

HOW THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY CAME TO THE CHURCH

By Allon Maxwell

The subject of the nature of Jesus has been a matter of controversy almost since the beginning of the church. This should be no surprise. One of the falsehoods of that first century "Spirit of Antichrist", described in John's epistles, centred around the question of whether or not Jesus is really a man.

All too often, the question of who was right or wrong, (if anyone was right at all), was far less a problem than the spirit in which the various opponents dealt with each other. Many of them managed to prove that they did not love one another at all. Jesus and John both say clearly that those who do not love one another are not disciples at all.

(John 13:34-35, 1 John 2:9-10)

The most notable of these controversies began in the early years of the 4th century. The leading opponents on this occasion were Arius and Athanasius. The theological warfare centred around the question of whether Jesus was a created being, subject to his Father, (Arius), or uncreated, co-equal, co-eternal and consubstantial with his Father, (Athanasius).

The hostility between the two parties was so great that it was considered by the Emperor Constantine to be a major threat to the political stability of the Roman empire. He began to exert pressure on the church for a speedy resolution of the conflict. This led to the calling of a council of the whole church at Nicaea in AD325.

The council was attended by 318 bishops but was not truly representative of the whole church since these were only about one sixth of all bishops in the empire at that time. Further, only about 10 of these were from the Western half of the Empire. Those who did attend, soon found that Constantine assumed a dominant role to force the adoption of the decision which he favoured.

Although Constantine is claimed by the church, to this present time, as the first "Christian" emperor, his personal Christianity was clearly more political than real.

The historian, Gibbon, describes him as a "cruel but dissolute monarch" combining "the vices of rapaciousness and prodigality". He became emperor by making war to destroy his opponents. He murdered one of his sons, his brother-in-law, his nephew and possibly his second wife.

Although favouring Christianity, he retained the title and role of high priest of the pagan religion. At the time of the council, he was unbaptised and, in fact, refused to be baptised until on his deathbed, on the theory that he could thereby continue to sin and be finally cleansed of all at the last moment.

Those bishops who allowed Constantine any role at all in the decision of the council and the affairs of the church, bring the credibility of their own Christianity into question. The events which led to the final vote, and the subsequent behaviour of the victors, are convincing evidence that the council itself and any decisions reached, completely lack the seal of the Spirit of God. (By their fruits you shall know them.)

To resolve the dispute, a creed was proposed which favoured Athanasius and condemned Arius. Although most of the bishops present were not Arian, many of them were equally opposed to the wording of the part of the creed which defined the nature of Jesus as of

"one substance" with the Father. Over sixteen centuries later, the theologians of the Eastern Orthodox churches and the Western Churches, of Roman origin, are still divided over this issue.

After a prolonged and inconclusive debate, the impatient Constantine intervened to force an end to the conflict by demanding the adoption of the creed. The vote was taken under threat of exile for any who did not support the decision favoured by Constantine. To avoid the consequences, a number of bishops found excuses to leave the council and return home before the vote was taken.

The majority voted in favour, although many were motivated by fear or politics, rather than conscience. Two stood firm to their conviction and voted against the proposed creed. They were subsequently exiled, along with Arius. The writings of Arius were condemned to be burnt and a death sentence decreed for any found in possession of them.

It is worth noting, in passing, that the council of AD325 and the creed which it produced, did not attempt to resolve the question of the personality of the Holy Spirit.

In that respect, the original version of the Nicene Creed is not truly Trinitarian.

The nature of the Holy Spirit was, at that time, still open to differing views. There were some who did affirm the personality and deity of the Spirit, but there were also those (including Arius) who taught that the Spirit was a created being. Others held that the Spirit was an influence and not a person at all. The wording of the creed did not clearly address this issue.

The scandalous "majority" vote of the Nicene Council did not really settle anything, and controversy continued unabated. Within a few years the Arians had regained so much ground that Constantine found it politically expedient to change sides and Arianism was restored to favour. (This writer suspects that this sudden reversal also made for peace at home, between Constantine and his Arian wife!)

Arius was recalled from exile and declared innocent of heresy. The exiled bishops were reinstated, and the Arian party conspired to have Athanasius banished! Constantine's reversal was so complete that, nearing the end of his life, he received his baptism from the Arian bishop of Nicomedia. After Constantine's death, his Arian son deposed the Trinitarian bishops and replaced them with Arians.

Over the next few decades, the balance of political power changed several times, backwards and forwards, from one party to the other. As opportunity presented itself, the Arians and their foes both misused their temporary periods of favour with the secular power, to persecute and exile the opposition.

The Arians, when they were in power, proved to be no more Christian than their foes. They were, if anything, even more vicious, intolerant and violent. It is open to speculation that an Arian dominant orthodoxy would have produced a history of persecution even more terrible than it has been under Catholicism.

The controversy produced vicious politics in both church and state and much bloodshed. Finally, in AD381, under the Trinitarian emperor Theodosius, a further council was held in Constantinople, to which only Trinitarians were invited. Not surprisingly, the 150 Trinitarian bishops who attended managed to carry a vote which altered the Nicene Creed to its present form.

The deity of Jesus was confirmed (with minor amendments) and a statement was added which affirmed both the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity became law for both church and state.

The destiny of the church was now in the hands of men whose dogmatic intolerance still shapes the attitudes of their successors.

Bishops who disagreed, were expelled from their pulpits and excommunicated from the church. The "victors" combined with the secular authorities to suppress the Arians by force of arms and exile. Enforced assent to abstract propositions about the nature of Jesus, rather than obedience to his teaching, became the test of Orthodoxy.

The church, which in former times had been so terribly persecuted for its faith, was now unashamedly using persecution as a weapon for the protection of the "faith"!

This majority "victory" is one of the great tragedies of the history of the church. Those who really know the Jesus of the Gospels, will never be able to believe that he would impose his will on the church by threats, force of arms, or political and religious pressures. Even a democratic vote which requires the minority to abandon their conscience, must be suspect.

How can we really believe that these men were followers of the real Christ, or that they were led by the Spirit of God in their decisions? How can we trust their confused theology?

The "victory" at Constantinople was far from complete. Controversy continued until, 70 years later, at the council of Chalcedon, the church found it necessary to further "explain" the Nicene Creed.

This new definition is known as the "Chalcedon Creed". However, this Trinitarian statement undermines its own credibility since it also defines the virgin Mary as the "Mother of God", threatening excommunication for those who dare to differ.

Somewhere around the same time, the "Athanasian Creed" made its appearance. Although it bears the name of Athanasius, it is actually of unknown origin, possibly first appearing in South Gaul, in the middle of the 5th century. (Some authorities place it much later than this).

The wickedness of the servants of the **False Christ** of the Nicene, Chalcedonian and Athanasian creeds, eventually produced a decree by the Emperor Justinian, in the 6th century, which imposed the death sentence for all who did not accept the doctrine of the Trinity.

For more than a thousand years this evil law was used by evil men, in an evil church, to justify the murder of "heretics". They actually claimed to serve God in what they did, fulfilling the prophecy by Jesus which warned his disciples to expect the appearance of such men! ([John 16:2](#))

The Athanasian Creed is, without doubt, one of the most illogical, contradictory and confusing documents ever written. In addition, it denies salvation to those who refuse to believe its confusion, and decrees that they "shall perish everlastingly".

The problem with all three of these creeds is that they use confusing language, to describe abstract concepts, far beyond the understanding of the ordinary men and women who comprise the majority of the church. They pay lip service to the humanity of Jesus, while at the same time effectively denying it by making him much, much, more than any other man who has ever existed.

No other man has ever been of one substance with God. No other man has ever existed eternally before his birth. No other man has ever possessed an infinite mind in a human body. No other man has ever combined two natures in one body. No other man has ever faced temptation as a "GOD MAN", possessed of these attributes.

The implication of this theology, especially in relation to the temptation of Jesus, is totally destructive. No matter how we rationalise it, it is beyond all reason and logic to say that the Jesus of these creeds is really a man.

This awful contradiction is presented as a "mystery". This clouds the issue in confusion and is supposed to silence awkward questions for which there is no logical answer.

The real truth is that these creeds are a cleverly contrived variation of that first century "Spirit of Antichrist", which denied that Jesus had come in the flesh as a real man.

The consequences of this for the church have been disastrous. Even though theologians, still, can neither agree totally among themselves about the meaning of these creeds, nor explain them in simpler words suited to the understanding of ordinary men, verbal assent to this "incomprehensible mystery" is a major test of orthodoxy. Salvation, the church says, requires that men profess faith in a form of words, without understanding their meaning.

The subtle dishonesty by which men come to terms with this sort of religion, reaches into many other areas of the lives of those who surrender themselves to it.

Theology which pays only lip service to the real humanity of Jesus, is universally associated with a religion which also pays only lip service to much of His teaching about the way of life which pleases God. The same confused logic which accepts the doctrine of the Trinity, explains away the need for radical obedience to the Sermon on the Mount.

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