baptismal instructions to his disciples, a trinitarian basis is also apparent (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:2).

Ignatius, a church leader under custody while enroute to his martyrdom in Rome (c. 107), wrote

1. All other uses of "Catholic" herein, except in the Preface, mean 'catholic' in the general sense (i.e., all Christians, the 'Body of Christ') — not the Roman Catholic Church.

2. Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 202.

3. Other christological summaries (some expanded) are 1 Cor. 15:1-7; Phil. 2:6-11; Heb. 4:14; 2 Tim. 2:8; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 John 2:22.

4. Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:32; Gal. 1:3 et al. among Pauline epistles, and, in others, 2 Pet. 1:2; 2 John 3; Jude 1, 4.

letters to several churches. His doctrinal summary included:

Jesus Christ, who was of the family of David, who was the son of Mary; who really was born, who both ate and drank; who really was persecuted under Pontius Pilate, who really was crucified and died . . . who, moreover, really was raised up from the dead when his Father raised him up.⁵

He also seemed to evidence a trinitarian belief: “For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived by Mary according to God’s plan, both from the seed of David and of the Holy Spirit.”⁶ Later the same (second) century, Irenaeus of Lyons in Gaul (modern-day France) more clearly outlined the trinitarian framework:

And this is the order of our faith, the foundation of [the] edifice and the support of [our] conduct: God, the Father, uncreated, uncontainable, invisible, one God the Creator of all: this is the first

5. Ignatius, *Trallians* 1-2, ed. and trans. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007); cf. *Smyrn.* 1-3 in which he reiterated similar points to the Christians in Smyrna.

6. Ignatius, *Eph.* 18.2, Holmes.

article of our faith . . . And the second article: the Word of God, the Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord . . . And the third article: the Holy Spirit . . . For this reason the baptism of our regeneration takes place through these three articles.⁷

Formulations such as those mentioned by Ignatius and Irenaeus were variants of the so-called ‘Rule of Faith.’ The ‘Rule’ was that early summary of core Christianity which church leaders claimed as a deposit from apostolic teaching and to which they adhered. It was considered a ‘badge’ of true Christian identity. Somewhat flexible, it was nevertheless recognizably similar among groups of Christians although the precise wording often differed. Sometimes it included additional phrases to reinforce biblical testimony and apostolic tradition.

Irenaeus claimed that the Church, “though scattered through the whole world to the ends of the earth” had “received it from the Apostles and their disciples.”⁸ Origen asserted that the “holy apostles, in preaching the faith of Christ, delivered themselves with the utmost clearness on certain points which they believed to be necessary to every one.”⁹

7. Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 6, 7, trans. John Behr (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997).

8. Irenaeus *Against Heresies* I.10.2, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* I.

9. Origen *De Principiis*, preface 4, *ANF* 4.

They were skeptical of us at first because they did not know if we were associated with a cult. They asked Jenny (my national partner) if she could recite the Apostles' Creed from memory. She had gone to a Methodist church in college that recited it every Sunday and so she was able to do it. Once they heard that, they were very welcoming and we prayed together and encouraged each other. (A short-term international mission team member describing encounter with Chinese Christians in southern China during 2015).

Source: Facebook message to George Lee, April 29, 2018. Author's name withheld.

Jesus' twelve apostles, however, did not actually compose the 'Rule' (even though medieval belief and some ancient commentary assumed otherwise). Nevertheless, it was a faithful consolidation of their preaching and, in that sense, was 'apostolic' and an accurate tradition (for additional examples of the 'Rule of Faith' see Appendix).

As a guideline of succinct Christian teaching, the 'Rule' was used to catechize baptism candidates. In mid-second century, Justin (ca. AD 165), the philosophical Christian apologist and teacher at Rome, described the baptismal practice as in the name of "God, the Father and Lord of the universe," "our Savior Jesus Christ who was crucified under

Pontius Pilate,” “and of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰ The obvious triadic structure was certainly based on the baptismal instruction that Jesus imparted to his disciples (Matt. 28:18-20).

By the following century in Rome (ca. 215), converts who had completed their catechetical instruction were asked a series of three questions at the moment of their baptisms. The questions resembled the ‘Rule’ and what developed as the Apostles’ Creed:

When the one being baptized goes down into the waters the one who baptizes, placing a hand on him, should say thus: ‘Do you believe in God the Father Almighty?’

And he who is being baptized should reply: ‘I believe.’ Let him baptize him once immediately . . .

‘Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born of Holy Spirit and Mary the virgin and was crucified under Pontius Pilate and was dead [and buried] and rose on the third day alive from the dead, and ascended in the heavens, and sits at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the living and the dead?’

10. Justin Martyr *First Apology* 61, ANF 1.

And when he has said, ‘I believe’, he is baptized again.

And again he should say: ‘Do you believe in the Holy Spirit and the holy Church and the resurrection of the flesh?’

And he who is being baptized shall say: ‘I believe’. And so he should be baptized a third time.¹¹

At about the same period in northern Africa, Tertullian alluded to what was evidently a similar protocol: “When we have entered the water, we make profession of the Christian faith in the words of its rule.”¹² Elsewhere, he wrote that “we are thrice immersed, while we answer interrogations rather more extensive than our Lord has prescribed in the gospel.”¹³

Near the middle of the following century (ca. 341), Marcellus of Ancyra (modern-day Ankara, Turkey), defended his orthodoxy to Julius of Rome with a creed that was nearly identical to one cited fifty years later by Rufinus who compared the creed of Aquilea (Italy) to that of Rome. Rufinus’ comparison is

11. Hippolytus *On the Apostolic Tradition* 21.12-18, trans. Alistair Stewart (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001).

12. Tertullian *De Spectaculis* 4, ANF 3.

13. Tertullian *De Corona* 3, ANF 3.

All Christians believe more than the Apostles' Creed, but none can believe less . . . We are declaring the truth of the Christian faith with the very words that gave early Christians hope, sent martyrs confidently to their deaths, and have instructed Christ's church throughout the centuries.

Source: R. Albert Mohler Jr., *The Apostles' Creed: Discovering Authentic Christianity in an Age of Counterfeits* (Nashville, TN.: Nelson, 2019), xvi.

known as the “Old Roman Creed” and is the basis of what eventually evolved into the established Apostles' Creed.

The Apostles' Creed as essentially worded today appeared in a handbook by Priminus, the eighth century Benedictine who established monastic institutions in Germany.¹⁴ Its version is known as “The Received Form” (= *Textus Receptus* in Latin). He wrote the manual as a doctrinal guide for his missionary disciples.

14. The second and third letters of his name are sometimes shifted. For the creed mentioned by Priminus, see Appendix.

THE CREED OF NICAEA (325)

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made both in heaven and on earth; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

And in the Holy Spirit.

Despite the widespread awareness and acceptance of the 'Rule of Faith,' Christian leaders nevertheless had to contend against false teachings that threatened the integrity of the good news of Jesus. The apostles themselves realized the importance of 'getting words right' about Christ with the truth of God's kingdom and supernatural life possible in him.

In his farewell message to the Christian leaders at Ephesus, Paul warned: "Savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!" (Acts 20:29-30). Likewise, Jude impressed to his readers: "I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3-4). Peter, too, foretold that "there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies" (2 Pet. 2:1). Adding his own words, John wrote: "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

As a baptismal confession, the Rule of Faith defined traditional Christian consensus. However, the Rule did not answer deeper theological questions as the early Christians attempted more detailed exposition of Jesus' lordship, especially about his humanity and deity. Neither did it explain the nature of the relationships between Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and God the Father. Different ideas were posed as

The right facts point to the right person. The wrong facts don't. You can't put someone you love in a box, but you can put him in a picture.

Source: David Mills, *The Saints Guide to Knowing the Real Jesus* (Ann Arbor, MI.: Charis, 2001), 33.

Christians attempted intellectual arguments that were both logical and philosophically persuasive. Religious pluralism challenged Christian distinctives but made critical that its heirs remain faithful to apostolic witness about Christ. As Christianity expanded beyond its Jewish environs, teachers and writers sought to clarify and preserve its doctrine as the Church received and believed it from the beginning.

True to the apostles' warnings, the early Church faced false teachers. Doctrinal disputes necessitated a sometimes long and arduous war of words involving technical vocabulary. Christian leaders were greatly concerned to remain faithful to the Scripture and to the teaching they inherited from the apostles. They realized that the revelation of divine truth involved mystery, so they were not trying to limit God or 'demystify' the gospel by logical argument. The early Christians were instead trying to *preserve* the mystery because of their love for Christ and the people of God, and their commitment to the witness of the Church.

During the early fourth century, a major controversy appeared in the teaching of Arius, an elder under bishop Alexander of Alexandria, Egypt. It concerned the status of the pre-incarnate Christ otherwise known as the Logos (i.e., Word) who became human in the person of Jesus (John 1:1). According to Arius, the Logos was the first and most exalted creature made by God. Since the Logos was only a creature (albeit a great one), Jesus could not have been divine, Arius taught. Arius popularized his teaching with the slogan “*there was when he was not*” and by composing lyrics to music. Arius’ point was that since the Son of God (or Logos) was not divine, he did not always co-exist with the Father.

Bishop Alexander counter-attacked: “God always, the Son always, the Son exists from God himself.”¹⁵ Moreover, the Body of Christ had always included Christ in its worship, and to deny his deity was to make its liturgical tradition self-contradictory.

Behind the controversy was the commonly accepted idea rooted in Greek philosophy that God’s nature was unchangeable and that he separated himself from creation. According to Arius’ way of thinking, if the Logos were divine he could not undergo change by assuming a human nature. If the pre-incarnate Son became truly ‘humanized’ as Jesus,

15. Quoted in Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963), 39. The words were attributed to Alexander in Arius’ letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia.

Arius and his followers protested, then he must have been less than fully divine since God would not invest himself with human nature. To be human is to undergo change and growth and endure suffering, all of which is impossible for divinity, according to Arian thought. The pre-incarnate Christ, although great and glorious, was created by God as a lesser being, contended Arius.

Alexander was shocked by Arius' teaching. Correct doctrine mattered — it wasn't a matter only for theologians or intellectuals. Indeed, Alexander realized that the true Christian message was at stake: Christ, the pre-existent Logos made flesh, participated in full human nature in order to make humans divine-like. If the Son was in some way less than divine — as the Arians argued — then humanity could not be joined to divinity. Consequently, salvation would be ineffectual and the gospel distorted. Humans were created in the image of God, and Jesus, being the divine image and likeness par excellence, is the pattern and prototype to whom God conforms those who believe in and obey Christ.

Alexander invited about hundred bishops from the eastern part of the Empire to Alexandria for a synod to examine the issues. They met in 318 and determined that Arius was in error, and dismissed him from leadership. Arius retreated to his friend and advocate, Eusebius of Nicomedia. Thereafter Arius and Alexander engaged in letter-writing campaigns. The controversy continued to boil such

It is the neglect of dogma that makes for dullness. The Christian faith is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man — and the dogma *is* the drama. That drama is summarized quite clearly in the Creeds of the Church, and if we think it dull, it is because we either have never really read those amazing documents, or have recited them so mechanically as to have lost all sense of their meaning. The plot pivots upon a single character, and the whole action is the answer to a single central problem: *What think ye of Christ?*

Source: Dorothy L. Sayers, *Creed or Chaos?* (Manchester, NH.: Sophia Institute, 1974), 3.

that even emperor Constantine was concerned about the growing dissension.

In 325, Constantine invited bishops from throughout the Empire to attend an assembly, or council, at imperial expense. They gathered at Nicaea (modern-day Iznik, Turkey) to help settle the Arian issue. Some 318 bishops attended. Most of the attendees were probably neutral to each side of the controversy and perhaps hoped for a compromise. Since Arius was not a bishop, he was not present in the Council, so his friend Eusebius acted on Arius' behalf. Thinking that a clear explanation of their position would suffice to convince the Council, Eusebius read an Arian statement. Contrary to what

he expected, when bishops heard his denial of the Son's deity, they were outraged and shouted Eusebius to virtual silence. The bishops deliberated on a formulation, with the Arian sympathizers proposing that it be limited to biblical terminology. However, Alexander and his defenders resisted, recognizing that the two sides went around and around without resolution because the Arians twisted Scripture to their own novel interpretations. To more clearly define the church consensus of its Christological belief, a concept was needed that was not limited to Scripture. Perhaps at the suggestion of his ecclesiastical advisor Hosius of Cordova (Spain), Constantine suggested a Greek term *homoousious*.¹⁶ It was proposed to define Christ as being of one essence with God — the Son and the Father sharing the same essential attributes of deity. The relevant phrase stated that “[We believe] in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God . . . true God of true God, begotten not made, *of one substance* with the Father.”

The use of non-biblical language in the Nicene Creed was . . . safeguarding a biblical thought.

Source: Everett Ferguson, *Church History Volume 1: From Christ to Pre-Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 2005), 197.

16. It is formed from *homo* (“same”) and *ousia* (“substance”).

Appended to the Creed was also a forceful statement that condemned and excluded Arian adherents: “Those who say ‘there was when he was not,’ and, ‘before he was begotten he was not,’ and that, ‘he came into being from what-is-not,’ or those that allege, that the Son of God is ‘of another substance [*hypostasis*] or essence [*ousia*]’ . . . these the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes”.¹⁷

The Council's statement is known as the Creed of Nicaea (somewhat expanded in 381 at the Council of Constantinople). It included four important assertions that helped clarify the biblical record and apostolic witness about Jesus' relationship to God.¹⁸

First, the creed stated that Jesus was “very God of very God” so that he was no less divine than God himself. Second, Christ was “begotten, not made.” Since God was “maker of all things visible and invisible” as the creed stated at its beginning, Jesus was clearly understood as in no way the result of a created act of God. Third, Jesus was “one substance with the Father.” He shared the same essence or ‘God-ness’ as God the Father. Fourth, the statement that Jesus became human “for us men, and for our salvation” emphasized that humanity could not have

17. “Anathema” means a condemnation by God and exclusion from God’s people. The word was used by Paul in 1 Cor. 16:21 and Gal. 1:8.

18. The following four key points were made by historian Mark Noll.

been restored to God if Christ were only a mere creature and therefore less than divine.

As one author summarized the issue at stake at the Council of Nicaea, the “apostolic faith of early Christianity revolved around the scandal of the deity of Christ . . . If it were removed in any way, then the hope for eternal participation in God’s own life and for forgiveness and restoration to the image of God would fall apart. The gospel would be wrecked.”¹⁹

19. Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 150.

NICENO-CONSTANTINOPOLITAN CREED (381)

We believe in the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.



For ‘out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks,’ Jesus said. When spoken genuinely as from the heart, words matter as an eternal consequence: Whoever publicly acknowledges Christ will be accepted by him in presence of angels, and if one confesses ‘Jesus as Lord’ he will never be shamed by God.

If persons refusing to recite ‘There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet’ are considered as Christians for dying as martyrs, how much more are they faithful to Jesus who declare ‘Jesus is Lord’ by reciting the Apostles’ or Nicene creeds before their last breaths.



The Council of Nicaea in 325 and its creed tried to resolve the questions and uncertainty about Jesus' divine status. In truth, the controversy intensified. It would not reach resolution until the Council of Constantinople in 381.

Most participants at Nicaea, having heard in person the tenets of Arianism, were decisively against it. Nevertheless, many leaders were concerned that the most appropriate description of Christ had not been reached. Some of them held beliefs somewhere in the middle between the two sides. Others, perhaps, were not theologically astute.

Though not reversing the Nicene decision, Emperor Constantine backpedaled. As Arian sympathizers pleaded their cause, he reinstated the Arian defender Eusebius who later baptized the emperor and oversaw the spiritual care of Constantine's sons after their father died. Thus, the emperor who had presided over the Nicene Council that approved an anti-Arian creed ironically died as an Arian himself.

Alexander, the bishop from Egypt who defended the received orthodoxy, died three years after the Council. An able young assistant, Athanasius, who had accompanied him to Nicaea, succeeded him as bishop at Alexandria. The 'black dwarf,' as Athanasius was called, would lead the charge to continue to uphold the traditional doctrine.

What continued to trouble the Church was not only Arian persistence, however. That the Nicene

keyword *homoousious* was not in the Scriptures troubled the consciences of its objectors.

By *homoousious*, the Creed of Nicea affirmed that Christ was ‘one substance’ with God (the Father), thereby emphasizing his divinity. Sometimes, though, the root word *ousia* (‘essence’ or ‘nature’) was employed more or less as an equivalent to approximate the concept of ‘person’ (= *hypostasis* in Greek).²⁰ The addendum to the Creed of Nicaea (not part of the creed per sé) had, in fact, included both *homoousios* and *hypostasis* as synonyms. Understanding the terms differently, some referred to *one* while others spoke of *three*. Those who spoke of *one* emphasized that the Father, Son, and Spirit share the same divine nature; others who spoke of *three* emphasized that the three persons of the deity were distinct. However, those who understood the words as ‘essence’ or ‘nature’ insisted that *three* meant three different gods — a concept opposed to the Judeo-Christian belief in one God. Meanwhile, those who understood the term more or less as ‘person’ insisted that applying *one* to the Godhead did not differentiate between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — a belief objectionable to apostolic and Christian tradition and known as the heresy of “Sabellianism” (named after Sabellius, one of its

20. Both words could refer, in a general sense, either to (1) the essence that all humans share, or, in a particular sense, to (2) the essence that makes an individual unique (roughly equivalent to the concept of ‘person’).

popularizers). The Sabellian heresy identified Christ so closely to the Father that they were considered identical — the Father, Son, and Spirit being mere names or ‘masks’ of the one God at different periods of his activity and self-revelation. This system of thought surfaced more than a century before Nicaea and was opposed by right-thinking Christians.

The resulting confusion led to a sad state. The church historian Socrates reflected that “in consequence of these misunderstandings, each of them wrote as if contending against adversaries: and although it was admitted on both sides that the Son of God has a distinct person and existence, and all acknowledged that there is one God in three Persons, yet . . . they could not agree among themselves, and therefore could in no way endure to be at peace.”²¹ Eventually, at a synod in Alexandria in 362, an important understanding was reached: the same word was meant differently to convey right beliefs.

All the while, however, disputants sometimes had genuine disagreements. Some Christians preferred to state that Christ was “of similar substance” (instead of “*same* substance”). They are generally termed ‘Semi-Arians’. Another contingent described Christ simply “like” the Father, avoiding the term “substance” altogether. A third party held that Christ was “unlike” the Father’s substance, although they

21. Socrates *Ecclesiastical History* 1. 23, NPNF 2.2

said he was alike in terms of activity, energy, and power. In the years following the Council of Nicaea, various synods gathered to produce their own creeds as attempts to supplant the Nicene.

The Arian menace, with the imposition of imperial favoritism, continued to shake the Church catholic. The high point for Arianism was the statement drafted by an assembly at Sirmium (357) which denounced any mention of “substance” and excluded any criticism of Arian belief. The developments prompted a Christian contemporary to label the assembly as the “Blasphemy of Sirmium,” while another lamented of the times that “the whole world groaned and was astonished to find itself Arian.”²² The theological issues absorbed even the populace such that commonplace interactions led to Arian assertions, wrote one fourth-century Nicene defender.

If you ask the price of bread, you are told, ‘the Father is greater, and the Son inferior.’ If you ask ‘Is the bath ready?’ someone answers, ‘The Son was created from nothing.’

Source: Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Deity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*, quoted in Roger E. Olson in *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity, 199), 173-74.

22. Jerome *Against the Luciferians* 19, NPNF 2.6

Athanasius, however, exerted a lifelong, tireless effort to champion Nicene orthodoxy. His many writings include *Against the Arians*, and the regarded classic *Incarnation of the Word*. For his painstaking labors he was exiled five times by various emperors, totaling nearly seventeen of his forty-five years as bishop. His last exile was in 365, forty years after the council at Nicaea. Athanasius maintained that Christ was as much divine as God: If Christ were otherwise, he could not have been a true revelation of God since only deity can fully reveal deity. According to the Scripture, “no one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known (John 1:18; cf. Matt. 11:27). If Christ were short of divine, then he was more like a mere messenger or prophet. In addition, like his mentor Alexander, Athanasius insisted that only the divinity of Christ made possible God’s renewal of the divine image in humans and their restoration to holy and holistic life in God. If to humans God only forgave their sins without investing his life in them through Christ, then they are still left in a condition of brokenness and death.

Related to questions about Christ included doubts and denials about the relations of the Godhead, including the deity of the Holy Spirit. Equal to the task of doctrinal defense were the “Cappodocian Fathers,” a trio of influential theologians from the area of present-day Turkey once known as Cappadocia. They included brothers Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa, and their mutual

friend Gregory of Nazianzus. All of them were friends of Athanasius.

Basil distinguished the terms *ousia* and *hypostasis*. By *ousia*, Basil meant the underlying essence that beings or substances have in common. For example, two persons named John and Mary have in common an essence or nature (*ousia*) that is humanity. Humans also feature particularities such as *tallness* that are ‘individualized’ and therefore distinguish one from the other. For the distinctives, Basil used *hypostasis* as ‘person.’ The Divine Being, in a somewhat similar way, can in nature (*ousia*) be one, and yet three in ‘person’ (*hypostasis*). Against modern conception, the people of Basil’s era considered personhood to encompass also relations or ‘community.’ The trinitarian ‘selves’ were not isolated or separate but perfectly together. Ancient thought was also influenced by the idea that substance or nature (*ousia*) was in a sense ‘higher’ and greater, or more ‘real’ than particular individualities. For Basil, the trinitarian persons shared the same nature — and that nature was more real than their individuality without eliminating their distinction. The persons of the Godhead were inseparable but not identical.

Defending the deity of the Holy Spirit also occupied Basil. He contended against a group known as “Pneumatomachians” (‘Fighters against the Spirit’) who asserted that the Holy Spirit was only a creature. Basil argued that apostolic tradition and the practice of baptism in the three-fold name — inclusive of the Holy Spirit — sufficed for believing

in the Spirit's equal divinity. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit's work of salvation in and for believers likewise demands that he is ranked equally with God.

Basil's friend Gregory of Nazianzus also helped defend trinitarian belief. According to a certain argument, a reality is either a substance (being) or action (mode of activity). The argument continued that if God is three substances, then three divinities must exist; on the other hand, if God is three actions (or modes of activity), then God must sometimes manifest himself as Father or, at other times, as the Son or Holy Spirit (per Sabellianism). To the contrary, Gregory wrote that, in the case of God, reality designates neither a mere action nor being, but a *relation*. The Son's unique relation is eternally *begotten* of the Father as image and agent; the Spirit's unique relation is eternally *proceeding* from the Father as his power and wisdom.

Gregory of Nyssa contributed to the work of his friend Gregory of Nazianzus and brother Basil by contending that the persons of the Godhead — unlike three separate human individuals who act independently — always operate in common. The “Father, Son and Holy Spirit cooperate in sanctifying, quickening, consoling and so on.”²³ Their unity of activity or work implies, therefore, a unity of nature. Although the exact manner may differ in that only

23. Included in J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (New York: David McKay, 1972), 266.

We confess to doctrines profoundly mysterious by their nature — that a man should be God, that one God should be at the same time three persons, that we of corruptible flesh should also be temples of the living God. So we believe, but so we cannot comfortably *think*. For as “thoughts,” these are in essence mystery. Mystery is what many contemporary minds are hungry for . . . We Christians in the West have not shared what we possess. We have mystery in plenty, yet our discourse averts it, avoids it as if in embarrassment. For mystery is what we have been taught through our education to extinguish.

Source: Anthony Ugolnick, quoted in Daniel B. Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker, 1994), 53.

the Son took a human nature, yet the Father and Spirit also acted together toward, in, and during the incarnation.

By their theological writings, then, the Cappadocians not only defended the deity of Christ, but also the doctrine of the trinity by recognizing the due place and honor of the Holy Spirit. Although their contribution was invaluable, their cultural and theological way of thinking (that continues in ‘Eastern’ or Orthodox Christianity) reflects less a ‘rational’ component than Christians in the West. To Eastern Christians, the profound truths of the faith

inspire mystery. In articulating and defending the faith, the Church must also realize that reason is limited and that humans also are attracted by imagination and wonder.

When a council was called in 381 by emperor Theodosius I at Constantinople, the 150 gathered bishops reaffirmed the Creed of Nicaea and re-emphasized the deity of Christ. Against the contentions of the Pneumatomachians ('Spirit-fighters'), the Council asserted with greater clarity the deity of the Holy Spirit as the "Lord, the giver of life . . . who, with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified." The resulting creed is a fuller version of the one that was adopted at Nicaea in 325. It is properly known as the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, sometimes referred to as simply the Nicene Creed (to be distinguished from the Creed of Nicaea of 325). Often recited in many liturgical or mainline churches, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (aka "Nicene Creed") is considered the universal creed of Christendom.

THE CHALCEDONIAN DEFINITION (451)

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [i.e., rational] soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.

In the fourth and fifth centuries, a theological dispute arose as to how the two natures of Christ were related in him. Two ways or tendencies of thought prevailed about the personhood of Christ: the 'Word-flesh' and 'Word-man' approaches.

One outlook that centered in Alexandria was the 'Word-flesh' perspective. It considered that the incarnate Word (or Logos) who was Jesus had a human body, or flesh, but did not possess a human soul. Whereas human beings all have a non-physical spirit and rationality, the pre-incarnate, divine Logos, on the other hand, supplied to Jesus that rationality (mind/will). Christ, in whom the Logos dwelled, had only human flesh or body, hence, the term 'Word-flesh' to describe the human-divine relationship in Jesus. The other outlook centered in Antioch of Syria and is known as 'Word-man.' It emphasized that the incarnate Word had, in addition to a body, a rationality (mind/will) that was genuinely human. The Word incarnate in Christ was, according to Antiochene perspective, a man in the fullest and complete sense, hence, the phrase 'Word-man.'

Proponents of the 'Word-flesh' christology included Athanasius. According to him, the Logos or Word, i.e., the pre-incarnate Christ, took for himself a human body and was its activating source and rationality. Though dwelling in the God-Man Jesus, the Word nonetheless remained sovereign ruler and sustainer of the cosmos. The Word was also the 'subject' of Jesus' actions and experiences — even his weaknesses and sufferings (such as distress, hunger,

and professed ignorance). But these 'limitations' were due strictly to the Logos as embodied, and not to the Logos' own nature per sé. According to Athanasius, Christ performed two sets of actions: some as God and others as God-man; both sets were by one and the same person, however.

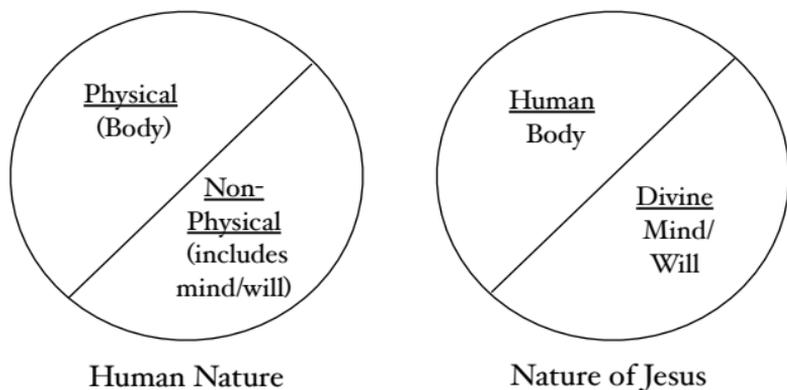
Among the Antioch-type was Theodore of Mopsuestia. He insisted that Jesus was a complete, genuine human of physical — and non-physical — elements. He possessed a human mind and will, thereby becoming a true human. As a result, Jesus experienced physical development, growth in knowledge and wisdom, bodily appetites, tiredness, and endured temptation. Unlike other humans whose minds and wills are inclined against God, Theodore taught that God's grace kept Jesus free from sin. Two natures (human and divine) existed and operated in the person of Jesus, yet, they united and presented themselves in Jesus as one person, one subject. The divine nature of the pre-existent Logos 'assumed' humanity, and the human nature of Jesus was the one 'assumed by' the divinity. However, Theodore had tendencies of expression that seemed to convey that Jesus was two persons presenting themselves as one persona. He pictured the unity of divine and human natures in Jesus as existing 'side-by-side' in an 'external' or outward representation. The analogy Theodore used to picture the union of two natures in Christ was the joining of husband and wife who, becoming 'one-flesh,' nevertheless remain separate persons. As a result, Theodore seemed to paint a

different picture than the Christ as one-person he otherwise taught.

Apollinarius from Laodicea in Syria represented the ‘Word-flesh’ perspective. He taught that Jesus’ mind and will was from the Logos, and since the Logos was divine, Jesus’ mind/will was not human. As a human is composed of both body, and non-body, or soul, elements (mind/will), so Jesus, according to Apollinarius, also had a body and non-physical soul — but the soul or rational faculty was not human but divine.²⁴ Since, according to Apollinarius, Jesus lacked a true human mind, his teaching seemed to deprive Christ of a full humanity. Gregory of Nazianzus realized the danger of Apollinarius’ teaching because it denied the full human incarnation of deity. As Gregory contested, if Jesus was not human in the full sense, then redemption of human nature was impossible. God’s renewal of human nature must involve all of it — including mind, consciousness, and rationality. If Christ’s incarnation was incomplete, so is human restoration; Gregory’s saying was “What was not assumed has not been healed.” Apollinarius’ doctrine was rejected at the Council of Constantinople in 381. Apollinarius had tried to explain the deity of Christ, but his explanation lessened Jesus’ full humanity.

24. Apollinarius originally taught that Jesus lacked a human soul. He later contended that Jesus possessed a ‘non-rational’ soul (i.e. ‘life force’), but not a rational one (i.e. mind/will). Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.46,

CHRISTOLOGY OF APOLLINARIUS



Humans have a body, and also a soul which includes the mind/will, i.e., the rational faculty. According to Apollinarius, Jesus' rational component was not human, but divine, being supplied by the pre-incarnate Logos (the Son of God).

In 428, another controversy erupted at the teaching of Nestorius, the bishop of Constantinople. He had come from Antioch and was probably a student of Theodore. By Nestorius' time, Christians were referring to Mary as *Theotokos* (Greek for 'God-bearer') to emphasize the deity of Jesus.²⁵ He objected to the term because Mary could not

25. This terminology was employed by Origen (third century), according to the church historian Socrates (*Ecclesiastical History* 7.32). Gregory the 'Wonderworker' used it in the same century (*Four Homilies* 2). Fourth-century writers to use it included Methodius (*Oration of Simeon and Anna* 7), Cyril of Jerusalem (*Catechetical Lectures* 10.19), and Ambrose (*On the Virgins* 2.2).

possibly have conceived the Godhead; she bore only Jesus' humanity. He preferred the term *Theodoxos* ('God-receiving') or *Christotokos* ('Christ-bearer').

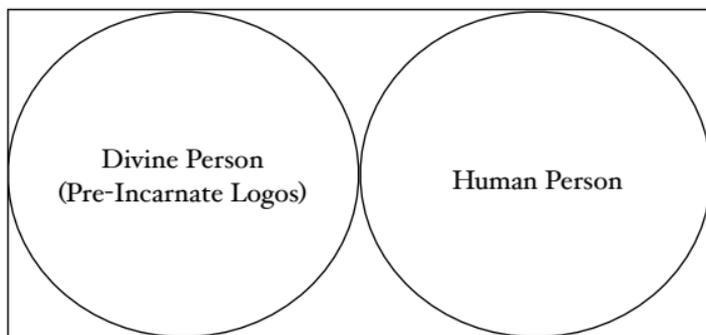
Nestorius insisted that the two natures of divinity and humanity in Jesus were genuine, yet remained distinct. He believed that each nature — divinity and humanity — had an expression or presentation of itself as a 'form' or 'appearance': a nature (*physis*) must be attached to form or 'person' (*prosopon*). In the incarnation, two natures conjoined in a 'common' reality and form (*prosopon*) that was the historical person of Jesus. Because Nestorius used the same term for each nature's 'form,' as well as for the conjoined form (who was the historical Jesus), critics consequently assumed that Nestorius taught a 'two person' christology. Although he insisted otherwise, the perception of his critics was that he implied that Christ was two persons — the divine Logos and the human Jesus somehow linked together.

Nestorius was strongly opposed by his counterpart, Cyril, bishop of Alexandria. Because Nestorius objected to the term *Theotokos*, Cyril accused him of relegating Christ to be a mere human to whom the Logos was connected in only an external way. He also considered Nestorius' theory of the union of Christ's natures as a conjunction to imply a mere artificial union. Cyril preferred as an analogy the union of body and soul which he considered a 'natural' union of natures. Unfortunately, Cyril's motives were not altogether above reproach. The cities of Antioch and

Alexandria, longstanding places of Christian influence, were the theological training grounds of Nestorius and Cyril, respectively. Each center had its predominant, distinctive doctrinal perspective. The Alexandrian theological point-of-view emphasized the oneness of God and the deity of Christ. By contrast, the Antiochian point-of-view focused on the threeness of God and the humanity of Jesus. Neither perspective was necessarily wrong, but both needed the other as a balance to avoid erroneous extremes. In addition, the bishoprics of Alexandria and Antioch also competed for prestige with Constantinople which, being the capital or 'New Rome' of the eastern empire, had influence and power from its proximity to the emperor. The debate between Nestorius and Cyril, beginning with different 'starting points' about the nature of Christ, also reflected, therefore, ecclesiastical rivalries and political ambitions.

Different understandings of terminology also contributed to the conflict. Those of the Antiochene circle meant by "nature" its attributes or characteristics, the totality of which would be a 'substance.' On the other hand, those of the Alexandrian circle meant by "nature" an individual being who has existence or 'subsistence.' As a result, when Nestorius and other like-minded Antioch-type thinkers referred to "nature," their Alexandrian critics interpreted more or less as an independently existent being (or 'individual').

CHRISTOLOGY OF NESTORIUS



Reprinted from Wayne Grudem. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 554.

Jesus possessed a full human nature, and a divine nature as God incarnate, according to Nestorius. He was perceived by critics to teach that Jesus was a divine person and a human person linked as one being.

Cyril and Nestorius exchanged a fruitless series of letters and each appealed to the church of Rome for support. The Roman bishop, Celestine, after learning each other's position, favored the teaching of Cyril and commissioned him to act on his behalf to excommunicate Nestorius. Emperor Theodosius II called for a church council to meet in Ephesus in 431. Parties from each side of the controversy arrived on different days, and proceeded to convene separately. Supported by representatives from Rome, the council endorsed a sentence against Nestorius and rejected the 'two persons' christology.

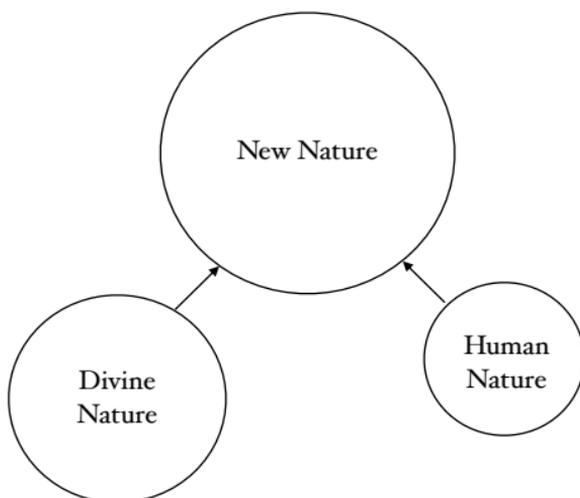
A third stage toward christological consensus was the reaction against Eutyches, an elderly monk, who was also from Constantinople. He regarded Christ as

having two natures before the incarnation and one afterward. As a result, his critics interpreted him to mean that even Christ's flesh came from heaven and, consequently, only *appeared* or *seemed* to be physical. Eutyches was reluctant to confess that Christ retained two natures in the incarnation — divinity and humanity. Although Jesus' mother possessed the same nature as other humans, Jesus did not, according to Eutyches. The traditional perception of his teaching is that the two natures of Christ must have formed a third kind of nature, or else that Jesus' divine nature 'absorbed' his humanity. At a meeting in 448 presided by the local bishop Flavian, Eutyches was removed, and Rome was informed of the result.

Eutyches, however, had a vocal and unsavory defender in Dioscorus, the successor bishop of Cyril in Alexandria. He prevailed upon Emperor Theodosius II to assemble a synod at Ephesus in 449, but the outcome was predetermined. A gang of monks who accompanied Dioscorus assaulted Eutyches' opponent Flavian, who died a few days later as a result. Eutyches was pronounced correct. In addition, Leo's representatives were prohibited from reading his letter, the *Tome*, that criticized Eutyches and defended the dual natures of Christ. Theodosius considered the matter settled. Leo, however, denounced the actions of the so-called 'council.'

God then seemed to intervene — the emperor died from a freak accident. He was succeeded by his sister Pulcheria and her consort Marcian, both of whom favored a doctrine of Christ's two natures that

CHRISTOLOGY OF EUTYCHES



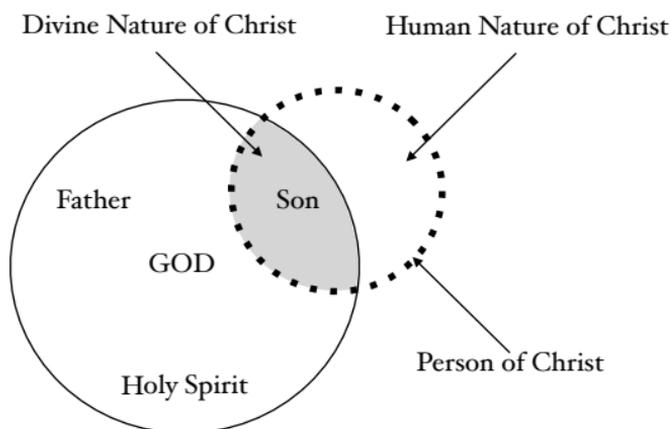
Reprinted from Wayne Grudem. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 554.

Eutyches said that Christ possessed two natures *before* the incarnation and one afterwards, implying to his critics that his body was unearthly. Eutyches may have assumed that in Christ either a third kind of nature was formed (or, possibly, that his divinity absorbed his humanity).

was contrary to the teaching of Eutyches. Another council gathered in 451 in Chalcedon, near the imperial capitol of Constantinople. Several hundred bishops attended with delegates from Leo of Rome, making it the largest of all previous councils. The council reaffirmed the Nicene Creed, removed Dioscorus as bishop in Alexandria, and posthumously vindicated Flavian.

More importantly, Chalcedon's formula of two natures in one person set the standard for the doctrine of christology which has been recognized by

CHALCEDONIAN CHRISTOLOGY



The Son shares the same divine nature as the Father and the Holy Spirit. He added a human nature as the person of Jesus. The Chalcedonian Definition, therefore, affirms that Jesus has two natures yet is one person.

all major branches of Christianity. The statement it composed is known as the “Chalcedonian Definition.” It emphasized “one and the same Christ . . . to be acknowledged in two natures . . . the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person . . . not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son.”

Against Eutyches who seemed to de-emphasize the humanness of Jesus, the Definition affirmed the “distinction of natures” and the “property of each nature being preserved.” Against Nestorius, it commended *Theotokos* of Mary, ‘God-bearer’ of the divine Son, “begotten” before all ages but “born” according to his humanity. Also against Nestorius,

The key affirmations of the definition reflected the main themes of the New Testament — that Christ was a unified and integrated person . . . In this sense, Chalcedon did not so much solve the technical Christological problem as confine it.

Source: Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1997), 77.

the Definition asserted Christ's unified personality — “not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son.” Further, its mention of a “reasonable” (i.e., rational) soul in Christ admits that Jesus was fully human, in contrast to the teaching of Apollinarius in the previous century who maintained that the divine Logos supplied the rational element to Jesus.

APPENDIX

THE RULE OF FAITH

As the 'Jesus movement' expanded during its earliest centuries — refined through persecution and theological controversies — the resultant Church persisted in its 'Rule of Faith' as a deposit of basic teaching from scripture and the apostles. It was remarkably similar across time and place.

Egypt?, ca. AD 150?

Our faith . . . is in THE FATHER, THE RULER OF THE ENTIRE WORLD, and in JESUS CHRIST OUR SAVIOR, and in THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE PARACLETE, and in the holy church, and in the forgiveness of sins.²⁶

Tertullian, North Africa, early third century

There is ONE ONLY GOD . . . also A SON, HIS WORD . . . him we believe to have been sent by the Father into the Virgin, and to have been born of her — being both man and God . . . called by the name of Jesus Christ; we believe him to have suffered, died, and been buried, according to the Scriptures, and, after he had been raised again by the Father and taken back to heaven, to be sitting at the right hand of the Father, and that he will come to judge the quick and

26. *Epistula Apostolorum* 5, in Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed. *New Testament Apocrypha*, trans. R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959).

the dead; who sent also from heaven from the Father . . . THE HOLY GHOST, the Paraclete, the sanctifier of the faith of those who believe in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Ghost. That this rule of faith has come down to us from the beginning of the gospel.²⁷

Gregory 'The Wonderworker,' ca. AD 270, Turkey

There is ONE GOD, THE FATHER of the living Word who is . . . perfect Begetter of the perfect Begotten Son. There is ONE LORD, Only of the Only, God of God, Image and Likeness of Deity . . . there is ONE HOLY SPIRIT . . . in whom is manifested God the Father, who is above all and in all, and God the Son, who is through all . . . There is a perfect Trinity, in glory and eternity and sovereignty . . . Neither was the Son ever wanting to the Father, nor the Spirit to the Son; but without variation and without change, the same Trinity abideth ever.²⁸

Patrick of Ireland, ca. mid-fifth century

There is no other God . . . except GOD THE FATHER . . . from whom all beginnings come . . . this is our teaching. And HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST, whom we testify has always been, since before the beginning of this age, with the Father in a spiritual way. He was begotten in an indescribable way before every beginning . . . He

27. Tertullian *Ad Praxeus* 2, *ANF* 3

28. Gregory Thaumaturgus *Declaration of Faith*

became a human being; and, having overcome death, was welcomed to the heavens to the Father . . . Jesus Christ, in whom we believe and whom we await to come back to us in the near future, is Lord and God. He is judge of the living and of the dead . . . He has generously poured on us THE HOLY SPIRIT . . . who makes believers and those who listen to be children of God and co-heirs with Christ. This is the one we acknowledge and adore — one God in a trinity.²⁹

Caesarius of Arles (France), first half of sixth century

I believe in GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY. I also believe in JESUS CHRIST HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD, conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell, rose again the third day, ascended into heaven, sat down at the right hand of God the Father, thence he is to come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in THE HOLY GHOST, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the flesh and life eternal.³⁰

Priminus, Southwest France, ca. 710-724

Do you believe in GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, Maker of Heaven and Earth? . . . Do you believe in JESUS

29. Patrick *Confession* 4, trans. Pádraig McCarthy (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2001).

30. Included in Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963), 24.

CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born from the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried, descended to hell, on the third day rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven and sat at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, thence he will come to judge the living and the dead? . . . Do you believe In THE HOLY SPIRIT, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the flesh, eternal life?³¹

31. Included in J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (New York: David McKay, 1972), 399.

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