

# THE FIRST ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

## 1. Early Trinitarian Heresies

### a) The Adoptionist

- \* Some of the proponents:
  - + Theodotus of Byzantium
  - + Theodotus the banker
  - + Paul of Samosata
- \* Used private interpretation & rational speculation of the Mystery of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son and reached some of the following conclusions:
  - + Jesus was a mere man; at His Baptism, a spirit, the heavenly Christ descended upon the man and enabled him to perform miracles
  - + "the Word is from above, Jesus Christ is man from hence; (Mary) gave birth to a man like us, though better in every way, since He was of the Holy Spirit", reasoned Paul of Samosata.

### b) The Monarchians

- \* Some of the proponents:
  - + Praxeas in Rome
  - + Noetus of Smyrna, teaching also in Rome
  - + Sabellius, a native of today's Lybia, who also came and taught in Rome
- \* Used private interpretation & rational speculation of the Mystery of the relationship between Father and Son and reached some of the following conclusions:
  - + "the Father Himself came down into the Virgin, Himself was born of her, himself suffered, in short himself is Jesus Christ."(according to Praxeas)
  - + because their view implied that the Father suffered on the cross, they are also called Patripassians, or Fathersufferers.
  - + more modern theology refers to this heresy as Modalism, because according to their view Father, Son and Holy Spirit are modes of the same being

## 2. The Arian Heresy: A Universal Heresy

### a) The Founder

- \* Arius, a presbyter in Alexandria, Egypt
- \* initiated the controversy around A.D. 318
- \* very well-known for his ability to preach

### b) The Heresy:

- \* God's essence is indivisible, thus it cannot be shared
- \* for God to impart His essence to another being would mean that He is divisible and changeable
- \* thus, whatever exists must come through creation from nothing and not from communication of essence
- \* the instrument of God's creation is the Word, who is a creature, generated or made, perfect and beyond all creatures but still just a creature because he has a Source, while God Himself doesn't.

\* He insisted that "there was a time when he(the Word)was not"; "Even if he is called God, He is not God truly, but by participation in grace...he is God in name only"

\* here are some of the New Testament texts which Arius misinterpreted:

- + Matthew 3,17 & Psalm 2,7: a son means that he was created, is inferior, and not to be worshipped
- + John 14,28: Jesus himself declares that "the Father is greater", which makes the Son inferior to the Father.
- + Mark 13,32 & Matthew 24,36: Jesus admits that "only the Father knows", which makes him inferior to the Father.
- + Luke 22,41-42: shows Jesus desperately praying to the Father, which makes him a creature totally dependent on the Father.

c) Local Councils could not resolve the heresy

\* Alexander, the Episkopos of Alexandria called a council of all the episkopoi from Egypt and Lybia in A.D. 320

+ from about 100 episkopoi attending, 80 condemned Arius and his teachings

+ about 20 Episkopoi supported him, since they themselves believed his teachings; they held a separate council at Nicomedia and proclaimed Arius "orthodox", while condemning Alexander as heretic.

+ Ossius, the episkopos of Cordoba was sent to try and reconcile the parties by Constantine, who was concerned with the potential for political instability, but the attempt failed.

### 3. The Council of Nicaea: the First Ecumenical Council

a) A universal issue had to be resolved by a universal Council

\* the heresy spread quickly

\* it became a real threat to the fragile empire

\* Constantine urges the Episkopoi to gather in Council

\* initially called at Ancyra, it was changed to the city of Nicaea (today's village of Iznik in Turkey)

\* because the minutes of the meeting itself are lost there is uncertainty regarding the exact number of episkopoi; the number 318 is often used.

b) The Council followed the apostolic pattern established in Jerusalem and described in Acts 15

\* among the participants:

+ Alexander of alexandria, Eustathius of Antioch, Macarius of Jerusalem, Nicholas of Myra from the Eastern part of the empire

+ Caecilian of Carthage, Domnus of Panonia, Ossius of Cordoba, as well as the priests Vito and Vincent

who represented the Episkopos Sylvester of Rome who was too old and infirm to attend

- c) The teaching resulting from this council is summarized in the first 7 sentences of the Nicene Creed.
- \* among the key sentences:
    - + "homoousios", "of one essence" "with the Father" which points out that the begetting of the Son from the Father means that He is generated from the very essence of the Father and not created out of nothing
    - + "true God of true God" was added to rebut the Arian contention that the son is not truly God, that he is God only by grace
    - + "begotten not made" was a direct attack on the Arian position that the Son is just a creature
  - \* here are some of the New Testament passages used:
    - + John 1,14 : begotten is a mystery word in no way similar to birth in time; it is an eternal begetting
    - + Colossians 1,15-19: He is the Creator, along with the Father
    - + Matthew 1,23: Immanuel: God is with us
    - + John 20,28
    - + John 1,1 & 3
    - + John 10,30
    - + John 14,9-10
  - \* the Holy Tradition was the "well" from which the Episkopoi attending could draw the proper interpretation of the debated verses
- d) Arius and his followers were excommunicated
- \* unfortunately Arius and at least two Episkopoi refused to accept the Creed; another 16 Episkopoi refused to sign the condemnation of Arius
  - \* Arius and his followers continued the struggle for quite a while
- e) The council also issued liturgical and church discipline canons which are available to this day, such as:
- \* the criteria of the Paschal cycle
  - \* at least three Episkopoi must choose a new Episkopos (see Canon 4)
  - \* reference to the practice of "second marriages" (see Canon 8)
  - \* no kneeling on Sunday since it is the Day of Resurrection (see Canon 20)

f) Athanasius, a deacon during the council, became the Episkopos of Alexandria in 328, and the leader of Orthodox defense against Arianism; he left us the very important book "On the Incarnation"

#### 4. Short Explanation of the words "homoousios" and "hypostasis"

- a) the Greek word "ousia"= "nature, substance, essence"
- \* a group of boys and a group of horses present us with:
    - + human nature for the boys
    - + horse nature for horses
  - \* the human nature and the horse nature are different because of their essential characteristics:
    - + human characteristics such as:
      - hands, feet, heart, head, etc.
    - + horse characteristics such as:
      - feet, head, tail, neck, etc.
  - \* thus, the nature or essence is a set of common essential characteristics which are possessed by a whole group or type, and through which that group is set aside
  - \* within that group, within the same nature, there are non-essential characteristics, such as:
    - + size, color, shape
- b) the Greek word "hypostasis"= "person"
- \* twin boys have:
    - + same essential, human characteristics
    - + same non-essential characteristics
  - \* what makes the twin boys different is their personality
    - + one loves horses, soccer, tennis, etc.
    - + the other loves piano, cats, reading, etc.
    - + mom can tell the difference; being with them will help us see the difference
  - \* thus, the person is an individual package within nature which has:
    - + distinct gifts
    - + which, while not separating him from human nature makes him unique
- c) God's nature is one
- \* among the essential characteristics of God's nature:
    - + oneness, see 1 Corinthians 8,6
    - + spirit, see John 4,24
    - + Holy, Perfect, see Matthew 5,48
    - + Light, see 1 John 1,5
    - + Love, see 1 John 4,8 & 16
    - + Unchangeable, see James 1,17
    - + Eternal, see Revelation 4,8
    - + Omnipresent, see Psalm 139, 7-9
    - + Almighty, see Luke 18,27
    - + Omniscient, All-knowing, see Romans 11,33
    - + Good, see Matthew 19,17
    - + etc.
  - \* all three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit have the same essence or nature, and that is clearly secured with

the word "homoousios"; all three Persons are spirit, holy, light, love, goodness, wisdom, unchangeable, omnipresent, almighty, omniscient, good, etc., for they share in the same divine nature

d) The Three Persons are distinct, unique through their hypostasis, or personality

\* Scripture tells us of Three:

- + see Genesis 1,26
- + Genesis 18
- + Isaiah 6,3
- + Matthew 3,16-17
- + Matthew 28,19

\* the Hypostasis of the Father is of the same divine nature as the Son and the Holy Spirit, but is distinct, unique through:

- + being eternal fountainhead of the Holy Trinity
- + all are eternally accountable to Him
- + eternally begetting the Son
- + eternally proceeding the Holy Spirit

\* the Hypostasis of the Son is of the same divine nature as the Father and the Holy Spirit, but is distinct, unique through:

- + ever existing WITH the Father
- + being eternally begotten of the Father
- + being Incarnate, crucified, buried risen and
- + being the Judge

\* the Hypostasis of the Holy Spirit is of the same nature as the Father and the Son, but is distinct, unique through:

- + ever existing with the Father and the son
- + eternally proceeding from the Father
- + poured on the Apostles
- + working in the Church