



# Nicaea 325: The Legacy of the Undivided Church in the Twenty-first Century

Tomi Karttunen

NATIONAL CHURCH COUNCIL 

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Publications of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland  
The Church and Action 164

National Church Council

Helsinki 2025

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Publications of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland,  
The Church and Action 164  
Other publications

Tasknumber: DKIR/216/06.02/2025

Original text: Nikea 325. Jakamattoman kirkon perintö 2000-luvulla  
(Väyläkirjat 2024)

Translator: Tomi Karttunen

Book design: Milla Cotterill

Layout: Emma Martikainen

Photo: Tomi Karttunen

ISBN 978-951-789-826-3 (PDF, accessible)

ISSN 2341-9407 (Online)

Helsinki 2025

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# Foreword

Belief in the Triune God and Jesus Christ as God and man are Christianity's central tenets. They open a view of God as the Creator, Sustainer, and Bringer of the universe's salvation in the midst of life. It took several hundred years for the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines to be jointly formulated based on the Bible. They comprehensively frame our lives as Christians, and their reception continues. The story of the first Christian millennium's seven ecumenical councils is of the struggle for faith. Seekers and defenders of truth and those making joint decisions, whether rulers or those called to ecclesiastical office, faced many challenges even then. We still enjoy the fruits of their labour, however. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) described the results of the early church's doctrinal struggle as the stones from which fire was repeatedly struck.<sup>1</sup> It is worth delving into this legacy.

In discussing key events in church history, the Lutheran or Protestant context often emphasizes the Reformation of the 1500s. Alongside 'national Protestant' thinking has been the Enlightenment's tendency to portray the Middle Ages unfavourably. Knowledge of the Christian tradition before the 1500s has remained somewhat thin. The present-focused thinking so typical of our time has contributed to the erosion of the value of tradition.

Yet modern times also include a quest for experiences hidden in history. The culture of speed and technical functionality is not all-encompassing. Ecclesiastical culture has also changed. For example, the ecumenical movement, which promotes Christian unity and creative interaction between different Christian traditions, has gradually changed the mainstream churches' perception, especially since the Second World War. In the light of historical texts, it has been possible to connect Luther's thinking more deeply with the ecclesiastical and medieval spiritual and

1 Cf. Bonhoeffer 2023, 17–24.

theological traditions. Ecumenical Luther research has contributed to the building of contact with the Orthodox and Roman Catholics, as well as Anglicans and Protestants. The unifying factor is above all Christianity's common spiritual heritage, living apostolic faith, and tradition.

As knowledge of Christianity diminishes in the West, new interest has been seen in the roots of Christianity and in the early church's thinking. Meanwhile, there is also interest in Christianity's growth in the Global South. In all contexts Christianity has a basic structure that transcends cultural boundaries, the message of the love of the Triune God, the gospel. It is important that by drawing on the early church's newly sprouting living roots, we can build unity not only among Christians living in different cultures today but with Christians of past generations, whose insights thus enrich our own thinking.

As a specialist in Lutheran ecumenical theology, I have been involved in the churches' official ecumenical activities for more than fifteen years. During that time, I have seen the early church tradition's importance in conversations not only with Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and Anglicans but also with Protestant churches. The early church's ecumenical councils play a significant role in doctrinal discussions between denominations, especially with the Orthodox. In these discussions we have had to deepen both research and the practical ecumenism that unites us, identify what still separates us, and seek steps forward together.

In my Finnish context the Orthodox tradition has enriched the Lutheran spiritual landscape. The development of consensus also requires Lutherans to engage in a detailed examination of the legacy of the ecumenical councils from the perspective of their own tradition. As early as the 1500s the reformers saw the importance of early church theology in Christianity as a whole. The theme is made even more topical by the celebration of the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea in 2025. The topic's significance will be visible in both research and ecumenical encounters between churches. For example, the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches raises the question of how we live the apostolic faith together today, and how we seek the church's visible unity in the competing pressure between tradition and modernity's fragmenting challenges.

Few compilations have been written on the history and theology of the ecumenical councils, and not many on examining their significance in the light of current ecumenical debate. This book approaches the theme more

from the perspective of what we can learn together from the heritage of faith of the first Christian millennium, and how we can interpret it today to serve both our own edification and the church's mission. The book begins by delving into how Christian traditions have understood the transmission of the apostolic heritage of faith, and what it means to think about the development of doctrine. This is the departure point for an examination of the ecumenical councils' decisions between 325 and 787, intended for Christians of all times, and their often painful reception. It is to be hoped that lessons can also be learned from the mistakes that have been made. Listening to each other and doing things together is the only sustainable foundation for a credible transmission of the heritage of faith. Of course, determination, courage, loyalty, and the ability to perceive religions thoughtfully are also necessary.

My unveiling of the ecumenical councils' legacy was inspired especially by Leo Donald Davis's classic *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325–787): Their History and Theology* (1983). It is also an internationally groundbreaking general presentation of the ecumenical councils.

On the thirtieth anniversary of my priestly ordination, 24 August 2024.  
Revd Dr Tomi Karttunen, docent.

# Introduction: ‘Believed Everywhere, Always, by All’

By its very nature Christianity is anchored in history. At the centre of its message is the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who has become one of us, and his relationship with us as the bringer of hope for the future. The Christian concept of time combines the past, present, and future. That which is unique can only exist in history in the flow of time. Each individual is unique. The essence and content of the Christian faith and gospel are connected to faith in the Triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the message of God’s love and mercy. The message’s immutability and mutability become comprehensible when the reality of each person and community is considered in time and place – their context. The common faith is passed on and interpreted afresh in different contexts and historical situations.

Christian doctrine’s core purpose from the perspective of the church’s faith is therefore to display, awaken, and strengthen the saving faith in the Triune God for the life of the world. This message has certain boundary conditions, or checkpoints, in light of which the core remains healthy and the message alive, the bearer of a recognizable Christian identity. We think of Christians living in the present around the world, as well as those of yesteryear – that is the church – as a *communio sanctorum*. According to the basic laws of communication the message conveyed change, especially when it is transmitted verbally. This also happens easily when interpreting its content in a particular environment – whether the message is in written or oral form. We need to be able to check what the original message was. This requires historical and theological knowledge and an understanding of the church as a community of faith in the past and present. Ultimately, the church’s faith is already determined by the church itself in accordance with the principle of autonomy contained in the Act on Religious Freedom.

There is also growing awareness that this articulation of the faith's content is the churches' common ecumenical task.

The supreme precept of Christian faith and doctrine is the Bible as the unique witness of God's revelation. The ecumenical creeds, which are intended briefly to express Christianity's basic truths based on the Bible, also play a key role. The only generally recognized ecumenical creed is the Nicene or Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (325/381). Creeds are also called symbols, derived from the Greek *sym-balleo*, meaning 'throw together'. Creeds are crystallizations of biblical faith. The term *homology* is also used, which means 'saying the same thing' – that is, joining the common faith here and now with the same faith of past Christians and in other parts of the globe. The glorifying of God's works of salvation (Gr. *doxology*) is also essential. The creed expresses the continuity of faith and its present and forward-looking meaning. It is a concise expression of Christian identity.

## Defining the catholicity of the faith based on the Vincentian Canon

'I believe in the deposit of faith' (Gr. *paradosis*, 1 Tim. 4:16) has been a concern from the beginning. The core of the gospel's guiding role in passing on the apostolic heritage was recognized early: 'no other gospel' (Gal. 1:7). The history of the ecumenical councils of the undivided church illustrates this. In 434 Vincent of Lérins summarized the idea that the identity of faith should be protected, not changed, in his *Commonitorium* in the 'Vincentian Canon': 'in the Catholic Church we must take care that we hold fast to what 'all have believed everywhere and always' (*ubique, semper et ab omnibus*). While this slogan is familiar to many, its deeper background is less known. The rule is not intended to be followed mathematically, which would render it superfluous and unsuitable for theology or the interpretation of doctrine.<sup>2</sup>

2 Guarino 2013, 2–4.

It has often been suggested that Vincent proposes an idea based on a historical fiction concerning Christian doctrine's golden age. However, more recent research has seen the Vincentian Canon as an ecumenically constructive premise that shows the importance of the church's undivided heritage for modern Christians. The rule does not regard doctrine as petrified but avers that it grows organically, so that faith deepens, enriches, and speaks to new situations. The first rule of the universality of faith should therefore be viewed in the context of the second, the idea of the development of doctrine. According to Vincent's second rule the meaning must remain the same (*in eodem sensu*) as the doctrine develops. Sameness does not exclude a living organic chain of events based primarily on the Bible and the systematic opening of faith's content. The church's living tradition preserves the apostolic heritage, especially through the decisions of the ecumenical councils (*Commonitorium* 3.3; 27.4). The consensus of scholars and believers and the support of the bishop of Rome are also important. In this case the idea that the content of the meaning of faith remains the same is linked to the idea of the universality of faith. Vincent strives to provide criteria for the success of the development. This idea emerged in the 1800s, the most famous example being the reflections of John Henry Newman (1801–1890), who converted from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism.<sup>3</sup>

In this ecumenical sense Vincent of Lérin's legacy has been approached in the Finnish Lutheran-Catholic dialogue report *Communion in Growth* (2017):

In the fifth century Vincent of Lérins emphasized consentient agreement in avoiding a dangerous alteration or change that was transformative of a doctrine's very nature and essence (*aliquid ex alio in aliud*). What has been believed and transmitted as the apostolic faith 'always, everywhere, and by everyone' (*semper, ubique, et ab omnibus*) was decisive. Concretely, this meant for him that a proper confession of the faith (*profectus*) was assured first through the Scriptures and then through the tradition of the Church. The doctrinal

3 Guarino 2013, 81–84. For the primacy of the Bible for the ecumenical councils, consensus of the faithful, and the role of the Bishop of Rome see Guarino 2013, 93–112. For Newman see e.g. Nichols 1990, 17–70 and Guarino 2013, 43–80.

consensus was known and preserved in the life of the Church in all its constitutive facets.<sup>4</sup>

Another example of the application of the Vincentian principle of development is the Lutheran-Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999). Its method of reconciling existing differences based on consensus takes account of the fact that the issue itself can be formulated differently. In this case a consensus can be found concerning the jointly articulated basic truths of faith, which different traditions express somewhat differently. The rule also appears when things are said in a new way without speaking of completely new things (*noviter, non nova*) that go beyond the boundaries the Fathers set. In other words, a distinction must be made between faith's content and its form or context. This was already applied in the ecumenical councils when biblically based faith was expressed with terms from outside the biblical canon. The best-known example of this was in 325, when the Council of Nicaea used the Greek term *homoousios* for the equal divine substance of God the Father and the Son of God.<sup>5</sup>

The same thinking that embodies 'unity in diversity' can be observed in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's metaphor of the basic theme of the music world (Lat. *Cantus firmus*), in which counterpoint themes are connected in polyphonic music, creating a single whole. This constructively connects the individual and community to express life's multidimensional nature.<sup>6</sup> Applied to the human voice, the choir has different voices that still perform the same interwoven work. This is not about arbitrariness but about channelling creativity in accordance with the basic rules of the score and music to create art and beauty rather than occasional cacophony. We can thus understand pluralism in a way that builds rather than fragments connection. It requires openness to the other and the ability to listen patiently and respectfully.

4 Communion in Growth, art. 181.

5 Guarino 2013, 86.

6 For Bonhoeffer see Karttunen 2004, 216–219.



# Continuity and reformation in the Lutheran tradition

The idea of the continuity and Catholicism of the faith, as well as the rejection of the grievances that threaten it, was also central to the drafting of the Lutheran Church's main confession, the Augsburg Confession (1530). This is best illustrated by its well-known concluding formulation:

Only those things have been recounted whereof we thought that it was necessary to speak, in order that it might be understood that in doctrine and ceremonies nothing has been received on our part against Scripture or the Church Catholic. For it is manifest that we have taken most diligent care that no new and ungodly doctrine should creep into our churches.<sup>7</sup>

The quest in the sources for reform was at the heart of the Lutheran Reformation, especially in the interpretation of the doctrine of justification centred on grace, faith, and Christ, and its rooting in the message of the Bible as the supreme precept of faith and doctrine. This was an effort to prove the Catholic nature of Lutheran faith. Catholicism thus means the desire to present the Christian faith as universal in its fullness of content, both historically and contemporarily. The assertion that Lutherans present no 'theological novelties' also featured strongly in the post-Reformation period. Martin Luther (1483–1546) held St Augustine (354–430), the key figure of his Augustinian order, in high esteem, and he especially valued him in his early works. In practice, Luther held the early church's view that the Bible expressed the essential features of authentic tradition and formed the basis for the unity of apostolic witness. Luther also studied the biblical foundations of the Fathers and ecumenical councils carefully and appreciated the continuity of the One, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. He also saw the early church and ecumenical councils as the initial norm for modern times. Luther drew attention to the fact that the councils

7 <https://bookofconcord.org/augsburg-confession/#ac-conclusion-0005> (referenced 24 October 2024)

did not introduce new doctrine, and that their disciplinary canons were inconsistently followed. Unlike many of his followers, however, Luther's connection with Vincent of Lérins was quite distant.<sup>8</sup>

In his defence of the Augsburg Confession (*Apologia*) Luther's colleague Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560) appeals to the unity of the church or to the Fathers in the articles on original sin, repentance, justification, and the Lord's Supper. This appeal to the *consensus patrum* (consensus of the Fathers) belongs to a broader ecclesiastical *consensus (ecclesiae)*. However, Melanchthon rejected the contemporary Roman Catholic Church's conception of the Fathers' unanimity. He was influenced by the humanistic ideal of returning to the sources and finding a purer and truer picture of the past. This led back to the Bible and especially the epistles of the Apostle Paul, the Fathers, and the ecumenical creeds.<sup>9</sup>

When there was insufficient evidence in the Fathers, one could appeal directly to the Bible. However, an essential criterion was the Fathers' interpretations of the Bible. Melanchthon and his colleagues sought to continue their role as biblical commentators. He also believed that the doctrines of the Augsburg Confession were compatible with the great Christian consensus of all time (*magnus consensus*) because they were compatible with the Nicene Creed. The doctrines of the Reformation of the 1500s were seen as an extension of the Nicaean confessional consensus. At the heart of consensus was the doctrine of the gospel (*doctrina evangelii*).<sup>10</sup>

Martin Chemnitz (1522–1586) was tasked with responding to the Council of Trent's critique of the Lutheran Reformation in the 1540s based on the Vincentian Canon. In Chemnitz's thinking the consensus of the Fathers plays a central role. His interpretation generally follows Melanchthon's approach, though he uses more colourful language. Chemnitz does not completely reject the requirement of the Vincentian Canon but adapts it to the idea of biblical primacy. He sees true Catholicism as 'that which is believed everywhere, always and by all' and is in harmony with the word of God. Chemnitz also applies Melanchthon's humanistic principle of 'purer

8 Stewart 2015, 37–38.

9 The ecumenical creeds in the Western tradition are the Apostolic, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds.

10 Stewart 2015, 48–49, 189. For Melanchthon's use of the Fathers see also Ojala 2020, 105–125.

and truer antiquity'. It is noteworthy that he often invokes the writings of the Eastern Church Fathers, Cyril of Alexandria and John of Damascus, in seeking support for the Lutheran doctrine of Christ, or Christology. On this point he goes further than the Lutheran confessions in appealing to these Eastern Fathers.<sup>11</sup>

Johannes Gerhard (1582–1637) was the most influential representative of Lutheran orthodoxy in the 1600s. In his exposition of the Christian faith, *Loci theologici*, he argues that the church of the first five hundred years was a true church despite a certain depravity in doctrine and practice. Gerhard also recognizes the consensus of the Fathers, which is useful in certain situations of controversy but is limited in value because it does not resolve religious disputes that may appear later in a new form. Gerhard also quotes extensively from the Fathers, though he no longer uses the consensus of the Fathers directly to justify Lutheran doctrine. Nevertheless, it was important to justify proclaimed biblical truths by associating them with the Fathers' statements as evidence of the Catholicism of Lutheran faith. This approach was greatly influenced by Cardinal Robert Bellarmine's (1542–1621) critical assessment of Chemnitz's defence of Lutheran Catholicism. Much of Bellarmine's argumentation led Lutheran theologians to abandon the appeal to the Vincentian Canon in support of their teaching, and they now appealed less to the consensus of the Fathers.<sup>12</sup>

During the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) Georg Calixt (1586–1656) attempted to unite Christendom based on the consensus of the first five centuries and the Vincentian Canon. He even reprinted Vincent's *Commonitorium* as Catholic troops were approaching the heartland of the Reformation in 1639. Calixt builds on the Vincentian Canon, appealing to Melancthon, Chemnitz, and Gerhard to demonstrate Lutherans' appreciation of the early church and its doctrines. He appeals to two sources of authority: the Word of God; and the consensus of the early church, especially in the ecumenical creeds. His position faced deep hostility from Lutheran orthodoxy, however, because it felt its identity was threatened.<sup>13</sup>

11 Stewart 2015, 191–192.

12 Stewart 2015, 194–196.

13 Stewart 2015, 196.

Lutheranism increasingly became a confessional denomination that relied on Luther's writings and its own orthodox theologians. The importance of appealing to the consensus of the Fathers diminished, as did the sense of the influence of the church's history and undivided heritage.<sup>14</sup> It was not until the liturgical movement of the 1800s and the modern ecumenical movement that the legacy of the early church was newly brought to the fore through the patristic, or source, works of the Church Fathers of the first Christian centuries and their associated research. The Second Vatican Council in 1962–65 also played a key role, and from the perspective of Nordic Lutheranism contact with Anglicans, among whom an appreciation of the heritage of the Church Fathers had undergone a particular revival from the 1800s. A fruit of this contact is the Anglican-Lutheran Porvoo Common Statement (1992) and Porvoo Communion of Churches (1996). We have returned to our roots in increasingly seeing the ecumenical significance of the Augsburg Confession and the fact that the concern of the Lutheran confessions is to explain the Bible and the ecumenical creeds.<sup>15</sup>

The appreciation of the Vincentian Canon and the consensus of the Fathers in England was also influenced by the migration of many learned ecumenists and scholars of the Church Fathers from continental Europe, including Johann Ernst Grabe (1666–1711), who advanced Calixt's legacy in Germany. The Vincentian Canon continues to play an important role in the English high church movement. The Church of England defines itself as 'Catholic and Reformed'. Calixt's vision of a broadly ecumenical and patristic Christianity without a substantial number of confessions has found fertile ground in the Church of England, where learning related to the Church Fathers has been cultivated, as well as faith in the consensus of the Fathers and Vincent's three criteria, universality, originality, and consensus, as the surest criteria for defining Catholic doctrine.<sup>16</sup>

14 Stewart 2015, 198.

15 Cf. e.g. Cantell 1973, 1981, 34–35.

16 Stewart 2015, 198–199.

# Development of doctrine in Catholic theology

Roman Catholic theology began to discuss the development of doctrine in the 1800s when the line was drawn with modernism. By the time the Second Vatican Council began in 1962, the debate had reached a certain maturity. Karl Rahner's (1904–1984) pre-meeting essays combined essential features of the debate, including the views of John Henry Newman. Rahner relied on two principles: (1) the establishment of unity between the various authors; and (2) the idea that individual doctrines were connected to the mystery of God's Trinity in God's self-revelation. Edward Schillebeeckx (1913–2009) and Yves Congar (1904–1995) also understood the theme of the development of doctrine to be finished.<sup>17</sup> This attitude and the church's official teaching are expressed in Article Eight of the council's document, *The Word of God (Dei Verbum)*:

This tradition which comes from the Apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. (5) For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (see Luke, 2:19, 51) through a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities which they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through Episcopal succession the sure gift of truth. For as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her.<sup>18</sup>

In postconciliar theology, however, the notion of doctrinal unity has been less clear because of the challenges of pluralism, the philosophy of

17 Nichols 1990, 263–266. For the development of doctrine see also Fairbairn & Reeves 2019.

18 DV 8. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html). For the reception of the Council of Nicaea in the Roman Catholic tradition see Dunn 2021, 347–367.

interpretation, and the reception of ecclesiastical decisions. There is one creed, but there is an undeniable theological pluralism, even in the Roman Catholic world. Hermeneutic theology has focused on the life and present experience of Jesus, as well as on a theology that mediates between the two rather than paying attention to the substantive truth of the Christian faith. The ecumenical movement has raised the idea of prescription, or accepting reception, which suggests that even if a significant part of Christendom has previously rejected a doctrinal decision, it can be collectively reconceived and received. However, this idea must be applied responsibly.<sup>19</sup>

Aidan Nichols OP has argued that from the perspective of healthy development certain limits should be set for pluralism, interpretation, and the reception process. Those with different theological views should therefore build a common theological culture in which what is important to others is highlighted in the theology of each, and responsibility is felt for transparency in relation to the church's official doctrine. In interpretation, however, a Catholic theologian's basic premise should be the view found in the church's tradition. Re-receiving, or *re-prescription*, should be based on Catholic doctrine and the addition of 'elements of truth' from other Christian traditions. Referring to the Scottish Presbyterian theologian Thomas F. Torrance (1913–2007), Nichols emphasizes that the Christian response to the truth conveyed in God's self-revelation is not a non-cognitive or non-conceptual relationship with God but always has an intellectual and conceptual aspect. The use of metaphors is guided by the meaning they receive in the Bible and the decision concerning that meaning. The doctrine also expresses objective evangelical truth, which binds the church to the creative source of its being, the gospel, and gives structure to its life and mission.<sup>20</sup>

19 Nichols 1990, 266–275.

20 Nichols 1990, 276–277.

# Development of doctrine in the Orthodox Church

In the Orthodox tradition the concept of the development of doctrine is influenced by Orthodox theology's special understanding of the role of the Spirit, tradition, the theology of the councils, and the infallibility of the church as a whole. Orthodox theology has preserved the early church's understanding of the inseparable connection between Christian dogma, or basic doctrines, and the church's liturgical life. This leads Orthodox theologians to emphasize the inability of words to express mystery (apophaticism). The negative form of dogma indicates that certain trains of thought lead to a dead end. The human mind is insufficient to express the divine mystery. Dogma does not encompass the fullness of God's revelation or Christian experience. However, doctrine has a substantive side (cataphaticism) that accompanies this insufficiency. Paul Evdokimov formulated dogma as a 'verbal icon of truth', or an image, a symbol of indescribable mystery. Dogma opens a secret and leads into and expresses it, simultaneously showing the finite nature of words. A typical example is Chalcedon's Christological dogma that Jesus Christ is God and human without separating, changing, dividing, and mixing. Dogma builds the church's unity by rejecting false doctrines.<sup>21</sup>

The apophatic attitude means that Christian doctrine in Orthodox theology is first praise (*doxology*), then confession of faith (*homology*). It is therefore natural that Christianity's basic tenets are used in the liturgy of baptism and communion (*eucharist*) and iconography. The Orthodox Church also celebrates special commemorations of the ecumenical councils, which it considers an extension of Pentecost, when the Spirit descended upon the apostles gathered in prayer. According to Orthodox thinking the formulation of doctrinal statements is a God-human process in which both God and human beings participate. The Holy Spirit cooperates with people, as in the meeting of the apostles (Acts 15). The guidance of the Holy Spirit preserved the church's identity and the continuity of its essence and faith. The unanimity of bishops in council is a sign of the Holy Spirit's presence

21 Nichols 1990, 279.

and action. The unanimity of God's entire people, which is expressed when believing Christians accept the decisions of councils, confirms these doctrinal statements' God-human nature.<sup>22</sup>

Orthodox theology generally holds that tradition is not another source parallel to the Bible. Rather, under the guidance of the Spirit, the church conveys the Bible's meaning and unity. The Holy Spirit inspired the biblical writers and now assists the church in remaining rooted in the biblical message and adapting to each time through preaching, doctrinal statements, the teaching of the Church Fathers, iconography, and liturgy. Christian doctrine lives in the flow of tradition and witnesses to it. It enables believers to accept the truth living tradition conveys and the necessity to demand its separation from heresy. For believers the doctrine formulated by the church becomes the rule of faith that distinguishes correct doctrine from heresy. The Orthodox Church does not rule out the need to proclaim new doctrinal definitions at a forthcoming council if required by integrity and purity of faith. However, this is not about the development of tradition but a deeper understanding of truth in the flow of tradition. The purpose of doctrine is also to give direction to spiritual and moral life.<sup>23</sup>

The concept of doctrinal development does not play the role in Orthodox thinking that it has in Catholic theology since the 1800s. Orthodox theologians have often treated the subject only as a reaction to the Catholic doctrinal definitions of the 1800s and 1900s, such as the Immaculate Conception, the primacy and infallibility of the pope, and the Assumption. Many Orthodox theologians have reservations about what they consider to be a Catholic idea of the development of doctrine. However, 'doctrinal development' is considered a more acceptable expression than 'development of dogmas' if it concerns the finetuning of theological statements and a deeper understanding of the revealed content. After all, the seven ecumenical councils are evidence of the reality of doctrinal development in the church's history.<sup>24</sup> In accordance with the principle of continuity Orthodox identity must emphasize adherence to the Nicæan faith, already represented by the First Ecumenical Council. However, it can and should be explained and

22 Nichols 1990, 280–281.

23 Nichols 1990, 281–282. For the relationship between Bible and tradition in Orthodox theology see also Stylianopoulos 2008, 21–34.

24 Nichols 1990, 282–283.



defended in new situations. The Orthodox Church proclaims the mystery of the Holy Trinity, revealed in the incarnation of the Son of God and the Word of God.<sup>25</sup>

Orthodox theology is said to have had a period focusing on (1) the doctrine of Christ (Christology) during the first eight centuries, (2) the work of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology) from the Council of Photius in 879–880 to the Trinitarian Councils of Constantinople of 1341 and 1351 concerning Gregory Palamas (1296–1359),<sup>26</sup> and (3) the early modern and modern periods, when the focus has increasingly been on Christian anthropology. The revealed doctrine's content, however, remains the same by virtue of the unanimity between the Fathers and the whole church. Ecumenical councils also seek to protect the previously defined faith from misunderstandings. Many Orthodox theologians have reservations about the idea that earlier dogmatic definitions might implicitly contain hidden truths of faith the later church would reveal. Doctrine is only about analysing what has already been said in apostolic times. Revealed truth's totality is always present in the church. In Orthodox theology it is essential to bring the decisions of ecumenical councils related to the doctrine of the Trinity and Christology into direct dialogue with contemporary issues. The teaching about the divine person thus provides the basis for the Christian concept of the human being, and the doctrine of the Trinity provides the basis for local churches' inter-church unity.<sup>27</sup>

However, Orthodox theology distinguishes between understanding dogma as a living truth in the church and the historical formulation of doctrine. The definitions of the councils never reflect the fullness of

25 Gavriilyuk 2021, 344.

26 Based on the 'Palamism' of Gregory Palamas, the idea was formulated in Orthodox theology that God's essence was 'unapproachable', beyond human grasp. Yet God connects with creation through divine energies that also belong to God and are therefore uncreated, though they are not part of God's essence, which is unreachable. At Mount Tabor after Christ's Transfiguration the revealed light was accordingly divine, God's uncreated light. The same light appears to those in deep prayer. See <https://ort.fi/synaksario/pyha-gregorios-palamas-tessalonikan-arkkipiispa/>

27 Nichols 1990, 283–284. For a comprehensive view of modern Orthodox theology see Ladouceur 2019.

revelation.<sup>28</sup> At least in principle this allows a response to challenges in a new context.

## The growing importance of the heritage of the Church Fathers today

The foregoing makes it clear that the heritage of the early church is valued in the Lutheran and Anglican, and more broadly, Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox traditions, despite the differences in emphasis on that heritage, both between churches and between individual theologians. It is no coincidence that the theology of the Church Fathers and the legacy of the early church have played a key role in the modern quest for resources for ecumenical unity between churches and church renewal. As has often been the case throughout history, Christian identity faces significant challenges. The number of Christians in Western countries is decreasing, though it is increasing in the Global South. The importance of the Christian church's common origins and solutions in relation to faith in God and the doctrine of grace, as well as their theological and practical work within the ecumenical community of churches, has not diminished. The common heritage is a resource during a period of increased individualism and national self-indulgence that has tested the building of unity. Knowledge of Christian heritage also provides resources for encountering other religions and strengthening the resources for meaning in conversation with all people of goodwill.

Over the years I have learned about the significance of the undivided church's legacy in ecumenical doctrinal discussions between churches, especially in discussions with Orthodox, Catholics, and Anglicans. I have also observed that Pentecostals, Methodists, and Baptists – among others – have become increasingly interested in the discoveries and building blocks

28 Nichols 1990, 285.

the spiritual richness of the early Christian centuries offers, in addition to the Bible and support for its interpretation.

In this book I attempt to reveal the significance of the undivided church's legacy by focusing on the history, theology, and interpretation of the seven ecumenical councils, taking the idea of doctrinal development in ecumenical theology into account. The first chapter provides a general overview of the historical and current significance of the early church councils, especially in ecumenical discourse on synodality – that is, the communal nature of the church's decision making. The question of the mutual primacy of bishops is linked to this. The second chapter reviews the history and theology of the seven ecumenical councils and assesses the significance of decisions and measures. I conclude with a summary and assessment of the significance for today of the first millennium's general councils.



# 1. The Councils of the Early Church: A Resource for Common Church Decision Making?

## The timeliness of the quest for a common path

In an era of globalization, polarization, chauvinism, and global environmental and pandemic challenges finding a spirit of encounter, peace, and cooperation is again topical. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 demonstrated the vital importance of combating violence and protecting the weak, as well as striving for a just and lasting peace. In the life of the Christian churches renewal projects in response to the challenges of secularization have in recent decades newly brought to the fore the tradition of joint consultation and decision making – that is, synodality – represented by a tradition that goes back to the New Testament and the first millennium's ecumenical councils.

In the largest denomination, the Roman Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council of 1962–65 especially enlivened this view. Pope Francis has vigorously promoted its spirit. At the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops on 17 October 2015 he made

a programmatic appeal: 'It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.' Pope Francis emphasized that synodality was 'an essential dimension of the Church' in the sense that 'what the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word "synod"'.<sup>29</sup>

The word 'synod', or council, comes from the Greek words *syn* (common) and *hodos* (road). 'Synodal gathering' refers to a gathering of bishops or clergy; more generally, the more recent expression 'synodality' describes the essence of the church as God's people and its mission inherited from the time of the apostles. Instead of synod, it is referred to in Latin as a *concilium*. Although there is no fundamental difference between the terms synod and council, Western tradition has generally referred to local councils as synods and global ecumenical gatherings as councils.<sup>30</sup> In the East the Greek term has been used more extensively.

'Synod' has been used for bishops' assemblies convened at various levels (diocesan, provincial, patriarchal, and worldwide) since the first centuries. There is evidence of meetings larger than the local church from around the mid-100s, when controversy arose concerning the date of Easter. In the third century bishops in local churches – that is, dioceses and ecclesiastical areas formed by diocesan groups – met in local councils, where they decided on matters of faith and practice. Their decisions may have had a fairly wide reception, but they were not sanctioned juridically. This was achieved only after the emperors Constantine and Licinius had granted religious freedom to Christians in the Edict of Milan in 313, and Constantine had convened the first ecumenical or general council in Nicaea in 325 and made its decisions legally binding. After a long reception process the Council of Nicaea was finally adopted by the First Council of Constantinople in 381 as the first official ecumenical council for all Christians. Both East and West recognize the authority of the seven ecumenical councils (325–787). All have discerned 'by the light of the Word of God and listening to the Holy

29 *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (SLMC), art. 1. For the ecumenical opening by the Second Vatican Council see e.g. Toiviainen 1975, 30–35. For synodality as an ecumenical and missional possibility see also Karttunen 2023, 355–367.

30 Toiviainen 1975, 9, note 2; SLMC, art. 3.

Spirit, the doctrinal, liturgical, canonical, and pastoral questions that arise as time passes'.<sup>31</sup>

The councils of the early church were meetings of bishops at which binding decisions were made concerning matters of faith, discipline, and organization in the life of the churches. The decisions were considered to be inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore unalterable. Regardless of the number of participants, they applied to the whole church if key bishops were involved in decision making. Not every meeting was ranked as an ecumenical council, however, and their decisions were not fully received. In the 300s the territorial division defining which participants were selected for the general council developed with the creation of metropolitans in the East, merging the region's dioceses and following the Roman Empire's provincial system and later the system of five patriarchates (Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem) headed by a bishop given the title patriarch.<sup>32</sup>

In 787 the Second Council of Nicaea comprehensively defined the ecumenical nature of councils as:

the agreement (*symphonia*) of the heads of the churches, the cooperation (*synergeia*) of the bishop of Rome, and the agreement of the other patriarchs (*symphronountes*). An ecumenical council must have its own proper number in the sequence of ecumenical councils, and its teaching must accord with that of previous councils. Reception by the Church as a whole has always been the ultimate criterion for the ecumenicity of a council.<sup>33</sup>

The criteria emphasize the current, *synchronous*, consensus between local churches on the one hand and the historical, *diachronic*, continuity or loyalty in passing on the living tradition received on the other. Decisions must be in harmony with previous pan-church decisions. This is ultimately related to the teachings of the apostles and Christ himself, as well as the totality of biblical tradition. In practice the unanimity of the church leaders present

31 Brennecke 2001, 1656–1657; SLMC, art. 4.

32 Brennecke 2001, 1656.

33 Synodality and Primacy during the First Millennium: Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church (SPFM), art. 18.

and the involvement of the bishop of Rome and the other patriarchs are required for an ecumenical council. Fostering and teaching unity in the service of the apostolic faith belong to the bishop's office. The ideal is unanimity in decisions, complemented by the role of the presiding bishops – the patriarchs of the four patriarchates of the East – and the honorary status of the bishop of Rome and the Apostolic See as first among equals (*primus inter pares*).

## The model of the Assembly of the Apostles in Jerusalem

The 'Synod of the Apostles', held in Jerusalem and described in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 15), was the model for later councils.<sup>34</sup> Its theme was whether non-Jews should also be required to undergo circumcision as a condition of salvation when they became Christians. Peter argued in support of God's ancient decision. The Gentiles had heard the gospel from his mouth and come to faith. The Holy Spirit had been poured upon them, as well as on churches of Jewish origin. Circumcision was a sign of belonging to the people of Israel, the essence of which was the spiritual covenant between God and humanity. The Gentiles did not belong to the people of Israel, but they had received the Holy Spirit; their hearts had been purified through faith in Christ. Circumcision was a sign of the covenant made with those received into communion with Christ who had been baptized as the embodiment of the gospel. The church's basis was not ethnic but spiritual and theological.

The grounds for the decision referred to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as counsellor: 'For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials' (Acts 15:28). The guidelines for relations between Jewish and Gentile Christians included avoiding meat sacrificed to idols, as well as avoiding blood and uncounted

34 Kelly 2009, 15.

flesh in accordance with the law of Moses. They were also ordered to avoid fornication.

At this Synod of the Apostles it was already necessary to consider in the light of the gospel and the essence of faith what the Holy Spirit's guidance called of Jesus's followers. What would and could be changed in the core of inalienable faith faithfully to fulfil the mission? At least the following features can be identified in the decision making that would guide the church's future life: (1) the church's global trans-ethnic nature; (2) the primacy of the gospel; (3) the recognition of the good fruits of the Holy Spirit and the influence of the gospel; (4) faith in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ as the foundation of salvation; (5) the leadership and authority of the apostles and elders; and (6) only the necessary religious-ethical rules and regulations and disciplinary instructions.

The entire Church of Jerusalem had responsibility in decision making, but Peter and James as general apostolic authorities and the elders of the congregation were consulted in particular. The decision was made by James based on counsel. He interpreted events in the light of prophetic scripture. James's speech presented a vision of the church's mission based on its anchoring in God's plan. The plan was open to the gradual manifestation of God's presence throughout salvation history.<sup>35</sup> *Synodality in the History and Mission of the Church* summarizes this as follows: 'By all listening to the Holy Spirit through the witness given of God's action and by each giving his own judgment, initially divergent opinions move towards the consensus and unanimity (ὁμοθυμαδόν: cf. 15.25) that are the fruit of communal discernment that serve the evangelising mission of the Church'.<sup>36</sup> At its core, then, are the apostolic faith and mission.

35 SLMC, art. 20–23.

36 SLMC, art. 21.



# Community as a reflection of the Trinitarian faith in the basic structure of church life

Christian faith is faith in a Triune God. It is central to the pursuit of the harmony of truth and love, unity in diversity, that exists in the interpersonal relationship of the Holy Trinity. Led by Moses, the people of Israel walked – though not without trials – towards the promised land. In the New Testament the kingdom of heaven has come near, and people are also travelling towards it together as a church. The metaphor the Apostle Paul uses for the church as the body of Christ especially illustrates the importance of communion (Gr. *koinonia*) and the creative potential of the richness of complementary diversity. He also describes various gifts of grace (1 Cor. 12), the greatest of which is love, which build relationship. The whole needs its parts and is more than merely their sum. When one member suffers, all suffer. Members of this body who at the same time form the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19) and God's people (1 Pet. 2:10) have also been called those who belong to 'the Way' (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22).<sup>37</sup>

Theologically, the early church's ecumenical councils lay the foundation for the structure of the church as a communion. The office of bishop is the local church's office of unity and representation. The whole church is in principle present at the general council through the local churches' representation. As a college of officials, the Synod of Bishops undertakes the mission given to the apostles to answer questions about faith and the church's mission under the Holy Spirit's guidance. The unity of the Holy Spirit is manifested in unanimity. The council is thus a spiritual event.<sup>38</sup>

The Reformation churches have also widely recognized the authority of the first four ecumenical councils on the grounds that they are in accordance with the Bible. Naturally, the contributions of all seven ecumenical councils can also be evaluated on the same basis, and the international dialogue between Lutherans and Orthodox, for example, states (1993, art. 7): 'The

37 SLMC, art. 3.

38 Neuner 2001, 1662–1663. Cf. The Lutheran-Catholic dialogue report *Communion in Growth*, arts 231–232.

ecumenical councils maintain the integrity of the teaching of the undivided Church concerning the saving, illuminating/justifying and glorifying acts of God and reject heresies which subvert the saving work of God in Christ.<sup>39</sup>

The reality from the outset is that the church's life is not without contradictions (2 Cor. 4:8). However, the unity of the Spirit and Christ's prayer for fellowship among his own invite us to do all we can to maintain the unity that enables us to travel and work together. Together we must determine the correctness of the compass direction – that we are following in the footsteps of Christ in accordance with the signs of apostolic faith.

The theological discussion paper of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, *Synodality and Primacy in the First Millennium* (2016), states in this regard:

2. From earliest times, the one Church existed as many local churches. The communion (koinonia) of the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Cor. 13:13) was experienced both within each local church and in the relations between them as a unity in diversity...

3. Synodality is a fundamental quality of the Church as a whole... Broadly, it refers to the active participation of all the faithful in the life and mission of the Church.<sup>40</sup>

These ideas are also well equipped to provide guidelines for dealing with the theme of synodality in other denominations. An overview of how the issue has been understood and discussed in different denominations follows.

39 Neuner 2001,1663; <https://blogs.helsinki.fi/ristosaarinen/lutheran-orthodox-dialogue/> (referenced 24.10.2024)

40 Synodality and Primacy during the First Millennium: Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church (SPFM), arts 2–3.

# Synodality and joint decision making in different denominations

In the Lutheran Church in Sweden and Finland the principle of communal decision making and action, or synodality, was already expressed during the Reformation at the Uppsala Councils of 1572 and 1593. During the period of the centralized monarchy, episcopate, and estate, however, this tradition atrophied into regional clergy meetings and the clergy's activities in the Diet of the Estates and as chairmen of parish councils. The concept of synodality was revived in Germany in the 1800s and then also in Finland, when the General Synod was established as part of the Lutheran Church's decision-making system in the 1870s.<sup>41</sup> In accordance with the Lutheran idea of the common priesthood, lay representatives are involved in decision making at various levels in addition to bishops and clerical representatives representing the office of the word and sacraments.

The Lutheran World Federation is a communion of Lutheran churches which realizes synodality through representative bodies. The reception of decisions of the LWF general assemblies and council meetings in the member churches depends on their own decisions. There are elements of joint decision making, however. Thus, for example, the internationally drafted Lutheran-Roman Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999) was presented for member churches' approval in the late 1990s. The Lutheran World Federation sees itself as heading towards a deepening communion that is spiritual at its core, not just organizational.<sup>42</sup>

In the Anglican Communion the Lambeth Conferences were launched in 1867 to promote mutual consultation between Anglican bishops. They bring together bishops from the worldwide communion approximately every ten years. The communion also has other instruments of communion: 1) the archbishop of Canterbury as the primus, or first among equals; 2) the Lambeth Conferences; 3) the meeting of the primates of the Anglican Communion; and 4) the Anglican Consultative Council.<sup>43</sup> In recent years the

41 Toiviainen 1975, 10.

42 <https://lutheranworld.org/what-we-do/churches-communication>

43 <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/structures/instruments-of-communication.aspx>

question of the nature of the communion and its members' interdependence has also featured in the debate concerning the *Anglican Covenant*.<sup>44</sup>

The Reformed churches have also discussed the nature of ecclesiastical unity and the need to join forces and strengthen ecclesiastical identity. An example is the transformation of the Reformed World Alliance into the *Reformed World Communion* and the corresponding change of the English name of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe from 'community' to 'communion'. Methodists, Baptists, and Pentecostals also form their own world communities.<sup>45</sup>

For the Orthodox Churches, which especially value the traditions of the first seven ecumenical councils, episcopal councils, or synods, and synodality are a fundamental premise for the conception of the church. The early church synods' decisions and positions are particularly binding canonically – under church law. At their core they all represent, refine, and interpret the faith expressed and formulated by the First Council of Nicaea in 325. It is the bishop's responsibility to cherish the confession, preservation, and proclamation of this faith. As no ecumenical council in the truest sense has been held since 787, synods of local churches or patriarchates have had to be accommodated.<sup>46</sup> The 2016 Great Council of Orthodox Churches in Crete awaits even wider reception to become truly ecumenical.

It will soon be 1,240 years since the last ecumenical council, which presents significant challenges for the modern interpretation of the councils' heritage, especially regarding the application of canons governing practical matters. For example, current circumstances have required the strengthening of the laity's participation in the Finnish Orthodox Church's decision-making structures, though the tradition of episcopal leadership in Orthodoxy is stronger than in Lutheranism. After the liberation from the Ottoman Empire the patriarchate of Constantinople decided to convene a council of the Orthodox churches in 1920. The Council of Constantinople sent a letter exhorting 'all the churches of Christ' to form a church communion

44 [https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/99905/The\\_Anglican\\_Covenant.pdf](https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/99905/The_Anglican_Covenant.pdf)

45 World Methodist Council <https://worldmethodistcouncil.org/>; World Communion of Reformed Churches <http://wcrc.ch/>; Pentecostal World Fellowship <https://www.pwfellowship.org/>; Baptist World Alliance <https://baptistworld.org/>.

46 Metropolitan Johannes of Helsinki 1985, 87, 92. Cf. Toiviainen 1975, 19.

(*koinonia ton ekklesion*) in the manner of the League of Nations. The idea was also discussed when the World Council of Churches was established in 1948, and when more Orthodox churches joined the council during the New Delhi General Assembly in 1961.

The project, which with its numerous preparatory meetings lasted about a hundred years, culminated in the Pan-Orthodox Synod in Crete in the summer of 2016.<sup>47</sup> However, the absence of the largest Orthodox church, the Russian Orthodox Church, meant its coverage was incomplete. There have since been further complications, including the schism between the patriarchates of Constantinople and Moscow, and the Moscow patriarchate's support for Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. This poses the problem of political issues and nationalist interests, the antidote to which would be a conciliary communality that sees things from a broader perspective than merely a regional one. The Roman Catholic Church, which emphasizes the dimension of the universal church, has generally been more resistant to nationalist thought, though there are exceptions.<sup>48</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church recognizes twenty-one general councils or councils, that is fourteen in addition to the seven ecumenical councils of the early church.<sup>49</sup> According to Catholic canon law an ecumenical council is convened by the bishop of Rome.<sup>50</sup> He also compiles and approves the meeting's agenda and order of business. The council's participants may propose other matters for consideration, which the pope must first approve. In principle, only members of the College of Bishops may participate in and vote at an ecumenical council. However, the pope may invite others to participate and define their role there. The council's decisions lack the force of law until the bishop of Rome and the fathers of the council have approved and confirmed them and ordered their publication.<sup>51</sup>

The concept of ecumenical councils according to the Catholic Church Act differs from the early church's ecumenical councils. The emperor

47 <https://www.holycouncil.org/>

48 Cf. Nichols 2010, 378–380.

49 <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils>. For the history of all 21 church councils see e.g. Kelly 2009.

50 [http://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic\\_lib2-cann330-367\\_en.html#Art.\\_2](http://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib2-cann330-367_en.html#Art._2).

51 Code of Canon Law, 339–341.

convened them, and papal envoys voted on his behalf at meetings. The pope approved the decisions afterwards or protested against them. All five patriarchs had to be present themselves or through their representatives for the council to be ecumenical. Sometimes the council was not approved as ecumenical until the next council's decision. The process's ambiguity and many misunderstandings complicated the position of ecumenical councils, including the interpretation of the status of the council from 869 to 870.<sup>52</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church recognizes as ecumenical the Second Council of Lyons in 1274 and the Council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence in 1431–1445, which aimed to overcome the East-West schism of 1054 and reunite the church. Even in the West, however, only seven ecumenical councils were recognized up to Pope Gregory VII (1073–1085). In connection with the Investiture Controversy (1078–1122) an attempt to limit secular monarchs' interference in the appointment and ordination of bishops, ecclesiastical law experts exploited Canon 22 of the council of 869–870, which forbids lay people influencing the appointment of clergy. It has been suggested in ecumenical contexts that the Roman Catholic Church should reconsider the whole issue and accept only the first seven major councils as truly ecumenical pillars of faith.<sup>53</sup>

The question of ecumenical councils and joint ecclesiastical decision making and management in general is ecumenically topical and important because of the need to deal with matters of global significance to all people, and/or that particularly concern churches and their global mission. In the World Council of Churches (WCC) the idea of joint decision making between churches and the promotion of cooperation, or conciliarity, has been on the agenda since the 1961 New Delhi General Assembly, when the ecumenical movement's goal was increasingly defined as the church's visible unity.<sup>54</sup> It addresses questions concerning the WCC's ecclesiastical nature, its relationship with its member churches, and their relationship with each other and the worldwide church. Questions of church renewal are also related to the whole.<sup>55</sup> The communal nature of decision making

52 Davis 1990, 323–324. See also Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 181–184.

53 Davis 1990, 324–325.

54 For the New Delhi unity statement and its meaning see Saarinen 2006, 287–288.

55 Toiviainen 1975, 12–13.

in the WCC was strengthened in the 2000s when the WCC switched to a system of consensus and listening because of a serious crisis in the organization in the 1990s.<sup>56</sup>

The question of joint decision-making structures remains open in different church relations. However, it seems clear that international communication requires at least some kind of meeting and consultation structure from both states and churches. Understanding the significance of church councils also involves the question of the role of church leaders, especially presiding bishops or primates, as part of the leadership and ordering of communal decision making. The papacy is a special case of its own. In what follows I will examine this question's historical background and the current ecumenical debate concerning it.

## Roles of primates and the five early church patriarchates

As early as the end of the first Christian century, the church in Rome and its bishop began to have a certain primatial status as the church of the capital of the empire and the place of the martyrdom of the Apostles Peter and Paul. Appeals to the bishop of Rome, especially in disputes, emerged quite early. The Council of Serdica (343) attempted to establish rules for such an appeal. Serdica's decisions were also adopted by the Council of Trullo (692), which brought together decisions on church law.<sup>57</sup> The First Council of Nicaea in 325 gave the presiding bishop, or metropolitan, of an ecclesiastical area consisting of dioceses the right to confirm a bishop's election.<sup>58</sup>

The five patriarchates or pentarchy (Gr. *penta* = five), the patriarchates of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, had honorary historical status as central metropolises or urban centres for the history

56 For the process see Hellqvist 2011.

57 SPFM, art. 19.

58 SPFM, art. 12.

of Christianity and the empire. In the East the leaders of the largest urban parishes were called metropolitans. Synodality is also always linked to the primate – that is, the order of precedence of church leaders. One of the church leaders is the first among his peers, at least in the sense that he acts as chairman, as in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland the archbishop chairs the Bishops' Conference, the General Synod, and the National Church Council.<sup>59</sup>

Although episcopal leadership, primacy, and fidelity to what has been inherited play a central role here, the reception or prescription of the whole church as the ultimate criterion also refers to the considerable importance of the church's apostolicity as a whole – that is, the sense of faith (*sensus fidelium*) of all members of the faith community. All the baptized are called to play their part in the common mission, which is the mission of the church. The office of bishop and the continuity it represents (*succession*), the heritage of faith (*tradition*), and the community of faith (*communio*) form a mutually balancing and complementary whole whose interaction is required to accomplish the ecumenical councils' purpose.<sup>60</sup>

## The office of Peter as an ecumenical challenge

Another question concerns how the role of the bishop of Rome, or pope, as 'patriarch of the West', and the office of Peter are understood in this context.<sup>61</sup> In addition to ecclesiastical polity, political reasons, and cultural differences the related disagreement is probably the most important factor still separating the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Significantly,

59 Cf. The Church: Towards a Common Vision, art. 55.

60 Cf. Communion in Growth, art. 178–182.

61 In the 2024 *Pontifical Yearbook* Pope Francis returned to the pope's historical titles as the 'patriarch of the West', reflecting his intention to promote the church's synodal, communal understanding, with less emphasis on central governance. Pope Benedict XVI had previously dropped the title in 2006. See <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/257360/pope-francis-reinstates-papal-title-patriarch-of-the-west-in-pontifical-yearbook>



the other four patriarchates' previously dismissive attitude to the primacy of Rome in the second millennium has softened. As early as the 1960s Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras described the ancient see of Rome as 'the first according to honour and order'. In contrast with the situation in the early centuries it would be difficult for the Orthodox Churches to accept a Roman primate. However, some Orthodox Christians sense the need for a ministry of unity that differs from the current office of the patriarch of Constantinople.<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, in relation to the Lutheran churches the papacy and understanding of the church's offices are related to a diversity of views and are a significant obstacle to rapprochement. This remains the case despite the fact that ecumenical doctrinal discussions have addressed the office of Peter and its fundamental importance for the proclamation of the gospel and the ministry of the unity of the church as a whole, which has also been seen as an opportunity once agreement is reached on its renewal.<sup>63</sup>

The situation is repeated, *mutatis mutandis*, in the question of the ordained ministry between the Orthodox and Lutherans. However, there are also other differences concerning the sacraments and the concept of the church. In 1985 the French ecumenical group Dombes proposed that the office of Peter (the papacy) should serve worldwide ecclesiastical unity through the pope acting primarily as a mediator between churches, a guide in seeking new directions for the future, and a bond and promoter of visible unity. According to the group the primacy of power and centralized authority was not an ecumenically acceptable model.<sup>64</sup> The most realistic approach to the current debate on the office of Peter was to distinguish between the ministry of the pope in the service of the unity of Christian churches without legal obligation and the pope within the Roman Catholic Church as a church leader associated with a particular structure defined in ecclesiastical law. Not even this suggestion is satisfactory for everyone.

62 J-M Tillard: Primacy in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (2002, 931–934). Cf. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, art. 55.

63 Cf. the Finnish Lutheran–Catholic dialogue report *Communion in Growth: Declaration on the Church, Eucharist, and Ministry* (2017).

64 Le ministère de communion dans l'Eglise universelle 1985. As referred to in Tillard (2002).

The Finnish-Swedish Lutheran-Catholic document *Justification in the Life of the Church* (2010) offers an important departure point for considering the heritage of the undivided church as a resource for ecumenical theology and action:

...Testimonies from Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch and Irenaeus suggest that, at the end of the first century, the Church of Rome had greater authority than other churches, and that the bishop of Rome took precedence among the bishops. This traditional precedence constitutes a primacy, which means that the Church of Rome 'presides over the community of love.'<sup>65</sup>

The ecumenical councils and the legacy of the early church in general up to Cyprian are also in Luther's thoughts in the Smalcald articles as he ponders the correct role of the pope as 'bishop and vicar of the Roman parish'. According to Luther the pope should not exalt himself instead of Christ. He must hold the proper Christian office. Luther seems to long for an office that nurtures the unity of Christendom based on human judgement, but he considers this unrealistic. He writes: 'And supposing that... we must have [there must be elected] a [certain] head, to whom all the rest adhere [as their support] in order that the [concord and] unity of Christians may be preserved against sects and heretics...' Luther stands in the tradition of the conciliarism of the Middle Ages, preferring a collegiate episcopal administration:

Therefore the Church can never be better governed and preserved than if we all live under one head, Christ, and all the bishops equal in office (although they be unequal in gifts), be diligently joined in unity of doctrine, faith, Sacraments, prayer, and works of love, etc., as St. Jerome writes that the priests at Alexandria together and in common governed the churches, as did also the apostles, and afterwards all bishops throughout all Christendom, until the Pope raised his head above all.<sup>66</sup>

65 *Justification in the Life of the Church*, art. 320.

66 <https://bookofconcord.org/smalcald-articles/ii/of-the-papacy/> (referenced 24.10.2024)

Thus, according to Smalcald's doctrines, episcopal unanimity and 'unity in doctrine, faith, sacraments, prayer and acts of charity' are essential in fostering the church's unity. Philip Melanchthon wished even more clearly than Luther to add an amicable position to the Smalcald Articles in relation to the papal office, stating in his subscription:

I, Philip Melanchthon, also regard [approve] the above articles as right and Christian. But regarding the Pope I hold that, if he would allow the Gospel, his superiority over the bishops which he has otherwise, is conceded to him by human right also by us, for the sake of peace and general unity of those Christians who are also under him, and may be under him hereafter.<sup>67</sup>

The Lutheran position expressed in ecumenical discussions seems to have something in common with the Orthodox conception of primacy, which emphasizes the early church. In the Lutheran church, too, the episcopate has a certain place in addition to the synodal structure. The General Synod is administratively the highest body, but the leadership of bishops is required. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland emphasizes that the archbishop is first among equals. However, it is not for the archbishop to comment directly on the affairs of other dioceses except as part of the collegial structure of the bishops, the synodal structure, and the consistorial structure of the National Church Council over which the archbishop presides. Nor is the bishop of Rome an individual who can act arbitrarily. He is bound to his church and the early church's common tradition, represented mainly by the Bible and the seven ecumenical councils.

The Finnish dialogue report *Communion in Growth: Declaration on the Church, Eucharist, and Ministry* (2017) continued what had been achieved in the Finnish-Swedish report *Justification in the Life of the Church* (2010), considering the voice of parishioners and the importance of the sufficient independence of local churches and stating the following in this regard about these institutional connections:

67 <https://bookofconcord.org/smalcald-articles/signatories/> (referenced 24.10.2024)

350. We agree that the Petrine Ministry should be seen in the context of the apostolicity of the whole Church, serving the communion of the Church personally, collegially, and communally. Concerning the universal Church (*communio ecclesiarum*) and the ecumenical aim of her visible unity, the embeddedness of the Petrine Ministry in collegial and synodal structures, which include the whole people of God, together with the principle of subsidiarity, is also a necessary precondition for ecumenical rapprochement.<sup>68</sup>

## The question of the voice of the church

The 'voice of the church' has also long been topical in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.<sup>69</sup> The report of the Bishops' Conference, *The Voice of the Church* (1976), the basic text of the doctrinal part of which was written by the renowned Luther scholar Tuomo Mannermaa, states: 'The office may ... act only in accordance with the consensus of believers... It ... [is] the unanimity of the believers of the whole church of Christ, or the body of Christ.' Regarding the church's tangible decision making, ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and teaching, it states: 'It seems that to express consensus, bishops must be unanimous. If the bishops are not unanimous, their decision cannot be the "voice of the church". In this case the problem in question must be dealt with until a consensus is reached, or the matter lapses.'<sup>70</sup> The premise is therefore the seeking of ecumenical consensus. It has thus not lost its value, even as the context has become more pluralistic.

68 Communion in Growth, art. 350. Subsidiarity means decision making at the lowest and closest possible level given the nature of the matter.

69 *The Voice of the Church*, 1.

70 *The Voice of the Church*, 10.

# The significance of the common early church heritage today

Even at the time of the early church ecumenism was not always such that an assembly would eventually be regarded as ecumenical. The seven ecumenical councils' results took a long time to receive and approve – and the reception of some remains ongoing. Not all the parties were always present or able to make their voices heard equally. In most cases, however, extensive recognition, or at least recognition deemed sufficient, has been achieved after a slow prescription or reception process. As we have noted, after the First Council of Nicaea this lasted several decades. For others it may have taken even longer.<sup>71</sup>

Barriers to communication have therefore not been absent in the history of the ecumenical councils either. Nevertheless, we can rejoice that the understanding of our common ground in the rich tradition of the Christian faith has increased with recent decades' ecumenical interaction. This book's central task is to highlight and open the significance and possibilities of this common ground to the modern reader. It is healthy to view the first centuries' reality from a human perspective but also so that the theological core can become crystallized under great pressure into a sustainable foundation and guideline that accords with the apostolic message's central content, and that is an inspiration for creativity at any given time.

71 Cf. Pihkala 1997, 257. A clear biblical-liturgical expression of the Trinitarian faith is the 'great commission' in Matthew 28:18–20 and its use in the context of baptism. The Gospel of John connects the Old Testament theology of the word with the incarnation of the Word (John 1:1, 14). In the New Testament the references to Jesus's life vary, but a high Christology gives them a unity which developed rapidly and was not only a feature of the early church (Welker 2013, 74).



## 2. Decisions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils and their Reception: Trinitarian Doctrine and Christology as Crystallizations of the Apostolic Faith

Nicaea I 325: The Son of God is of the same substance (Gr. *homousios*) as God the Father

### The challenges of understanding the Trinity

To perceive the Christian understanding of Trinity in an intellectually consistent manner and do justice to the church community's sense of faith was difficult, even for early Christian thinkers. The church's liturgical life, and baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as the sacrament that initiated the Christian life in communion with the church, did convey this legacy. It was difficult, however, to hold on to both God's unity and encounterability in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit simultaneously.

Notable questions included: (1) What does it mean from the perspective of Christianity as a whole, the atonement, and redemption that Jesus is the Son of God, come in the flesh? (2) What does it mean that the Holy Spirit conveys God's holy presence and truth in the life of the church?<sup>72</sup>

A line had to be drawn on the one hand between how Christianity differed from the Jewish interpretation of the Holy Scriptures based on its belief in the Messiah and from the religions and phenomena of the time that represented polytheism on the other. One had to strive both for coherent thinking and to do justice to an object higher than human thought, the person and mystery of God's self-revelation.

The need to find a solution to these theological and philosophical-theological dilemmas became topical with the Edict of Milan (313), when Christianity gained religious freedom under Emperor Constantine I (272/273–337) in the western part of the Roman Empire and under Licinius (265–325) in the eastern part. Constantine, who had ruled the West since 310, became emperor of the entire empire in 324. He saw that Christianity's ever-spreading network and growing power would be beneficial in the service of the Roman Empire and for its unity.<sup>73</sup> There is no reason for a purely cynical interpretation of Constantine's strategic relationship with Christianity, yet it is clear that his Christian identity deepened over time, and his policy progressed from allowing to favouring Christianity.<sup>74</sup>

## Overtuning the foundations of faith in Christ in Arianism

The liturgical tradition that carried the Christian message and the reading of apostolic writings in the early centuries seems to have ensured that

72 For the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology in early Christian theology see e.g. Pihkala 2005, 112–201.

73 Cf. Chadwick 1967, 126a; Kivimäki & Tuomisto 2000, 312–314; Kelly 2009, 17; Miettinen 2021, 90–96.

74 For example, Professor Paul Freedman from Yale emphasizes that Christianity differed so significantly from the Roman military ethos that reasons other than political and cynical power motivations must have lain behind Constantine's decisions: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcluAJ-jaSg&t=18s>.

teaching and preaching at the parish level were very much in parallel.<sup>75</sup> However, the freedom of religion granted to Christianity intensified public debate about how the Christian faith ranked in the world of religions. A key factor contributing to the escalation of perceptions was argumentation's adherence to a philosophically defined conception of consistency.<sup>76</sup>

The person through whom the presentation of the Trinitarian speculations this debate generated, and who led the church and its confession of Christ to its deepest crisis, was the Libyan-born presbyter Arius (256–336). According to most researchers the Arian controversy broke out in 318, when Arius was already an experienced priest.<sup>77</sup>

Philosophically, Arius's thinking was derived from Gnosticism and Neoplatonism. Perhaps from his teacher Lucian of Antioch, Arius had adopted some principles of the Antiochian interpretation of the Bible:<sup>78</sup> favouring a literal explanation of the Bible; emphasizing the unity of God; and distinguishing between the Logos (Word) and God. He may have adopted an emphasis on the unity of God and a tendency to avoid the idea of the birth of the Son from the apologist Athenagoras (late 100s), who philosophically defended Christianity. He may have received the idea

75 Pihkala 1997, 137.

76 Pihkala 1997, 138.

77 Davis 1990, 49, Müller 2010, 331; Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 55.

78 The Antiochian school of biblical interpretation was formed in Syria around AD 200. It pointed to a literal interpretation of the Bible and the full humanity of Christ against the Alexandrian school, which emphasized symbolical, allegorical biblical interpretation and the divinity of Christ. The Antiochian school blossomed from the 4th until the 6th century, and it produced significant theologians like Diodorus of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, and Theodoret of Cyrus.



of the Son's submission to the Father from Origen<sup>79</sup> (d. 253) and the idea that the Son was separate from and made by the Father from Dionysius (d. 265). Arius also seems to have emphasized the Old Testament idea of God's transcendence and the creation of the world from nothing. He may have received these ideas from Philo of Alexandria (d. 50). In turn he apparently learned from Aristotle's dialectic about the strict application of syllogistic reasoning to theology. All these positions ran counter to the middle or Neoplatonist (Plotinus, Porphyry) idea that God was one (Gr. *to hen*). From these elements of Greek philosophy, Gnosticism, the Old Testament, and a literal interpretation of the Bible he created a synthesis that deeply divided Christendom.<sup>80</sup>

Arius's basic idea seems to have been to emphasize God's absolute transcendence and unity in accordance with a theologically applied Christian Platonism. Since God's essence was transcendent, unique, and indivisible, it could not be divided. According to this logic for God to give God's essence to someone else would mean God was divisible and changeable. This could not be the case because God was one and unique. Everything else was outside God and created by God, including the Son. Almighty God could not directly approach the unnecessary and changing world, so God needed to create an instrument. For Arius this instrument was the Word, which was itself created. Admittedly, the Word was above other creatures, yet

79 Origen of Alexandria (c. 185–254) was the early Greek church's most important theologian and biblical scholar. His major work is *Hexapla*, in which he presents six different versions of the Old Testament in parallel. His allegorical interpretation of the Bible resulted in the official church accusing him of arbitrariness. Origen's theology basically concerns the goodness of God and the freedom of creation. The transcendent God is the source of all being. God is good, just, and almighty. God created rational and spiritual creatures through the Logos. This act of creation entailed a certain self-limitation on God's part. In the formulation of his theology Origen used the Platonist philosophy of his time in parallel with biblical and theological tradition. Some counted Origen as one of the most significant Church Fathers, and his writings were extensively used in the church. His exegetical methods were the standard of the Alexandrian school, and the Origenists were a significant group in the 4th-century debates concerning Arianism. The local synod of Constantinople (543) declared 15 anathemas against Origen, and at the 553 ecumenical council he received 11 anathemas for heresy. Nevertheless, he was an important theologian whose writings influenced later ecclesial thought, including about the doctrine of the Trinity.

80 Davis 1990, 49–50; Pihkala 1997, 137–144; Müller 2010, 331; Hart 2020, 200; Lyman 2021, 43. For a more detailed survey of Arius see Williams 2002.

the Word was a creature, a kind of demigod – neither a god nor a human being: ‘He is a god only in name.’<sup>81</sup>

Arius’s conception can be called a kind of *Logos-sarx* (Word-flesh) Christology, in which the foundations of faith in Christ are destroyed by denying 1) Christ’s full divinity and 2) his human soul.<sup>82</sup> A God who is rationally based on the absolute One and the hereafter, who is not in relation to others through God’s Persons in the manner of the Triune God, ultimately cannot reveal God’s self.<sup>83</sup>

As Arius’s ideas began to spread among Alexandria’s clergy, the intellectual centre of the Roman Empire at the time, Bishop Alexander convened his priests and deacons. Bishop Alexander emphasized the unity of the Godhead, but Arius called his view Sabellian, according to which the persons of God were understood only as manifestations of the same God. Arius also concluded that if the Son was born of the Father, ‘there was a time when he did not exist’. Despite being requested to, Arius did not renounce his teaching. In 320 Bishop Alexander convened a meeting of the bishops of Egypt and Libya. Eighty of the hundred assembled bishops voted to condemn Arius. Two supported him, as did seventeen Alexandrian priests and deacons. Arius fled to Caesarea in Palestine. There he was warmly received by the church historian Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, who was strongly influenced by Origen’s idea that there were three distinct *hypostases* in the Godhead, the reality of being. Some other bishops from Palestine supported Arius, but the bishops of Antioch and Jerusalem opposed him.<sup>84</sup>

Bishop Alexander sent a synodal letter informing at least seventy bishops of the council’s judgment against Arius. He received letters in response assuring him that ecclesiastical contact had been maintained with Bishop Alexander. This indicated their acceptance of the decision and Arius’s excommunication. Alexander continued his correspondence by sending a letter in which he rejected Arius’s views and described the Word as a

81 Davis 1990, 52; Kelly 2009, 20–21. For a new assessment of Arius’s thought in its historical (apologetic) context see Lyman 2021, 52–62.

82 Pihkala 1997, 150, 227; Müller 2010, 331.

83 Müller 2010, 333.

84 Davis 1990, 53; Behr 2004, 76; Ladouceur 2019, 2. For the locals’ critique of Bishop Alexander cf. Lyman 2021, 47; for Eusebius as a describer of the Nicene Council Johnson 2021, 202–222.

person separate from the Father. The Word (Logos) mediated between the Father and creation, but the Logos himself was not created but a partaker of the being of the Father. The Word was as eternal as the Father because the Father had always been the Father. The Word was born of the Father in eternity, in his image and likeness, and was therefore immutable.<sup>85</sup>

Constantine, who became emperor of the entire Roman Empire in 324, was irked by his politically united empire's religious division. His adviser on ecclesiastical affairs, Bishop Ossius of Cordoba, sent letters to both Bishop Alexander and Arius, reproaching them for their polemical discussion. According to him it was mainly a result of misused leisure time and intellectual exercises, which should have been kept to themselves and not spread to the masses. Ossius sought to reconcile the two, asserting that they were not divided on any of the main doctrines or heresies but in fact largely agreed. They should return to the same altar and communion. The attempt failed. In early 325 Ossius presided over the Council of Antioch, which condemned the Arian view. However, this was the preparation for an even larger meeting.<sup>86</sup>

## The emperor's role in Nicaea as a model for later ecumenical councils

In 324 Constantine the Great convened the bishops of his empire in Ancyra. However, the venue changed to Nicaea, now the town of Iznik in Turkey, because it was easier to come to from both Italy and the rest of Europe, and its climate was favourable. It was less than fifty miles from Nicomedia, where the emperor lived.<sup>87</sup>

Emperor Constantine I's invitation probably came not only because of concerns about the empire's political unity. Apparently, a theocratic idea also underlay it that was familiar from the Hellenistic context, according

85 Davis 1990, 53–54.

86 Chadwick 1967, 129–130; Davis 1990, 54–55; Behr 2004, 78–79; Van Dam 2021, 23.

87 Davis 1990, 56; Behr 2004, 79. Kelly 2009, 16 argues that the First Council of Nicaea was convened because 1) a Christian emperor was on the throne for the first time, and 2) because Trinitarian theology required final confirmation.

to which the emperor represented God on earth. God had given him supreme authority over earthly and spiritual matters. He was therefore also responsible for leading people to God. In preparation for the meeting the emperor probably held consultations with the presiding bishops.<sup>88</sup>

Constantine regarded the council as a counterpart of the imperial senate in ecclesiastical matters that facilitated the relationship between church and state. The emperor convened the assembly and the bishops as participants in the same way as senators. They also subscribed to the decisions in accordance with the order of precedence the state indicated. The emperor only had the right to be present and speak in the senate but not to vote, which, when applied to the council, provided the bishops with relative doctrinal autonomy. This protected the church's independence from the state. Occasionally, Constantine participated actively in the debate. He confirmed the bishops' decisions and made them binding under Roman law. From the perspective of the episcopal see of Rome, however, the decisive factor was the acceptance of the decisions and the pope's approval. The fact that the emperor convened an ecumenical council and incorporated its decisions into the state's public law also provided a model for future ecumenical councils.<sup>89</sup>

At the same time, however, Constantine enjoyed a semi-priestly position as an 'equal to the apostles' (Eusebius). The position of the Roman emperor in Constantinople became part of the Eastern tradition of *Basileus*, according to which the emperor was both an earthly and divine ruler. Some churchmen described Constantine as the new Moses, the new David, or the

88 Davis 1990, 56–57. For Constantine the Great as emperor see also e.g. Tajakka 1982, 21–27, Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 38–47, and Karkinen 2021, 192–205; for a more detailed description of the First Council of Nicaea see Behr 2004 and the *Cambridge Companion to the Council of Nicaea* 2021.

89 Davis 1990, 57; Nichols 2010, 179. Krötzel 2004, 26 emphasizes that bishops in the ecclesial councils of the 4th and 5th centuries were under the leadership of the emperors or their representatives. Gwynn 2021, 91 warns against an over-emphasis on the Roman senate as the model for the ecclesial councils. They were also influenced by the period's courts of justice, especially their practices in studying accusations of heresy. The first council in Nicaea 325 was probably not as well organized as the later ecumenical councils, based on the accumulation of experience. For the influence of Eusebius's Origen-influenced Christology, in which the Logos and the emperor were subordinated to God the Father, and for the understanding of the emperor as a reflection of the divine cf. van Dam 2021, 34–35.

new Solomon. He had the privilege of entering the holiest of holies, blessing the congregation, partaking of Holy Communion like priests, reading the gospel, and preaching on certain feast days. The transfer of the imperial see from Rome to the 'new Rome' was therefore also theologically significant. The patriarch of Constantinople had the emperor to thank for his high position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and his episcopal see's rationale lacked the legacy of Peter and Paul that justified the primacy of the bishop of Rome. It was difficult for the patriarch to stand up to his patron.<sup>90</sup>

The model of the relationship between emperor and state power and the church applied under Constantine thus also laid the foundation for modern religious freedom thinking on the faith community's doctrinal autonomy.

## The relationship between church and state

The emperor's task was to organize the church's public life by securing its ecclesiastical unity and doctrinal peace. The principle of a 'symphony', or harmonious cooperation, between church and state was formulated in the 500s in Emperor Justinian I's codex (*Corpus iuris civilis* 529). The voices of church and state were complementary. In a public forum the emperor implemented the faith the bishops defined; he did not define the creed, the faith of the church. This was a basic theory that often came under

90 Nichols 2010, 180–181; Hohti 2021, 73. For Constantine's role at the Nicene Council see also Drake 2021, 111–132. Drake concludes that the Protestant Reformation demonized Constantine as the man 'who robbed from the early church its purity'. To avoid both idolizing and demonizing the emperor, it is reasonable to assess Constantine in his historical context. For example, it is noteworthy that during ancient times every state had to have good relations with the divine forces whose support it was judged the empire's success needed. The emperor of Rome was seen to be closer to the gods than ordinary mortals. Drake also points out that dealing with the Donatist schism at the Synod of Arles in 314, at which bishops were widely present, taught Constantine much about how the church's dissidents ought to be handled to avoid significant protestations of maltreatment. This is often neglected. Cf. Nichols 2010, 57. Kelly 2009, 18 states that the idea of an earthly ruler elected by God overshadowed the Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican Churches until the 20th century. Arffman 2022, 136–137 notes the problem of the lack of legitimating historical tradition in Constantinople, noting that because of this the relics of the Apostle Andrew, Luke the Evangelist, and Timothy, the auxiliary of the Apostle Paul were transferred there, as were the relics of the Prophet Samuel to create continuity with Old Testament times.

pressure but was not rejected. Generally, emperors did not interfere in the decisions of synods of bishops. Problems began when they had to decide between rival synods. The emperor could follow a synod that the church later rejected as heretical. When a state of spiritual war broke out between the emperor and the orthodox bishops, the church of the East sought to limit the emperor's ecclesiastical ambition without abandoning the principle of a symphony. In the West Bishop Ambrosius of Milan heavily criticized Emperor Theodosius, but even in the East Patriarch John Chrysostom dared to speak truth to power, resulting in his removal from office.<sup>91</sup>

Even in the West the pope accepted the symphony theory if the emperor left church doctrine alone. Between the late 400s and the early 700s Roman bishops were directly or indirectly subordinate to the Byzantine emperors. Only when they saw the emperor sign the decisions of a particular council Rome viewed with suspicion did the popes protest. If emperors followed correct doctrine, as it was interpreted in Rome, the popes allowed Caesar far-reaching privileges. They even allowed the emperor to confirm the pope's election. When popes felt the emperors were not following the correct doctrine, they objected strongly. The idea of the pope's divine power had yet to develop; it emerged around 1200. According to this the pope had the power to judge whether the emperor or king was performing his duties morally correctly, or even to depose a secular ruler by declaring that his subordinates were no longer obedient to the monarch. Such a theory was alien to the Byzantine church.<sup>92</sup>

## Council of Nicaea 325: rejection of Arianism, which considered Christ a demigod

Historically, it is impossible to pinpoint the exact number of participants at the Council of Nicaea, but the symbolic number 318 was soon adopted in the lists of councils. It referred to the number of Abraham's armed servants

91 Nichols 2010, 179–181. For the emperor, church, and monasteries in Byzantium see also Hohti 2021, 24–31.

92 Krötzel 2004, 48; Nichols 2010, 184. For the development of the primacy of the pope see e.g. Krötzel 2004, 25–35.

(Gen. 14:14), which in Greek read TIH, the symbol of the cross and Jesus.<sup>93</sup> The number therefore referred to God's promises and the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ as their fulfilment.

The eastern part of the Roman Empire was well represented at the meeting. For example, the anti-Arian side was represented by Bishop Alexander of Alexandria and his deacon and secretary Athanasius, later a staunch defender of the Nicæan faith, called the 'pillar of truth'. Meanwhile, Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, was involved on the side of the Arians, for example. Some Western bishops were also present, including Caecilian of Carthage, and Pope Sylvester was represented by the priests Vito and Vincent. The pope apologized for his absence due to his age and poor health. Two bishops came from outside the empire's borders: John from Persia; and Theophilus from Scythia on the northern Black Sea coast. The bodies of some participants bore the marks of recently ended persecutions.<sup>94</sup>

The Council of Nicaea did not begin promisingly. Arianism was controversial because it went to the core of Christianity's conception of God and salvation in relation to Christ's divinity as the Son of God and his humanity. Before the emperor opened the meeting the bishops had already written indictments of each other. It is said that Constantine, with diplomatic statesmanship, burned these indictments without opening them. The meeting opened around 20 May 325 at the imperial summer palace. Ossius of Cordoba most likely presided. Eusebius of Nicomedia made an early statement of faith in favour of the Arians. The motion was rejected, however. Eusebius of Caesarea next offered the baptismal confession of Palestinian Caesarea, which was accepted, and his reputation was restored. Yet the confession does not seem to have provided the basis for a final creed. Biblical terms were sought for a clear rejection of Arianism, but this was unsuccessful.<sup>95</sup>

93 Davis 1990, 57–58; Gwynn 2021, 92. Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 57 tell us that Constantine invited all 1,800 bishops in the Roman Empire, but approximately 250–318 bishops were present.

94 Davis 1990, 58; Kelly 2009, 21–21.

95 Mannermaa 1977, 56; Davis 1990, 58–59; Gwynn 2021, 93. For a more detailed description of the meeting's practical arrangements see Jacobs 2021, 65–89. Jacobs 2021, 76 sees it as likely that Emperor Constantine wanted to invite the meeting to Nicaea rather than the capital city of Nicomedia because he did not want to support the ambition of the local bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia.

According to Eusebius, Constantine participated actively and sympathetically in the discussion. His apparent intention was to secure consensus by attending the meeting itself and inviting the bishops to conduct the fullest possible joint decision making to isolate the minority through broad consensus. The Synod of Arles in 314 in particular had taught him this way forward. The Syrian-Palestinian Creed seems eventually to have provided the basis for a new creedal statement intended to exclude an Arian interpretation. The final creed is preserved in Athanasius's writings, through the historian Socrates and Basil of Caesarea, and in the final documents of the Council of Chalcedon of 451. Athanasius tells us the Cappadocian priest Hermogenes wrote the final version:<sup>96</sup>

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 from the Father, only-begotten,  
that is, from the substance of the Father,  
God from God,  
light from light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten not made,  
of one substance with the Father,  
through Whom all things came into being,  
things in heaven and things on earth,  
Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down,  
and became incarnate  
and became man,  
and suffered,  
and rose again on the third day,  
and ascended to the heavens,  
and will come to judge the living and dead,  
And in the Holy Spirit.

96 Chadwick 1967, 130; Davis 1990, 59; Drake 2021, 123; Gwynn 2021, 101.



But as for those who say, There was when He was not,  
and, Before being born He was not,  
and that He came into existence out of nothing,  
or who assert that the Son of God is of a different hypostasis or  
substance,  
or created,  
or is subject to alteration or change  
– these the Catholic and apostolic Church anathematizes.<sup>97</sup>

The condemnation at the end of the confession of the idea that God the Father and God the Son were of a different '*hypostasis* or substance' means no distinction was made between substance and person (*hypostasis*) at this stage. Later in the 300s this distinction was made by the Cappadocian Fathers, and especially by Basil the Great, and it became significant for belief in the Trinity. It also corresponded to the Western tradition in which the Church Father Tertullian (160–240) had spoken of one substance and three persons of God (*una substantia, tres personae*).

## The theological core of the Nicene Creed: the same substance as (Gr. homoousios)

The Arians could easily agree with the formulations 'born of the Father' and 'Only Begotten'. However, they understood 'birth' in this context as synonymous with 'done'. The formulation of the birth of the Son from the 'substance of the Father' excluded this interpretation. The phrase 'true God from true God' excluded Arian talk of the Son as God only by the grace of God and nominally. This expression could still be interpreted in Arian terms, but the expression 'begotten, not made' could not. The Son was not created by his divine nature, as the Arians thought. According to the anti-Arian interpretation the Father's nature included the bearing of the Son. The Father had never been anything other than the Father, meaning the term, like those used in the natural language of God, went beyond

97 Davis 1990, 60; [https://earlychurchtexts.com/public/creed\\_of\\_nicaea\\_325.htm](https://earlychurchtexts.com/public/creed_of_nicaea_325.htm). For the decisions of Nicaea 325 see also e.g. <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils>.

the usual biological meaning. The key concept in the church's official and binding creed's response to Arianism was the term 'of the same substance' (*homoousios*) as the Father. The Son shared the same substance and being as the Father and was therefore fully divine.<sup>98</sup>

However, '*homoousios*' was not strictly defined but remained a vague and ambiguous concept at the time. It may have had three different meanings: 1) it could be *generic*, or genre-related: two people could be said to share a common humanity though each was an individual; 2) it may have meant *numerical sameness*, or the Father and the Son were identical in their tangible being; 3) it may have referred to *material objects*: two pottery vessels were of the same substance because both were made of the same clay. The council mainly meant the word's first meaning. The Father and the Son were *homoousioi* in that they were equal in divinity. However, it was also implicit that the Father and the Son were numerically one, or single, divine substance. In the long struggle after the council the Church Father Athanasius (292–373) expressed this perspective.<sup>99</sup>

The bishops at the Council of Nicaea initially found it difficult to accept the term '*homoousios*' for at least four reasons: 1) it was associated with the idea that sameness was based on the same material basis; 2) if the Father and the Son were numerically one, this exposed Sabellius to the heresy that the persons of the Trinity were merely manifestations of the same divinity (*modalist monarchism*<sup>100</sup>); 3) the term was also associated with Gnosticism and was condemned as heretical at the Synod of Antioch 268 in connection with Paul of Samosata's teaching that Christ was adopted as the son of God; 4) it was especially difficult for conservative bishops that the term was not

98 Davis 1990, 60–61. For the meaning of the Nicene Creed as the creed of the church for all times see Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 48–79. For the history of creeds in general see Kinzig 2024. Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 59 describe the Nicene Creed as adapting and formulating anew the general baptismal creed to respond to the contextual challenge of Arius.

99 Mannermaa 1977, 57; Davis 1990, 61.

100 *Modus* = way of being or form of manifestation, *mon-arkhos* = sole beginning. Modalistic monarchism concludes that since the Father is the source of divinity, both the Son and the Holy Spirit are only his manifestations, not independent persons.

biblical.<sup>101</sup> There was also a fear that the Latin emperor and his advisers would introduce the Greek version of the Latin term (*consubstantialis*) into the text, forcing conformity to Western theology's thought patterns. The result, however, was that no unambiguous interpretative key could be found in the biblical texts. Arius was able quite convincingly to interpret the biblical arguments opposing his view to support his position. The decisive concept therefore had to be chosen outside the scriptures so that the basic truths and understanding of faith in the biblically based Christian concept of God and salvation would be expressed sufficiently clearly. Subsequently, this process has been called doctrinal development or inculturation.<sup>102</sup>

Three basic premises are central to the Nicaean decision: 1) the Son is not created; 2) the eternal Son proceeds from the Father through 'birth' (as distinct from the created); 3) the distinction based on the relationship between the Father and the Son concerns the unity of being together in the reality of God's being.<sup>103</sup>

It seems the authority of Emperor Constantine played a decisive role in the term's acceptance in the creed after all. His long-time ecclesiastical adviser, Bishop Ossius of Cordoba, who represented the theology of the church of the West, supported him. Alexander of Alexandria's influence was also considerable. Although the term '*homoousios*' had yet to be officially incorporated into Western theology, it accorded with the Trinitarian theology popular in the West and the concept of the Father as the source of divinity. It is likely Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, supported Ossius with the emperor's involvement in proposing the term as a key concept in the creed. Constantine may have been partly drawn to the term's ambiguity, which created the conditions for the creation of a united front.<sup>104</sup>

101 Davis 1990, 61–62. Cf. Edwards 2021, 145–149. For the biblical background of the council of Nicaea see Jukka and Lauri Thurén 2017 and Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 19–37. Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 62 state on the basis of the defence of the decision of Nicaea written by Athanasius, that the bishops concluded that they were forced to use non-biblical words 'to gather the meaning of the Scripture'.

102 Pihkala 1997, 162–163; Kelly 2009, 22–23, 25.

103 Müller 2010, 334–335.

104 Davis 1990, 62; Gwynn 2021, 101. For Alexander, Arius, Athanasius, and Nicaea more broadly see Behr 2004, 143–186.

The assembly's resolutions clearly condemned the Arian view by declaring that the Catholic and Apostolic Church rejected the expressions 'there was a time when there was no Son of God, and before he was born, he did not exist'. The condemned phrase 'he came into being from non-existence' had already been ruled out in the creed through its positive content in stating that the Only Begotten Son was 'begotten, not made'. The condemned phrase 'he is a different *hypostasis* or substance' had been ruled out when it was established that the Son was of the same substance as the Father. At the same time all subordinationism, or thinking in which the Son's divinity was somehow subordinate to the Father's, was condemned. This also highlights a terminological difficulty in Eastern theology because the terms '*hypostasis*' and 'substance' were understood as synonymous and meaning essence. *Hypostasis* only gradually came to denote what was called a person in Western theology, while Greek *ousia* was synonymous with Latin *substantia*, or substance. A prerequisite for a correct understanding of the term *homoousios* is thus the distinction between 'essence' (*ousia*) and person (*hypostasis*). The last condemned phrase that the Son 'was variable' was directed against the Arian doctrine that the Son was morally variable when created, but that by his willpower he remained enduring in goodness.<sup>105</sup> Here, too, there is a clear dimension of salvation and mercy.

When the creed was completed, eighteen bishops still opposed it. The emperor threatened to drive his opponents into exile; at last only Arius and his most staunch supporters, the Libyans Secundus and Theonas, remained. They were removed from the episcopate and exiled with Arius.<sup>106</sup>

## The twenty canons of Nicaea, or decisions on ecclesiastical law

The ecumenical councils took decisions not only on specific theological and doctrinal disputes but also on questions related to ecclesiastical order and organization, ecclesiastical legislation and administration, and the basic constitution of church life. The twenty canons of Nicaea can be divided into

<sup>105</sup> Davis 1990, 62–63, Müller 2010, 329. For the meeting's anathemas see also Edwards 2021, 149–151.

<sup>106</sup> Davis 1990, 63.

five categories: 1) church structures; 2) clerical conduct; 3) reconciliation with the fallen; 4) readmission of heretics and schismatics into communion with the church; and 5) liturgical practice.<sup>107</sup>

For example, the fourth canon stipulated that episcopal ordinations must be attended by all bishops of the ecclesiastical province, or at least three in emergencies with written consent from the absent bishops. A new element was that the confirmation of episcopal office became the task of the provincial metropolitan. This strengthened the scope of his ecclesiastical and administrative powers, or jurisdiction. Bishops were commanded to meet in regional councils twice a year, preferably before Lent and in the autumn to deal with excommunications from the church.<sup>108</sup>

The sixth canon laid the foundation for the emergence of larger metropolitans or patriarchates as Christendom grew in the ensuing centuries. The bishop of Alexandria was assigned responsibility for Egypt, Libya, and the Pentapolis in eastern Libya. Arianism's strong areas were thus subordinated to a staunch defender of the Nicæan faith, the bishop of Alexandria. Reference was also made to the bishop of Rome's supreme provincial authority in central and southern Italy, Sicily, and Sardinia, and to the bishop of Antioch's authority in Syria. The seventh canon gave the bishop of Jerusalem special status, though he remained under the authority of the metropolitan of Caesarea. This may reflect the mystical reverence for the holy city of Constantine and his mother, the Empress Helena. In the sixteenth canon clergy were commanded on pain of excommunication to return to the churches where they had been ordained and forbade bishops to ordain persons from another church without their own bishops' permission. Their ordinations would otherwise be null and void. In the church's organizational structure priests and deacons thus joined the local church, headed by a bishop. The leadership of the patriarchates of Rome,

107 Davis 1990, 63; Weckwerth 2021, 158–176. Gwynn 2021, 102 notes that the decision about when to celebrate Easter was also essentially connected with the meeting at Nicæa. No formal decision about this is documented in the archives. Yet the decision is described in the synodal letter to the church in Egypt and in Constantine's letter after the council. It is cited in Eusebius's book *Vita Constantini*, *The Life of Constantine* 3.17–20.

108 Davis 1990, 63.

Alexandria, and Antioch only accorded with customary law and had yet to be further regulated.<sup>109</sup>

Among the liturgical canons we should mention Canon 20, to which the Orthodox, for example, still adhere. The council decreed that the prayers in the liturgy should be conducted standing on Sunday and Pentecost, when some were accustomed to kneeling. The canons of Nicaea were not a systematic whole, but situational, and could be carefully adapted in different situations. However, the canons of Nicaea became important and revered parts of the growing totality of church law, or canon law, in the various churches' traditions.<sup>110</sup>

Two separate proclamations were also made concerning the return to fellowship of those who were in the schismatic church and the timing of the celebration of Easter on the Sunday after the full moon after the vernal equinox.<sup>111</sup>

## Nicaea as a commitment to mystery: faith in the Trinity and Christ belong together

By saying that the Son was of the same substance as the Father but a different person, the Niceneans expressed what they read in the Bible and understood concerning the Word of God incarnate, through whom all things were created. The Bible's message was understood as the truth of faith, but the aim was now to perceive the matter *intellectually*. It was the foundation of faith that influenced everything that could be said about the Christian faith and its relationship with the state, society, and the world. The Niceneans held fast to the truth of revelation, even though it was rationally difficult to reconcile the monotheistic doctrine of one God with the idea of a Triune God.<sup>112</sup>

The Arians thought more rationally, viewing the Son primarily as an intermediary between God and the universe in a cosmological sense. The

<sup>109</sup> Davis 1990, 63–65.

<sup>110</sup> Davis 1990, 67.

<sup>111</sup> Davis 1990, 67–68.

<sup>112</sup> Davis 1990, 71–72.

Son was subordinate to God and gave order to the universe, society, and the human person. The incarnate Son was ultimately left with the modest role of proclaiming God's unity and reminding people of their mortality.<sup>113</sup> Arius became the standard-bearer of the 'Hellenization' that threatened Christianity. In his thinking one can identify a paradigm structured from the Platonist worldview, according to which God the Father, or the 'One', was transcendent and, as a non-being, the source of all things. The Son and the Holy Spirit, meanwhile, were the 'other god' who belonged to the world. Christianity was thus considered to take on a satisfactory non-paradoxical form. However, this flattened out the life-giving tension and God's living and atoning presence that constituted the basis of faith in salvation.<sup>114</sup>

For the Nicaeans the Son of God was the Saviour and Mediator between the just and eternal God and sinful mortal humanity because of God's saving redemptive death. Because of the Son's life, death, and resurrection, humanity was reconciled to the Father, and people could therefore also become divine – that is, God's image in them would be corrected. According to the Nicaean faith the centre of biblical law and tradition was Jesus Christ. The law of love he proclaimed might also be contrary to the orders of the emperor. Christ's divine self-sacrifice ensured salvation for mankind and brought into force a new law to which the Christian ruler was also subordinate. Meanwhile, based on Arianism's low and thin Christology, the ruler could be seen as God's instrument in maintaining order in society. The law of the historical Christ could not exceed the living law – that is, of the emperor by the grace of God.<sup>115</sup>

## The divinity of Christ sets limits to the power of Caesar and lays the foundation for the church's internal autonomy

The differing views of the Nicaeans and Arians influenced four aspects in the 300s: 1) the authority of the emperor in relation to creeds and canons;

113 Davis 1990, 72.

114 Pihkala 1997, 178.

115 Davis 1990, 72.

2) the eucharist, or Holy Communion; 3) the episcopate; and 4) Christ as head and king of the church.<sup>116</sup>

Eusebius of Caesarea, who represented the Arian subordination Christology, saw both Christ and Constantine as instruments of the Word. One proclaimed the kingdom of God; the other established monotheism. Eusebius saw Constantine as a second saviour. Christ, as the bringer of universal salvation, opened the gates to the kingdom of the Father, and the emperor again cleansed the earthly realm of error to save the entire crew of the ship of which he was the pilot. In maintaining order and harmony, Caesar did on earth what the Word did in the cosmos.<sup>117</sup> Unfortunately, both the Eastern ruler thinking and modern dictatorships in the West share traces of this way of thinking, so the dangers of its abuse are obvious. Paradoxically, Nicaean loyalty to Caesar in this matter shows the limits of Caesar's power, and the Arian propping up of Caesar's position seems to undermine both the church's independence and the proportional exercise of secular power.

The eucharist was the centre of liturgical life for both the Nicaeans and the Arians. In believing in the divinity and living presence of Christ in the eucharist, the Nicaeans emphasized that communion nourished and united the members of Christ's body. Meanwhile, the Arians saw the eucharist as a bloodless rational sacrifice that had replaced the Gentiles' sacrificial rites. Because the Nicaeans believed in the full divinity of Christ, they excommunicated the Arians.<sup>118</sup>

The Nicaeans sought to maintain unity between the local churches and trace the line to the earthly Christ through the apostles. The Arians regarded the emperor as an instrument of the eternal God and were more inclined to accept imperial appointment and the emperor's approval as a guarantee of episcopal authority's validity, and they gladly accepted transfers from one episcopal see to another. Ambrose of Milan developed the notion that a bishop as a priest received his authority from Christ on earth and his prophethood from the eternal Christ's authority. As a prophet, it was also the bishop's task to speak the truth to the supreme ruler, Caesar, as Ambrose

116 Davis 1990, 72.

117 Davis 1990, 72-73.

118 Davis 1990, 73-74.



himself did to Theodosius I when he declared him excommunicated unless he repented of the slaying of thousands of citizens in Thessaloniki in 390 for killing the army commander.<sup>119</sup>

The experiences of the imperial councils alienated the Nicaeans. Athanasius, exiled five times, a tireless defender of the Nicaean faith and occasionally punished by the emperor, thus changed his mind about whether Caesar had the right to convene an ecumenical council, to judge in matters of faith and church order, and to interfere in the affairs of the local church. He ultimately advocated the council's complete independence from the emperor.<sup>120</sup>

The Nicaean bishops saw the church as a reflection of the heavenly kingdom. Bishops could criticize the emperor based on apostolic tradition and biblical law. The Arians, who denied Christ's conformity to the Father, were more inclined to see God's appointed ruler as higher than the bishops appointed by Christ. As Ambrose summarized it: 'The emperor is in the church, not above it.'<sup>121</sup>

## The struggle for Nicaea's legacy

The Council of Nicaea created a significant new way for the church to deal with crises. Its doctrinal decision, however, was not immediately set in stone in the sense that it was received with undivided approval throughout Christendom at the time. It took almost all that was left of the 300s to determine Nicaea's significance. This was influenced both by the ambiguous history of the interpretation of the term *homoousios* and by church-political and political situations. The interpretation of the council's decision was already influenced by the growing tension between the easternmost and western parts of the Roman Empire and its use in church-political wrangling. On the Arian question, however, Rome and Alexandria, one of the Eastern centres, were on the same side. Arian leaders could still build a fairly united front in the Greek churches in the easternmost part of the empire. They

119 Davis 1990, 74.

120 Chadwick 1967, 167–168; Davis 1990, 74.

121 Davis 1990, 75.

received support from tolerant emperors, first from Constantius II (337–361), then from Valens (364–378). Arianism’s final overthrow in a harsh way meant that tension continued between the region near Constantinople and the West.<sup>122</sup> In the ensuing decades the bishops of Rome and Alexandria played a key role in maintaining the Council of Nicaea’s authority.<sup>123</sup>

More recent research has emphasized that not all opponents of Nicaea were Arians carved from the same tree; some were part of a broader and loosely interconnected theological tradition that considered Lucian of Antioch (c. 240–312) to be his common teacher. The widespread use of the term Arian for non-Nicaeans was primarily a result of Athanasius’s effective rhetoric. The concept of Arianism in this sense can be considered to have been constructed only between 340 and 350.<sup>124</sup>

Bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia, the emperor’s former administrative city, and later of Constantinople, whispered his thoughts in Constantine’s ear. Henry Chadwick divides the stages of the post-Nicaean crisis into three chronological periods: 1) from Nicaea (325) until the death of Constantine (337); 2) the church at the time of Constantine’s sons; and 3) from Julian to Theodosius I (361–381).<sup>125</sup> The latter periods already paved the way for the Council of Constantinople in 381, so they will be discussed in more detail in its context.

## Influence of Eusebius of Nicomedia

Under Constantine the Nicene Creed remained firmly established as a criterion of true faith. However, the emperor pardoned the Arian church leaders in 328; Eusebius of Nicomedia, Theognis of Nicaea, and Maris of

122 Chadwick 1967, 133; Behr 2004, 75; Kelly 2009, 24; Parvis 2021, 225–255.

123 Parvis 2021, 227.

124 Behr 2004, 35–36; Kim 2021, 10. For Lucianos see e.g. Behr 2004, 59–64; for the construction of Arianism in 340–350 Ayres 2004, 105–132 and Lyman 2021, 43–62.

125 Chadwick 1967, 333–351; Davis 1990, 75. For the period from Nicaea in 325 to Constantine’s death in 337 see also Behr 2004, 81–87; for the development of positions 337–351 Behr 2004, 87–95; for the politics of *divida et impera* Behr 2004, 95–107 and the attempt at reconciliation 361–369 Behr 2004, 107–114; for the dialogue between East and West 371–377 Behr 2004, 114–127; and for the consolidation of the Nicaean orthodoxy 378–381 Behr 2004, 127–143.

Chalcedon were allowed to return to their episcopal sees. Eusebius directed his counter-campaign at three bishops who considered it a weakness of Constantine's ecclesiastical policy that bishops sympathetic to the Arians were allowed to continue in office, Eustachius of Antioch, Athanasius, and Marcellus of Ancyra.<sup>126</sup>

Eustachius spoke disrespectfully of Constantine's mother Helena, using the term *stabularia*, or chambermaid, when she visited the Holy Land on pilgrimage in 326. Eustachius was deposed by the Council of Antioch and exiled by Constantine.<sup>127</sup>

Athanasius focused on defending the church and categorically rejecting all heresy and schism. However, the emperor ordered Athanasius freely to receive all who wished to return to the bosom of the Catholic Church, or he would be suspended and expelled. What was most difficult was that Arius himself had now subscribed to the Nicene Creed – with private additional remarks – and according to the emperor he must be readmitted to the church. As the dispute continued, many false accusations – that he had expropriated customs duties collected from Egypt's grain merchants and treated schismatics harshly – were made against Athanasius. Among these schismatics were the Egyptian Copts. In 335 the Council of Tyre excommunicated Athanasius and exiled him for behaviour unworthy of a bishop. Athanasius was exiled to Trier in the Rhineland in 336.<sup>128</sup>

The third target of Eusebius of Nicomedia was Marcellus of Ancyra. There had long been a struggle in Ancyra against Origen's theological tradition, which emphasized the independence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as three separate '*hypostases*'. Based on this idea, like Tertullian, we can also speak of the persons of the Trinity in the East. Marcellus emphasized God's unity before God's diversity. In his thinking the persons of the Trinity were manifestations of only one God, not independent actors. When for reasons of conscience Marcellus considered himself unable like the East's other bishops to participate in the celebrations of Constantine's thirtieth anniversary as emperor at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 336, which would have been solemnly agreed with the Arians, he was accused

126 Chadwick 1967, 133–135.

127 Chadwick 1967, 134; Davis 1990, 75–76.

128 Chadwick 1967, 134–135; Davis 1990, 76–77.

of disrespect for Caesar and heresy. At the Council of Constantinople in early 336 Marcellus was deposed and expelled.<sup>129</sup>

Arius appealed to Constantine to be readmitted to the sacraments before he died. As Alexandria was still too dangerous for him, it was graciously arranged that he be allowed to return to communion with the church in Constantinople. In 336, the day before this, however, Arius died from internal bleeding at a public bath. Emperor Constantine died the following year. Dressed in the white baptismal garb of Christians, the emperor received baptism before his death from Eusebius of Nicomedia. He was buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople in the cenotaph to the Twelve.<sup>130</sup>

## Constantinople 381: affirmation of the Trinity

### Act Two of the Arian controversy

Constantine the Great's legacy was bloodstained, and the plan for a tetrarchy of the four rulers of the Roman Empire did not materialize. The army killed Constantine's two half-brothers and six young princes because it refused to be ruled by anyone other than Constantine's sons. Realpolitik sought to preserve the empire's unity. The emperor's three sons now divided the empire between them: Constantine II received the provinces of Gaul, Britain, and Spain; Constantius II Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt; and Constans Italy, Africa, and Danubia. Three years later Constans defeated his older brother Constantine II in a power struggle and now controlled the entire western part of the empire until 350, when he was defeated by the rebel Magnentius.<sup>131</sup>

129 Chadwick 1967, 133–134. For Marcellus see also Behr 2004, 38.

130 Davis 1990, 77; Kelly 2009, 25–26.

131 Chadwick 1967, 136–137; Davis 1990, 81.

In the summer of 337 the exiled bishops, Athanasius and Marcellus, and others attempted to return to their seats. However, Constantius favoured the policy of Eusebius of Nicomedia, who had succeeded to the episcopal see of Constantinople, which had also replaced Nicomedia as the administrative capital. The exiles received a hostile reception and were forced to retreat to the West. Egypt's bishops expressed their support for Bishop Athanasius at a meeting in Alexandria, but the Eusebians chose a certain Gregory as bishop, who, with the support of an armed force, arranged for his ordination to replace Athanasius in 339.<sup>132</sup>

Pope Julius (337–352) invited Athanasius and Marcellus to Rome in 340 and welcomed them into the church as persecuted refugees. It was a serious matter for Rome to associate with persons excommunicated by Greek councils, though Athanasius and Marcellus considered the decisions to be based on the accusations of heretics and therefore invalid. It could be argued, however, that the episcopal see of Rome had the status of a court of appeal. In the East, however, this argument's acceptance was less clear.<sup>133</sup>

On 6 January 341 ninety-seven bishops gathered in Antioch with Emperor Constantius. The bishops bitterly rejected accusations of Arianism, and that they wanted to reject the Nicene Creed. Their only criticism was that Nicaea could not exclude such obvious heretics as Marcellus from the communion of the church. They accepted the creed that God was three in God's being, but – as in Origen – was one by agreement of God's will, and that the Son was not only created but born of the Father. The bishops responded to the idea of Rome as a court of appeal that it was new for the Western diocese to evaluate the decisions of the East.<sup>134</sup>

## Escalation of the East-West conflict

Despite the Eastern bishops' rejection of accusations of Arianism, the Arian controversy had developed into an ecclesiastical dividing line between Greeks and Latins. The East rejected Rome's claim to supreme providence.

<sup>132</sup> Chadwick 1967, 137.

<sup>133</sup> Chadwick 1967, 137; Davis 1990, 82.

<sup>134</sup> Chadwick 1967, 137–138, Davis 1990, 83.

Eastern theologians also looked askance at Western theology's adoption of the term *homoousios*, which they saw as naively accepting the Sabellian idea of persons as manifestations and committing blasphemy by belittling the Son's personal presence. Meanwhile, in the West, the term *homoousios* was seen as rejecting the East's drift towards tritheism or polytheism, while the expression three *hypostases* was translated to Latin as three *substances*. Moreover, the fact that Eusebius of Nicomedia, who later moved to Constantinople and became embroiled in the Arian controversy, continued to have an influential position in ecclesiastical politics made it appear in the West that the Greek bishops supported Arianism. In these circumstances the objections were not credible.<sup>135</sup>

In the winter of 341/2, however, Eusebius of Constantinople died. The emperor of the West, Constans, then began to pressurize Constantius to make the bishops of the East more sympathetic to his Western colleagues. In 342/3 the emperors convened a council in Serdica, now Sofia in Bulgaria, to discuss how the council might unite East and West. The meeting split into two mutually anathematizing parties. The Greeks left in the middle of the meeting because they could not persuade the Latins to condemn Athanasius and Marcellus of Ancyra. The pretext was that they must participate in the celebration of Constantius II's victory over the Persians. However, they produced a creed simultaneously condemning the anti-Arian position and Julius the Roman and Ossius of Cordoba, among others. Meanwhile, the Latins produced canons designed to clamp down on individualistic and overzealous bishops, especially their transfer from one see to another, mutual harassment, and accelerated episcopal ordination. The bishop of Rome was also given the right to appoint judges to hear the appeals of bishops who had been deposed in their province. The Latins published a canon that insufficiently justified the reunification of Marcellus of Ancyra. However, the proclamation made it clear that the bishops distanced themselves from Marcellus's idea of the duration of the Son's kingdom by emphasizing that there was no beginning or end to the Son's reign with the Father.<sup>136</sup>

135 Chadwick 1967, 138; Davis 1990, 82.

136 Chadwick 1967, 139; Davis 1990, 84–87; Ayres 2004, 122–125.

The schism's consequences also began to manifest themselves in the East, especially in Egypt, when Constantius deposed and exiled bishops and priests who supported the Nicaean views. Pope Julius sent Vincent of Capua and Euphrates of Cologne as his official envoys to reconcile their views with Emperor Constantius II. Although no reconciliation could be achieved, Constantius ended the persecution of Athanasius's followers in Egypt. The bishops of the East in turn sent a delegation of four bishops to Emperor Constans of the West in 345. They presented the 'Long-lined Creed' (Macrostich), in which they rejected accusations of tritheism and emphasized the position of the Father in the Trinity and the Son's nature as God and true man. He was the most perfect of the first and in all things like the Father (*homoiousios*). They also rejected the doctrine of Marcellus of Ancyra and his disciple Photinus, according to which the kingdom of the Son had a beginning and an end. Nevertheless, the creed was still fundamentally Origenistic in tone, embodying the subordination of the Son. Western theologians demanded that the Greeks condemn the doctrine of three *hypostases*, which in the West was interpreted as tritheism. The theologians of the East refused and returned home.<sup>137</sup>

## Athanasius as a defender of Nicaean theology

Eventually, the impasse after Serdica was broken. After three requests from the emperor of the East, Constantius II, Athanasius returned to Alexandria in 346, while the East remained silent about Marcellus of Ancyra. Athanasius was received joyfully. Four hundred bishops from all over the empire proclaimed their communion with him, and he held the episcopate without interruption the next decade.<sup>138</sup>

Athanasius can be seen as the main representative of those who fought for Nicaea. He was a central defender of the council's theological core and the dominant theological figure in the 300s. However, the information about the period's theological controversies comes for the most part from him or his supporters. Some critical scholars have regarded Athanasius

<sup>137</sup> Davis 1990, 87–88.

<sup>138</sup> Chadwick 1967, 140; Davis 1990, 88–89.

as a propagandist and political figure rather than as a defender of truth and theologian. It has been pointed out, however, that this may reflect a reaction to his saintly aura rather than to his person. Yet there is also support for the idea that the criticism of the harsh measures levelled at Athanasius during his lifetime was not without foundation. His reputation as an 'elder statesman' who would not have attained his status had he not also possessed the Christian virtues of meekness and humility has since also been restored. For example, the cultural Protestant historian of dogma Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) stated that by the standards of the time there was nothing unusual or unpleasant about him. Nor was Athanasius ever accused of heresy.<sup>139</sup>

Athanasius's theological premise was *soteriological*, or salvationist. He followed the church's liturgical and biblical-salvation-historical tradition – especially that of Paul and John – rather than philosophical reasoning. The basis of human salvation was that the Word of God, incarnate in Christ 'for our sake and for our salvation', was of the same substance as the Father, and at the same time he had truly become human. Although he was an Alexandrian influencer, Athanasius has been characterized as having a latent affinity with the Antiochian and popular Word-human (*Logos-anthropos*) Christology in the West. He emphasized that the Son had to become man to redeem the human family so that people could be deified – that is, the image of God shattered by the Fall could be repaired. The Son could not deify human beings if he only participated in the Father's divinity but was not God himself, in the image of the Father. The Word became flesh so that we could be deified – that is, Christ and the Holy Spirit could work in us, working in us the fruits of salvation and the Spirit.<sup>140</sup>

Athanasius argued that the Father could never exist without the Son, just as light could never cease to shine. It was in the Father's nature not only to be good but also to give birth. He was always perfect. Birth occurred in eternity as an intrinsic part of the Father's being, not just by a decision of

139 Ayres 2004, 140–143; Behr 2004, 187–190; Kelly 2009, 28. Parvis 2021, 229 even concludes: 'Without Athanasius's political and theological understanding of the importance of that first "great and holy Council", and his rhetorical skill in communicating it, the Creed of Nicaea and the term *homousios* alike would almost certainly have sunk with very little trace long before 381.'

140 Chadwick 1967, 140; Mannermaa 1977, 58–59; Davis 1990, 89, Pihkala 1997, 228; Behr 2004, 186–292.



the will. The separation of the Son from the Father was likewise eternal. Christ was the Word incarnate, so the Word was also of the nature of the Father, and those who saw him therefore saw the Father. Athanasius came to see the full meaning of the term *homoousios* at Nicaea increasingly clearly, and he became its staunchest defender. He placed even greater emphasis on the sameness of the divine nature of the Son and the Father than Nicaea.<sup>141</sup>

Athanasius thus vigorously defended the core Nicaean term '*homoousios*', but his terminology still needed clarification. For example, he failed to emphasize the true humanity of Jesus, even though his salvationist thinking seemed to require this. His thinking represented the Alexandrian tradition of Christological unity, providing a departure point for further development in the direction of both the Chalcedonian two-nature doctrine and a miaphysite (monophysitism) unity Christology.<sup>142</sup> Work remained to analyse the tasks of the persons of the Trinity. In any case, according to Athanasius, there was some exchange of qualities (*communicatio idiomatum*) between Christ's divine and human sides, despite the divine Logos's immutability. This laid a clear foundation for the two-nature doctrine, though its conceptualization remained incomplete. He also lacked the key theological distinction between *hypostasis*, or person, and *ousia*, or substance.<sup>143</sup>

Athanasius was absolute but not blind in his view of Nicaea's importance. When necessary, he could also engage in theological discussion to strengthen contact with potential allies. His intransigence in the core aspects of faith earned him a position as one of the key Church Fathers and especially in Alexandria as the 'pillar of faith' in the life to come.<sup>144</sup>

The road to fame underwent many battles. In 350 Emperor Constans of the West lost to the usurper Magnentius, whom Constantius of the East did not recognize, and a bloody civil war ensued, won by Constantius at Mursa. The Arian Bishop Valens of Mursa prayed fervently for Constantius's victory; he became an influential ecclesiastical adviser to the emperor. Constantius sought to overthrow Athanasius after Pope Julius in 352 was succeeded

141 Davis 1990, 89–91.

142 This book uses the term *miaphysite*, which is not defamatory like the expression *monophysitic*, used during and after the early Christological controversies.

143 Davis 1990, 91; Pihkala 1997, 164–169.

144 Chadwick 1967, 140; Pihkala 1997, 161–162.

by Deacon Liberius, who was weaker than Julius. In early 353 Athanasius sent his writings on the Nicene decisions to the bishop of Rome, triggering a debate in the West about the Nicene Creed and the term *homoousios*, and solidifying Western support for Nicaea. Few Western theologians were familiar with the subject, however. At the Councils of Arles (353) and Milan (355) Constantius led the Western bishops in condemning Athanasius and even Ossius of Cordoba, president of the Council of Nicaea. In 357 this event was used to declare the term *homoousios* unbiblical. The bishops who defended Athanasius, Lucifer of Cagliari, Eusebius of Vercelli, Dionysius of Milan, Hilary of Poitiers, and, above all, Liberius, bishop of Rome, were sentenced to exile. Nicaea was in peril.<sup>145</sup>

## The flight of Athanasius into the wilderness and the rise of the radical Arian George to the episcopate

In February 356 Athanasius was driven into the wilderness to the monks who were his staunchest supporters. With the aid of an armed force George of Cappadocia, a radical Arian, was installed as bishop of Alexandria. He immediately launched the persecution of Athanasius's supporters. In his hiding place Athanasius produced pamphlets in which he defended the Nicæan faith. In practice he remained Egypt's spiritual leader. Another Arian, Eudoxius, rose to the important episcopal see of Antioch. In the thinking of George and Eudoxius the Son was unlike (*anomoios*) the Father. This anomoeanic design, which emphasized the difference between the Father and the Son, differed both from the idea of the same substance as in Nicaea (*homoousios*) and the Father-like (*homoiousios*) idea favoured by the Greek bishops whom the emperor supported.<sup>146</sup>

The moderate Greek bishops, led by Basil of Ancyra, saw danger in anomoeanic thinking denying the divinity of the Son. Supported by his moderate colleagues, Basil ignored Valens of Mursa the Arian and convinced

145 Chadwick 1967, 140; Davis 1990, 91; Delcogliano 2021, 261; Parvis 2021, 245–247, 253.

146 Chadwick 1967, 141; Davis 1990, 93; Pihkala 1997, 186; Kelly 2009, 27; Müller 2010, 336.

Emperor Constantius that a new creed should be formulated in place of Nicaea that would refer to the Son as 'like' the Father (*homoiousios*). Pope Liberius accepted this formulation and was allowed to return to Rome to his see. However, Hilary of Poitiers vowed the bishops of Gaul and Britain would remain faithful to the Nicæan expression *homoousios*, while maintaining contact with the adherents of *homoiousios*, who at least had rejected the radical *anomoeanic* model. Meanwhile, from his hiding place Athanasius encouraged his own followers to stand firm.<sup>147</sup>

## A temporary victory for Arianism

For a year Basil of Ancyra managed to retain the emperor's support, but then Valens of Mursa gained favour. He wanted to avoid all talk of God's nature (*ousia*), advocating the formulation that the Son was like the Father (*homoios*). In 359 the emperor decided to convene a general council, to be organized separately in East and West in a logistically advantageous manner. The meeting of the East would be held in Seleucia, on the southern edge of Asia Minor; the meeting of the West would be held in Rimini (Ariminum). A preparatory meeting was held at 359 in Sirmium. Mark, the bishop of Arethusa, drew up an updated creed there, stating:

But whereas the term essence (*ousia*) has been adopted by the Fathers in simplicity, and gives offence as being unknown to the people, because it is not contained in the Scriptures, it has seemed good to remove it, that essence be never in any case used of God again, because the divine Scriptures nowhere refer to the essence of Father and Son. But we say that the Son is like (*homoios*) the Father in all things...

147 Chadwick 1967, 142; Davis 1990, 95–96; Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 68. For the terms which different groupings favoured in considering the relationship between Father and Son (*homoousios*, *homoios kat'ousian*, *homoios kat'energeian*, *heteroousios*) see also Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 66–67, according to which this was basically a deal between the Nicæans and Arians, which concerned the basic issue of whether God came to us, or we elevated ourselves to God. The majority of the bishops chose the first alternative and thus the Nicæan faith.

In 360 Eudoxius was transferred to Constantinople, where the consecration of the church of Hagia Sophia officially promoted the new creed that the Son was 'like' the Father.<sup>148</sup>

At the Rimini meeting the Nicæan majority was forced under threat of violence to accept the term 'like'. In Seleucia Constantius forced a quarrelsome assembly to accept the same term in 359. Bishop Wulfila (c. 311–383) spread the decision among the Germanic tribes beyond the empire's borders. The struggle between 357 and 360 marked the victory of Arianism. Nike's 359 confession used a vague formulation that rejected the ousian language. Valens of Mursa had convinced Emperor Constantius that the most imprecise formulation possible would best unite the empire, and that the Nicene Creed and its term *homoousios* was the path of division. In practice, Constantius was forced to persecute those who believed that Arianism was an unacceptable form of Christianity, and who fought passionately for the divinity of the Son not to be watered down.<sup>149</sup>

All this challenged the Nicæan front to defend the rejection of the Arian position and this obscure compromise, and why it was vital in salvation doctrine to speak of an essential connection between the Father and the Son. This was likely to give rise to serious theological work to clarify the foundations. The *pro Nicæa* alliance was formed in reaction to the events of 357–361 and out of extreme dissatisfaction with the Creed of Nike being considered Arian. In 344 the Eastern bishops had reported their position to the West's ecclesiastical leadership, and Athanasius had drafted many tracts, but there had been no broad-based work before this. It was important for the gathering of forces and the result that Athanasius in his ecumenical wisdom saw that Basil of Ancyra and his associates were nevertheless on the same side against Arianism, and that the dispute between them was largely a disagreement concerning terminology.<sup>150</sup>

148 Chadwick 1987, 143; Davis 1990, 97; Kelly 2009, 27; Parvis 2021, 249.

149 Chadwick 1967, 143; Davis 1990, 97–99; Parvis 2021, 251.

150 Chadwick 1967, 144; Delcogliano 2021, 265.

## The third act of the Arian controversy, from Julian's reign to the time of Theodosius I

Constantius's war in Persia went badly, and when he ordered troops from Gaul to the eastern front, the troops rebelled and proclaimed Julian, the only survivor of the 337 massacre of the Constantine dynasty, emperor. Other troops joined to support him. The sick Constantius was baptized by the old Arian Eudoxius of Antioch, naming Julian his heir. Constantius died in the autumn of 361.<sup>151</sup>

Julian's reign marked a resurgence of paganism. Julian had been baptized and had received a Christian – though Arian – upbringing. However, he had not developed a deep loyalty to the religion whose representatives had killed his loved ones in the massacre of 337. Increasingly, his sympathies lay with the myths of Hellenistic antiquity and the ancient gods. Under Julian all religious groups were basically tolerated, but pagan temples and cults enjoyed imperial favour. Cities that did not favour old cults were denied military protection. Julian sought to revive the old cults' priesthood, encouraging them to develop relief activities for the less fortunate that mimicked the Christian model. These actions met indifference or even ridicule.<sup>152</sup>

Julian allowed the old defender of Nicaea, Bishop Athanasius, to return to Alexandria after fifteen years in exile. He now appeared an elder statesman. He was no longer a zealot but a wise man from whom advice was sought, and whose intransigence over the decades commanded respect. Once more, however, old Athanasius was forced into hiding because when Julian's attempts to destabilize Christianity failed, the bishops were again driven away. This time Athanasius remained in hiding in Alexandria after misleading the authorities. However, this was temporary, as Julian was wounded and killed in 363 while returning from battle in Persia after reigning as emperor for only twenty months. Athanasius was apparently the last surviving attendee of the Nicene Council of 325 when he died on 2 May 373. Before his death he had succeeded in building harmony among

151 Davis 1990, 100. For the road to the confession of Nicaea and the neo-Nicaean front see also Williams 2021, 305–324.

152 Davis 1990, 100–101.

those who, despite terminological differences, held fast to the Son of God's full divinity and his essential communion with God the Father.<sup>153</sup>

Before his exile Athanasius convened a peace conference in Alexandria in 362, which included representatives from Egypt, Syria, and Italy. The core idea was reconciliation between the Nicaeans and moderates through delving more deeply into the issue behind the creed itself, beyond the various factions' slogans. The model that has since proved its worth in ecumenical discussions was thus already being applied. Athanasius, having asked more specific questions about the parties' views, concluded by pointing out the fundamental truth for which they were fighting, and that there was ultimately no basis for disagreement between the moderate supporters of the term *homoiousios* and the Nicaeans. Pure doctrine was about purpose rather than design. This interpretation, which Athanasius developed in *De synodis*, was evidently influenced by the writing of Hilary of Poitiers after some critical digestion. However, he never renounced the primacy of the Nicene Creed's wording. The elements of reconciliation were in place, but unfortunately a wedge had been driven between the parties by the failure of the staunch Nicaean Lucifer of Cagliari to seek reconciliation with the moderate Meletius, bishop of Antioch, though he consecrated the old Nicaean Paulinus as bishop. A quarrel between those who were essentially close to each other resulted in the churches of Antioch remaining in the possession of Eudoxius the Arian.<sup>154</sup>

New theological problems arose between the 360s and 370s in addition to the old Arianism. First, the unwritten doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Nicene Creed was a headache. Some theologians embraced the Nicaean belief that the Son was of the same substance as the Father. However, they did not grant the same status to the Holy Spirit, whom they considered a creature, belonging to the category of angels. Athanasius considered this untenable. Macedonius of Constantinople led a group that denied the Holy Spirit's divinity because of two or three passages in scripture and the

153 Chadwick 1967, 145; Davis 1990, 101–102.

154 Chadwick 1967, 147; Davis 1990, 102–103; Delcogliano 2021, 265–267; Parvis 2021, 249.

missing wording in the Nicene Creed. The Nicaeans named them ‘Spirit-fighting’, pneumatomachi, or Macedonian.<sup>155</sup>

Second, there was terminological ambiguity about the concept of *hypostasis* and its relationship with the concept of *ousia*. In Greek *hypostasis* expressed the Son’s separation from the Father to avoid the idea that the different persons of the Trinity were seen only as manifestations or roles without a *de facto* independent person, as in Sabellianism or the thinking of Marcellus of Ancyra. The formal use of *hypostasis* against this purpose originated in Origen. Athanasius avoided using *hypostasis* until the 360s. In Basil’s circle, however, some had begun to say that the relationship between *hypostasis* and *ousia* should be understood as a relationship between the special and the common.<sup>156</sup>

The third problem that appeared in the 360s was the most difficult. It was raised by one of Athanasius’s oldest friends, Apollinaris of Laodicea from Syria. Born around 310, Apollinaris had been a pupil in Athens at the same time as the young future Emperor Julian. When Julian forbade Christian schoolmasters to teach literature, Apollinaris and his father attempted to rewrite the Bible using the forms of classical literature. Problems arose when Apollinaris developed the Word-flesh (*Logos-sarx*) Christology, according to which the union of the divine with the human in Christ as one nature was possible only by replacing the soul of Jesus with that of the Son. This was not how Christ’s full humanity was expressed. Apollinaris’s Christological idea was discovered in 362, and by 375 his relations with the orthodox church had been severed. He was convicted in 377 at the Roman Council, in 379 at Antioch, and in 381 at the General Council of Constantinople.<sup>157</sup>

155 Chadwick 1967, 146. For the Holy Spirit and the Trinity in early Christian theology see e.g. Pihkala 2015, 7–27.

156 Chadwick 1967, 146–147.

157 Chadwick 1967, 148; Davis 1990, 104; Behr 2004, 417–436; Kelly 2009, 35; Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 82–84; Spoerl 2021, 282–304.

# Cappadocian Fathers as the finalizers of the classical doctrine of the Trinity

After Athanasius's death in 373 his successors were the Cappadocian Fathers Basil of Caesarea (Basil the Great, 329–379), his friend Gregory of Nazianzus (329–390), and Basil's brother Gregory of Nyssa (331–396). Their educational and social background made of the Cappadocians natural leaders. When the most important, Basil, was elected bishop of Caesarea and metropolitan of Cappadocia in 370, he began to build a strong Nicaean faction in Asia Minor. Basil's book *On the Holy Spirit* picked up where Athanasius's *Epistle to Serapion* had left off, marking a decisive advance in the discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity. Basil appealed above all to liturgical and sacramental traditions in baptism, which justified going beyond the letter of the Bible and the 325 Nicene Creed.<sup>158</sup>

Emperor Valens sought to reduce Basil's power by dividing his diocese in two. Basil in turn sought to spread the influence of likeminded people by appointing his brother Gregory bishop of Nyssa and his friend Gregory of Nazianzus bishop of Sasima. From there, however, he soon moved on to help his ailing father, who served as bishop of Nazianzus. Basil was a first-class ecclesiastical statesman, but he was an even more important theologian, helping to bring the Eastern church's thinking more in line with Nicaea and thus completing the work begun by Athanasius.<sup>159</sup>

Basil seems to have been the first to associate the Origenist idea of the three divine *hypostases* with the Nicaean idea of *homoousios*, which emphasized the unity of substance. This was done by placing substance ontologically – that is, substance-appropriately – on a different level than *hypostasis*. *Ousia* represented a common divinity, while *hypostases* represented the differentiation of persons. Philosophically, in addition to Platonism, this was based on a Stoic-influenced analysis of being already used by Tertullian (d. c. 220–225). Basil brought Eastern thought in the same direction as the Western tradition, where Tertullian had already formulated God as having one substance but three persons (*una substantia, tres personae*). For Basil *ousia* signified God's existence or substance, or

158 Chadwick 1967, 148–149. For Basil of Caesarea see also Behr 2004, 294–297.

159 Davis 1990, 111–112; Behr 2004, 295.



God as an essential being. *Hypostasis*, meanwhile, denoted substance in a specific way characteristic of each of the three persons. The Father was characterized by fatherhood, the Son by sonhood, and the Spirit by sanctification. However, Basil believed the term *homoiousios* preserved each person's uniqueness better than the term *homoousios*.<sup>160</sup> At the same time, however, his thinking, especially from the Western perspective, met accusations of tritheism.

When he was younger, Basil avoided speaking directly about the Holy Spirit's divinity, but after a break with his old mentor, Eustathius of Sebaste, who denied the Holy Spirit's divinity, Basil became more forthright. The Spirit had the same honour, reverence, and worship as the Father and the Son. However, Basil never called the Holy Spirit God.<sup>161</sup>

In terms of the Cappadocian approach and Christological development Gregory of Nazianzus, despite Basil's impulses, was a true theological champion. He is venerated in the tradition of the Eastern church as Gregory the Theologian. Gregory pointed out the difficulties in the *Logos-sarx* Christology that came close to Apollinaris's Arianism. Apollinaris of Laodicea proceeded from the general idea of the philosophy of the age, according to which 'two that are perfect cannot unite'. The Logos played the same role in human beings as the soul in the human body, making Christ a 'mixture of God and human' or 'a heavenly human being'. Meanwhile, Gregory emphasized that what the Redeemer had not taken possession of had not been redeemed. The whole of humanity was to be embraced, including its intellectual aspect. If Christ had a soul but no mind, he was not truly human.<sup>162</sup>

Basil's younger brother Gregory of Nyssa was an even deeper thinker and is counted among the great Christian mystics. However, he was weaker as a church statesman. His poor administrative skills led the Arians to accuse him of misappropriating funds, which led to his removal from office as bishop of Nyssa in 376. However, Gregory returned to his episcopal see and played a key role in the Council of Constantinople. In Trinitarian theology Gregory emphasized that God's three *hypostases* shared the same divine substance

160 Davis 1990, 112; Ayres 2004, 187–221.

161 Davis 1990, 112–113; Behr 2004, 296.

162 Davis 1990, 106; Pihkala 1997, 170–173, 187–191; Ayres 2004, 244–250; Behr 2004, 361–370; Kelly 2009, 28, 36.

because God was one. The differences between *hypostases* consisted in their interrelationships. The Father was the cause, the Son directly from the cause, and the Holy Spirit indirectly from the cause. The Father had no beginning, the Son was born of the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father through the Son. However, the use of the term 'cause', according to Gregory, did not entail a distinction between the substance of *hypostases* but stated that there was no Son without birth from the Father, while the Father did not need birth. Everything that happened in creation proceeded from the Father through the Son and was perfected in the Holy Spirit.<sup>163</sup>

Nyssa's mysticism was not only drawn from Neoplatonism; he was also one of the pioneers of apophatic or negative theology, which above all described what God was not. Accordingly, God's nature was unknown, incomprehensible, and indescribable. Gregory continued along the lines of Basil and Nazianzus, emphasizing that Christ was a human embraced by God with a human soul through which the body also partook of salvation. Salvation was about clarifying created reality. Although the roots of the two-nature doctrine can be found in Gregory of Nyssa's thinking, the expression of the hypostatic unity of the human and supernatural in Christ remains conceptually unclear. Only in the next century would there be a departure from the Stoic concept of *mixing* that would fully enable the further development of Chalcedonian theology.<sup>164</sup>

Athanasius was the first theologian of the East to emphasize the absolute identity of the substance of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Basil and Gregory of Nyssa, meanwhile, drew attention to making a distinction within that unity. Basil sharply distinguished between one being (*ousia*) and three *hypostases*, or ways of being, while emphasizing the existence of *hypostases* in each other. Gregory for his part explained the relationships between differences in divine existence and the works of God proceeding from the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit.<sup>165</sup> After the remarkable theological work of the Cappadocians more and more people in the East were convinced

163 Davis 1990, 113–114; Kelly 2009, 28. For Gregory of Nyssa see also Ayres 2004, 344–363 and Behr 2004, 455–459.

164 Pihkala 1997, 191–195.

165 Davis 1990, 114; Behr 2004, 459–502.

that the Nicaean decision represented authentic Christian preaching and biblical teaching rather than 'Western monarchism'.<sup>166</sup>

Basil wrote to Athanasius in his last years suggesting they ask the bishop of Rome to appoint representatives to help resolve the doctrinal disorder in the East. Unfortunately, he cited Meletius of Antioch, a *homoiousian* who had ordained Basil deacon, as the condition for a solution. However, Athanasius shared communion with Meletius's rival, Paulinus of Antioch.<sup>167</sup>

The Cappadocians also reinforced the teaching about the Holy Spirit's divinity as part of the Trinity. Athanasius had already expanded the teaching of the Holy Spirit against the Arians, who denied the full divinity of the Spirit, and theologians influenced by Origen. For them the Holy Spirit was like an angel, though the greatest among them, not one of the persons of the Trinity. Athanasius emphasized that the Bible revealed the Spirit as more than created. The Spirit made human beings partakers of God and divine – and must therefore be God in substance. The Trinity was eternal, one, and indivisible. If the Spirit was part of the Trinity, the Spirit was of the same substance as the Father and the Son. The Son and the Spirit worked together to create, sanctify, and inspire. The Spirit belonged to the substance of the Son as the Son belonged to the substance of the Father. However, according to the custom of the time, Athanasius did not call the Spirit God.<sup>168</sup>

Basil and the two Gregories supported each other in clarifying Trinitarian terminology. The distinction between person (*hypostasis*) and essence (*ousia*) was key here. This also fuelled the showdown with Arianism. In the past *ousia* and *hypostasis* had both meant what is in itself, or substance. It was now possible to do more justice to the unity within the Trinity and the relationships between the persons. According to the Cappadocians the Triune God had 'three *hypostases* [person] in one being'. In explaining the relationship between one essence and three persons, they used an analogy between the general and individual. Each person had its own characteristics. In keeping with apophatic theology, however, the mystery of faith was important: the Trinity could be worshipped but not explained.

166 Kelly 2009, 28.

167 Davis 1990, 114–115.

168 Davis 1990, 106–107.

The Cappadocians conceived of the doctrine of the Trinity in a way that approached Tertullian's teaching in the West. This created the conditions for Nicaea's confirmation at Constantinople in 381.<sup>169</sup>

The central role of biblical theology for both Athanasius and the Cappadocians is also noteworthy. The controversies in which they became embroiled compelled them to delve carefully into the scriptures' teaching about Christ and develop the doctrine of biblical commentary and the theology based on it as a continuation of what had already been done on the road to Nicaea in response to the New Testament's question: 'Who do you think I am?' (Matthew 16:15).<sup>170</sup>

## The defeat of Arianism in the West and the continuation of the dispute in the East

After Julian's death the empire received a new ruler, Jovian, in the summer of 363. He summoned Athanasius. He also cooperated with Meletius of Antioch. Reunification seemed imminent. However, Meletius hesitated to establish contact with Athanasius and recognized the newly ordained Paulinus as the rightful bishop of Antioch. The schism continued between the Nicaeans and *homoiousionists*. Jovian died in February 364 and was succeeded by Valentinian I. Valentinian supported the Nicæan faith but did not want to interfere in ecclesiastical affairs. When Hilary of Poitiers tried to persuade the Milanese to revolt against the Arian bishop Auxentius, he was told to leave the city. However, the struggle for Nicaea against the Arians had largely been won in the Western Empire, apart from Milan and parts of Illyria in the Western Balkans.<sup>171</sup>

In the East the situation was different. *Homoousios* did not prove attractive, and both the proponents of the 'like' term for substance, *homoiousios*, and those who favoured *homoios*, 'similar', were still alive.

169 Chadwick 1967, 149; Mannermaa 1977, 60–61.

170 Behr 2004, 525. For the connection between the Bible and theology in 4th century theology see also Ayres 2004, 31–40 and Faith and Order Paper 213 Reading the Gospels with the Early Church (2013). Dietrich Bonhoeffer especially points to the question 'who' as the basic Christological question: DBW 12, 283–289.

171 Davis 1990, 108–109.

Following Constantius's model, Valens, the brother of Valentinian and emperor of the East, decided to force the bishops at least to accept the decision of Rimini-Seleucia-Constantinople concerning the term 'similar', or *homoios*, as a central tenet of orthodoxy. At the same time, he forced the bishops whom Constantius had deposed, but who had returned with Julian's permission, to resign and flee again. Disillusioned with Valens's policies, the *homoiousians* decided to appeal to the emperor of the West. Pope Liberius was ready to re-establish communion if these bishops and their successors recognized the Nicene Creed and rejected the Rimini-Seleucia-Constantinople confession. However, Valens's persecution in the East continued. Athanasius's death in 373 compounded the distress. His disciple Peter was elected bishop in his place, but the authorities did not confirm this. Instead, it was ordered that Lucius the Arian be installed by imperial force. Peter fled to the protection of the bishop of Rome as Athanasius had earlier.<sup>172</sup>

In August 378 Emperor Valens died at the Battle of Adrianople. The Greek churches' situation changed rapidly with the arrival from the West of a Spanish general, later Emperor Theodosius I, sent by Emperor Gratian. While restoring order, he fell ill in Thessaloniki and having professed the Nicæan faith, was baptized by the papal representative Ascholius. Theodosius had studied the ecclesiastical situation in detail.<sup>173</sup> He renewed Valens's decree that all exiled bishops be allowed to return. A Nicæan emperor in the East was again reversing the situation.<sup>174</sup>

In the West, therefore, the Nicæan faith was already well established. The Church Father Ambrosius, who later became an important teacher of Augustine, was elected bishop of Milan. He was a catechumen and an authority in civil administration. In Milan and Illyria, the last Western centres of Arianism, he led the struggle for the Nicene Creed. At the Council of Sirmium in 378 Ambrose, supported by Emperor Gratian, deposed six Arian bishops. In 379/380 Gratian, supported by Ambrose, banned Arianism in the West.<sup>175</sup> More generally, Ambrose can be seen as the architect of

172 Davis 1990, 110–111.

173 Chadwick 1967, 149–150; Davis 1990, 115–116.

174 Davis 1990, 116. For Theodosius the Great as emperor see also e.g. Tajakka 1982, 27–31.

175 Davis 1990, 116.

the Western orthodox empire's exclusion of those representing religious heresies or making them second-class citizens.<sup>176</sup> However, he was also important as an insightful theologian and builder of East-West connections during the time of the Cappadocian Fathers.<sup>177</sup> Among others he passed on this heritage to the Church Father Augustine.

Under Pope Damasus the Roman Synod in 377 addressed the growing problem of Apollinarism and Macedonianism. These delusions threatened the Christian doctrine of salvation. Macedonius denied the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. According to Apollinaris the divine Word took the place of Christ's human soul or mind in the incarnation. The meeting concluded that the idea that Jesus had no human mind came surprisingly close to Arianism. Arianism spoke of Jesus's imperfect divinity, Apollinarism of his imperfect human nature. If human nature was imperfect, the gift was also imperfect, and so was our salvation. Sin came into the world through the fall of the human mind, so it too needed redemption. According to the Catholic Church a perfect God took perfect humanity, which the Synod recognized. With the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit was worshipped as perfect in all things – in power, reverence, majesty, and divinity.<sup>178</sup>

In the East the rise of the Nicene Creed had begun when Basil of Caesarea sent his fellow bishop Gregory of Nazianzus to Constantinople to win support for the Nicaean faith. A temporary temple was set up in a private residence, which he named Anastasia, the Resurrection, and in a series of sermons he explained to the people the Orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, the one God in whom three were one, equal in every respect, one and the same, yet each separate in its personal specificity, each God because all persons were of the same substance. The persons of the same substance differed in their origin. The Father was primordial, the origin of the Son was in the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father differently from the Son. Gregory was thus clearly referring to the Holy Spirit as God. However, the Arians rebelled against him and on one occasion almost killed him at the altar.<sup>179</sup>

176 Chadwick 1967, 166–167.

177 Pihkala 1997, 204.

178 Davis 1990, 116–117, 329; Müller 2010, 337–338.

179 Davis 1990, 117–118; Delcogliano 2021, 274.

Having been appointed emperor, Theodosius immediately informed the Greek world that the conditions for ecclesiastical recognition were acceptance of the Nicene Creed and communion with Pope Damasus and Peter (Athanasius's successor), bishop of Alexandria. This also meant automatic recognition of Paulinus of Antioch as the true bishop. On his arrival in Constantinople in 380, however, Theodosius soon discovered that the creator of unity among the Greek bishops could only be Meletius of Antioch, and that Paulinus must be tactfully ignored. Theodosius himself was present at Gregory of Nazianzus's investiture in Constantinople.<sup>180</sup>

## Constantinople I 381: explicating the Christian doctrine of the Trinity

In May 381 Emperor Theodosius summoned an ecumenical council of 150 bishops to Constantinople to confirm the anti-Arian result achieved in the East. This meant both the theological and ecclesiastical confirmation of Nicaea, and that the Cappadocian interpretation became part of the state's approved doctrine. The Nicæan decision was then also applied to the Holy Spirit as had been done early on in baptismal teaching.<sup>181</sup>

At the beginning of the meeting the emperor diplomatically appointed Bishop Meletius as its chairman, whose personality established contact between the Nicæans and their opponents. Initially, no representative from Rome was involved, and the council appointed Gregory of Nazianzus, bishop of Constantinople. He was a fluent orator and an intelligent defender of the Nicæan tradition. During the council, however, Meletius died. Gregory spoke on behalf of Paulinus as Meletius's successor in Antioch as a creator of communion with the West. However, this was not accepted. Gregory was deposed on canonical grounds. Pope Damasus had instructed his representative Ascholius to stop the recycling of bishops between dioceses. The transfer of Gregory from Sasima to Constantinople had therefore been questioned. The fifteenth canon of Nicaea forbade moving from

180 Chadwick 1967, 149–150; Davis 1990, 115–116, 119; Delcogliano 2021, 276–278.

181 Davis 1990, 127; Pihkala 1997, 197. For the canons of the Council of Constantinople 381 in English see e.g. <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils>.

one episcopal see to another. Gregory left the meeting and retired to Cappadocia.<sup>182</sup>

The council then elected the priest Flavian as bishop of Antioch and Nectarius, an administrator, as bishop of Constantinople. The latter was consecrated bishop immediately after his baptism. It was not uncommon for an upper-class layman to be ordained bishop without ordination as a deacon or priest, but the councils frowned on the practice. The assembly's second canon established the principle of the fifteenth canon of Nicaea, according to which one could not move from one episcopal see to another. In the same context reference was made to the supra-territorial jurisdiction of Alexandria and Antioch in a particular ecclesiastical province. The remark was based on the 'principle of accommodation' later adopted by the Eastern Orthodox Church, according to which an episcopal see's importance depended on its societal significance. The ninth canon of the Local Council of Antioch in 341 had already stipulated that the bishops of the province should recognize the importance of the 'metropolitan' – that is, the bishop of the provincial capital – and that the metropolitan should bear responsibility for the entire ecclesiastical province.<sup>183</sup>

Doctrinally and from the perspective of the Nicæan faith's continuity, it was essential that the Council of Constantinople in 381 affirmed the key term 'of the same substance' (*homoousios*) in the Nicene Creed of 325. At the Constantinople meeting a carefully worded addition concerning the Holy Spirit relied on Basil the Great's argument that the Holy Spirit was worshipped and honoured with the Father and the Son in the liturgy, and that the difference between the Son and the Spirit was that the Son was 'born of the Father', but the Holy Spirit 'proceeds from the Father'. The council also condemned Apollinarianism, which belittled Jesus's humanity, and Macedonianism, which denied the Holy Spirit's full divinity.<sup>184</sup>

The most important of the council's lost documents was the *Tomus*, which explained in detail the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity – that is, in accordance with the decisions of the ecumenical councils – and the rejection of heretical views. The *Tomus* appears to have been a separate

182 Davis 1990, 127; Delcogliano 2021, 275.

183 Davis 1990, 127; Behr 2004, 409.

184 Chadwick 1967, 150–151; Davis 1990, 125; Behr 2004, 408–409. Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 71 describe how Cappadocian theology dominated the meeting.



document from the creed and canons. According to J. N. D. Kelly there are references to the creed of the Council of Constantinople in the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus, Pseudo-Athanasius, and Theodore of Mopsuestia. The present Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed's written form comes from the Council of Chalcedon's second session in 451. It was then considered an extension of the Nicene Creed, and in the Middle Ages it was called only the Nicene Creed.<sup>185</sup>

However, the confession was refined in more ways than concerning the Holy Spirit, though it can be considered consistent with the Nicaean faith. The supplement on the Holy Spirit was probably drafted during the short presidency of Gregory of Nazianzus to explain the Nicaean faith amicably to the Macedonians, bishops denying the divinity of the Holy Spirit, because Emperor Theodosius wanted to heal the schism and unite them as part of orthodoxy.<sup>186</sup>

In general, therefore, the Council of Constantinople merely affirmed the Nicaean faith's basic ideas, even though it did not adopt the same wording or even the same basic text. It added elements to the creed to address problems yet to be foreseen at Nicaea. The formulation 'eternally begotten of the Father' unequivocally distinguished the 'birth of Christ of the Father' from the creation of the world and excluded the Nicaean interpretation from Platonic cosmology. A formulation derived from the Old Roman Creed 'of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary' was added to reject some Arians' idea that the Logos himself produced the humanity he had embraced. The discussion was also a prelude to the process that led to Chalcedon's Christological dogma. The expression 'his kingdom will have no end' was aimed both against the thinking of the anti-Nicaean Marcellus of Ancyra (d. 374) that the kingdom of the Son would end, and he would hand it over to the Father, and against the idea of Photinus, an even more radical disciple of Ancyra, that the Son was merely a temporary object materializing the Father's energy.<sup>187</sup>

However, the creed's main protest was directed against the Macedonians, or pneumatomachi, deniers of the Holy Spirit's divinity, whom the council's

185 Davis 1990, 121–123.

186 Davis 1990, 123; Behr 2004, 412–413.

187 Davis 1990, 124, Pihkala 1997, 198–199; Behr 2004, 414–416; Kelly 2009, 30; Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 74; Kinzig 2024, 363–378.

first canon called semi-Arians.<sup>188</sup> The creed's statements about the Holy Spirit were cautious and conciliatory. The Spirit was not referred to, as *the same essence as* was used when discussing the Son's relationship with the Father. Nor was the Holy Spirit called God in as many words as the Son. The choice of softer biblical expressions indicated a desire to emulate Emperor Theodosius's attempt to mediate in the direction of the Macedonians. Thus, for example, 2 Cor. 3:17 clearly refers to the Holy Spirit as Lord, and 2 Cor. 3:6 and John 6:63 as 'Giver of life'.<sup>189</sup>

In conclusion, the Council of Constantinople clearly devoted four divine attributes to the Holy Spirit: (1) the divine title 'Lord'; (2) divine missions – that is, giving life and inspiring prophets; (3) origin from the Father, not by creation but by proceeding; and (4) supreme worship on an equal footing with that dedicated to the Father and the Son.<sup>190</sup>

## Council canons and Western reaction

In addition to the first canon on condemned heresies and the second canon prohibiting bishops interfering in the affairs of another diocese, the third and fourth canons were also approved by the Council of Constantinople. According to the third canon the bishop of Constantinople, the emperor's new capital, held an honorary position as the second after the bishop of Rome, as Constantinople was the 'new Rome'. The principle of accommodation was thus applied when, after the last council, Emperor Constantine had made Constantinople the capital fifty years earlier, exceeding Alexandria and Antioch in rank.<sup>191</sup>

188 Canon 1: The Faith of the Three Hundred and Eighteen Fathers assembled at Nice in Bithynia shall not be set aside, but shall remain firm. And every heresy shall be anathematized, particularly that of the Eunomians or [Anomæans, the Arians or] Eudoxians, and that of the Semi-Arians or pneumatomachi, and that of the Sabellians, and that of the Marcellians, and that of the Photinians, and that of the Apollinarians. <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils>

189 Davis 1990, 125.

190 Davis 1990, 126.

191 Davis 1990, 128; Behr 2004, 409–410. Canon 3: 'The Bishop of Constantinople, however, shall have the prerogative of honour after the Bishop of Rome, because Constantinople is New Rome.'

The fourth canon stated that the consecration of Maximus the Cynic as bishop of Constantinople, as well as the ordinations at which he had officiated in the office of the church, was found invalid.<sup>192</sup> The council's fifth and sixth canons actually date to the local Council of Constantinople in 382. The seventh canon, dealing with the practice of receiving converts from delusional Christian groups, is even earlier.<sup>193</sup>

The decision on Constantinople's primacy alienated both Alexandria and Rome. The West fought a nine-century battle against the Council of Constantinople's decisions before it was adopted. The authenticity of its creed was also questioned. Doctrinally, it was essential, and primarily in accordance with the Western theological tradition, that the council's decisions marked the end of the Arian attempt to hijack the church of the empire. Nevertheless, Arianism lived on until the 500s among the Goths. Special mention should be made of Bishop Wulfila, a translator of the Gothic Bible, a Western Goth whom Eusebius of Nicomedia had consecrated as a missionary bishop. In the Roman Empire Arianism died unloved and unlamented. The movement, which had begun as a bold attempt to formulate Christian doctrine approachably for a learned audience, ended in superstitious repetition of outdated slogans.<sup>194</sup>

Arianism's condemnation in the West was confirmed in September 381 by the Council of Thirty-five Bishops held in Aquileia, presided over by Ambrosius, bishop of Milan. The assembly protested against Nectarius's uncanonical consecration as bishop of Constantinople and supported Maximus the Cynic as the rightful bishop. The following year, however, Ambrose realized the true nature of Maximus and withdrew his support. When Paulinus of Antioch died in 388, Flavian, who became bishop in 382, was recognized in the West, and the Meletian schism came to an end. In 382 Pope Damasus convened a council in Rome that stated that the Church of Rome was not placed first by the decisions of councils but by the mouth of our Lord when he said to Peter, 'You are Peter, and on this

192 Canon 4: 'Concerning Maximus the Cynic and the disorder which has happened in Constantinople on his account, it is decreed that Maximus never was and is not now a Bishop; that those who have been ordained by him are in no order whatever of the clergy; since all which has been done concerning him or by him, is declared to be invalid.'

193 Davis 1990, 126, 128.

194 Chadwick 1967, 151; 249; Behr 2004, 414; Kelly 2009, 37.

rock I will build my church'. The importance of the Apostle Paul and Rome as the place of his death was also highlighted. Pope Damasus's reaction to the Eastern principle of accommodation was clear: the bishop of Rome's primacy was based on his succession from Peter and Paul, and the episcopal sees' hierarchical order was based on Peter: Rome was Peter's first see; Alexandria, consecrated by Peter's pupil Mark, the second. Antioch, as Peter's residence before he moved to Rome, was third.<sup>195</sup>

As early as 376 the Western emperor Gratian had recognized in state law that the bishop of Rome had the right to hear appeals from metropolitans, primarily in Gaul and Italy, and otherwise from metropolitans who had not received justice from their own metropolitans. In 380 Emperor Theodosius had appointed Damasus of Rome and Peter of Alexandria as guardians of orthodoxy. Damasus considered his episcopal see apostolic and adopted imperial courtship. He began to call his fellow bishops sons, not brothers. One of his key – if disputed – achievements was to place pride in the society of the Roman Empire at the service of Christianity's position. This was evident in the emphasis on the importance of the founding Apostles Peter and Paul and their burials. Damasus also promoted the liturgical remembrance of saints and martyrs – above all Peter and Paul but also Martin of Tours, for example – in the West. The self-esteem of Western Christendom thus increased in relation to the older Eastern Church.<sup>196</sup> Pope Hormisdas (d. 523) finally recognized Constantinople and three other general councils. However, the West did not accept the canons of the Council of Constantinople until the Second Council of Lyon in 1274.<sup>197</sup>

In the West the pope's position was strengthened, as was the church's independence. In eastern Constantinople the emperor was closer to the patriarch of Constantinople, whose seat was the episcopal see of the new Rome. However, the situation was less simple than that the church was more under the care of the state and the emperor in the East, and in the West the pope was dominant.<sup>198</sup> For example, Popes Gelasius (492–496)

195 Chadwick 1967, 162–163; Davis 1990, 129; Krötzel 2004, 28; Kelly 2009, 31; Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 169.

196 Chadwick 1967, 215. For Damasus see also Karkinen 2021, 243–263.

197 Davis 1990, 130. For Pope Hormisdas see Karkinen 2021, 373–379.

198 For the crises of authority resulting from alliances with the Roman Empire see also Arffman 2022, 131–172.

and Gregory the Great (590–604) recognized the authority of Caesar in secular matters, though Gelasius, in accordance with the doctrine of two swords, emphasized that the spiritual sword was superior to the earthly one, and Gregory the Great was suspicious of the Greeks. Augustine had taught him to distinguish between church and state. Gregory also began to see that the church of the West should be more oriented towards mission among the Western barbarians and building a partnership with them than towards the Eastern Roman emperor. This observation accelerated the separation of East and West. The time of the Church Fathers is therefore considered to have ended with Gregory the Great in the West and John of Damascus in the East (675–749). It then becomes more difficult to write a single story of the Catholic Church.<sup>199</sup>

At the level of political theology, the difference was that in the East there was a symphony, or a common voice, between church and state, and there was no understanding for a view of the church and state as two communities (*societas*) as in the West (cf. Augustine). In the Eastern symphony they were parts of the same whole, striving for harmony. The emperor was seen as the secular equivalent of a divine monarch, or patriarch. He was expected to represent orthodox Christianity; if this was not the case, there was strong protest. In this theory, however, the balance could be seriously disturbed if the state sought to control the church. In the West, where the paradigm was more ambivalent, the church could similarly seek to dominate the state. However, it was in the West, in Merovingian Gaul, in the 500s that a system arose in which the king regularly appointed bishops. Meanwhile, in the

199 Chadwick 1967, 254, 288; Kelly 2009, 49. For the strengthening papal requirements see also Nichols 2010, 191–226; for the political rivalry between Rome and Constantinople Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 178; for Pope Gelasius Karkinen 2021, 349–355. Cf. Krötzel 2004, 48 points out that the Byzantine emperors were steadfastly following late antique tradition, according to which the emperor also had supreme power in issues related to faith. In the 6th and 7th centuries even the popes had to send their credos to the emperor in Constantinople to be checked before they could be installed. Krötzel 2004, 25 recognizes a struggle between a firm, though long directly subordinated, relationship with the Byzantine emperor and the bishop of Rome's intention to liberate himself and become more independent as typical of the bishops of Rome's political actions until the end of Western Rome in 476, and even until the 9th and 10th centuries.

East the emperor occasionally influenced the appointments of important bishops.<sup>200</sup>

## Ephesus 431: From the Trinity to Christology: the two natures of Jesus Christ and the judgment of Nestorius's separation Christology

The period after the Council of Constantinople in 381 was very challenging for the Roman Empire's unity. Theodosius I, the last ruler to serve as emperor of both Eastern and Western Rome, died in 395. His sons, Arcadius in the East and Honorius in the West, were both orthodox Christians and continued their father's approach.<sup>201</sup>

## John Chrysostom: the turbulent time of the truth-teller as patriarch of Constantinople

The declaration by the Council of 381 that Constantinople was a 'new Rome' that should take precedence over old Rome in state terms provoked irritation in both the patriarchate of Alexandria and in Rome. The Alexandrians sought to promote the presence of weak and ineffective bishops in Constantinople. After Nectarius's death in 397 John of Antioch, or John Chrysostom ('Golden-mouthed') (r. 347–407), was elected bishop of Constantinople. His surviving eloquent sermons remain famous. Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria, initially collaborated with Chrysostom in resolving the long-running schism in Antioch. After the monks who followed Origen's teachings appealed to the bishop of Constantinople concerning Theophilus's treatment of them, Chrysostom was forced to condemn Theophilus's harshness. As Chrysostom

<sup>200</sup> Chadwick 1967, 165–166.

<sup>201</sup> Davis 1990, 134.

had a long history with the Origenist monks, there was reason to suspect the verdict was unfair. Theophilus decided to depose Chrysostom, who facilitated the task by acquiring enemies.<sup>202</sup>

In 401, after Chrysostom received fifty monks from Egypt who were fleeing Theophilus's harsh rule partly into the service of the church, Empress Eudoxia summoned Theophilus. Theophilus protested against the criticism, arriving in Constantinople with twenty-nine bishops and his nephew Cyril. Theophilus allied himself with Bishop John's enemies and soon won over the empress, whom Chrysostom had unflatteringly compared to the notorious Queen Jezebel of Israel. Theophilus did not hesitate to use funds at the appropriate point to gain supporters. At the Synod of the Oak near Chalcedon a raft of accusations was made in absentia against Chrysostom, resulting in his removal from office and exile. However, the people rebelled, and Theophilus thought it wise to leave Constantinople. After an earthquake shook the city, the superstitious empress allowed John to return.<sup>203</sup>

John could not keep quiet, however. After a silver statue of Empress Eudoxia was erected in front of his cathedral he compared the empress to Salome dancing for John the Baptist's head. Chrysostom was now charged with exercising his episcopal ministry during his removal from office, contrary to the canons. On a quiet Saturday in 404 imperial troops attacked his entourage. For the sake of the city's peace John thought it best to go into exile. The bishops he had excommunicated returned, and the bishops he had ordained were expelled. Bishop Innocent I of Rome protested in vain to John's persecutors. Before his death Chrysostom went from one prison to another for three years. Alexandria had won the first struggle with Constantinople.<sup>204</sup>

## Germanic invasion of the Roman Empire

The Germanic peoples made gains in the East, conquering large areas of the empire's less populated and economically weaker western region. In

202 Chadwick 1967, 186–187; Davis 1990, 137; Kelly 2009, 37–38.

203 Davis 1990, 137.

204 Davis 1990, 138. For Innocent I see also Karkinen 2021, 278–291.

the mid-winter of 406/7, the Vandal Alans and Suebi crossed the frozen Rhine near Mainz with great force. They wandered for about three years in Gaul and then invaded the Iberian Peninsula. Roman rule retreated to the northeastern corner of Spain. The Western Goths, who had defeated the Roman emperor and his legions at Adrianopolis in 378, now conquered Thrace, Greece, Illyria, and northern Italy, before besieging Rome itself for three days under their chief Alaric in 410. In Rome the Church Father Augustine began writing his great *De Civitate Dei* in response to the pagans' accusations that their gods had never allowed such destruction to befall the city.<sup>205</sup>

The Western emperor was the weak Honorius, who was based in Ravenna. His successor Valentinian III, who succeeded him in 423, was also weak. His army consisted mainly of Central Asian Hunnic troops. In 429 the Vandals left Spain for North Africa and established a kingdom there, with Carthage as its capital, from where they disrupted Roman trade in the western Mediterranean. During the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431 Germanic tribes were building new kingdoms in the West, superseding practices based on Roman law. This also led to the strengthening of their practice of worship in accordance with the Arian Christian faith in these areas. Roman aristocrats were forced to move to their rural villas and hand over much of their property to the invaders. Bishops professing the Nicæan faith remained in the old Roman cities to mediate between the Germanic conquerors and their Roman subjects.<sup>206</sup>

The Eastern part of the empire held its own from the fortresses of Constantinople against the Goths and the Huns of the Danube front. Emperor Arcadius died in 408 and was succeeded by Theodosius II, initially with his sister Pulcheria, then with his wife Eudoxia. Under Theodosius Constantinople's walls were reinforced, and Roman law bearing his name was codified. Like his grandfather Theodosius the Great, the emperor convened a general council in Ephesus in 431.<sup>207</sup>

205 Davis 1990, 134–135; Kelly 2009, 32–33.

206 Davis 1990, 135–136.

207 Davis 1990, 136.



# The Nestorian controversy: is Mary the Theotokos or the Christotokos?

In 428 Nestorius, the head of a monastery in Antioch and known as a good preacher, became bishop of Constantinople. At his installation he declared war on all heresies. Ironically, this nemesis of heretics was himself accused of heresy. The Antiochian clergy who accompanied Nestorius began to preach against an old Greek prayer that used Mary's title of *Theotokos*. Nestorius attacked the title on every occasion. This prompted protests because it was part of the religious heritage of the local church in Constantinople and its liturgical sense of faith. Nestorius's sermons were interrupted by people shouting that Mary was the mother of God. A sign was hung on the wall claiming that Nestorius followed Paul of Samosata's teaching and claimed Jesus was not God. The accusation was unfair, however.<sup>208</sup>

Nestorius threw the protesting monks into prison. He also expanded the controversy by publishing his sermons widely. He even sent them to Celestine, bishop of Rome, making the mistake of enquiring about what had been wrong with the teaching of Julian of Eclanum and Celestius, the two leaders of the Pelagian party who had fled Constantinople. Bishop Augustine of Hippo especially had spent years rooting out this heresy of grace in the West. Another heresy emerged in the West when the Trierian monk Liporius claimed that the divine Word and the human Jesus were two different persons, and that Jesus had gradually become God through his virtues. Aurelius, bishop of Carthage, and Augustine, bishop of Hippo, corrected and guided Liporius, who recanted. Doctrinal discussions thus seemed to achieve ecclesiastical peace in the West. In the East the situation was different.<sup>209</sup>

Pope Celestine placed the writings of Nestorius in the hands of Deacon Leo, the later pope. He delivered them to Cassian, abbot of the monastery of Marseille, who lived in the East. Cassian had already condemned Liporius's dichotomous Christology. He now wrote seven critical books about Nestorius for the Roman authorities. Cassian was not a great theologian, however. He misinterpreted Nestorius's refusal to use the term *Theotokos*

208 Davis 1990, 140; Pihkala 1997, 228–236; Kelly 2009, 38–40.

209 Davis 1990, 140–141.

as revealing that he did not consider Jesus to be fully God, but only adopted by God's Word. Marius Mercator, a Latin layman living in Constantinople, also kept the pope informed. The bishop of Rome had a bad impression of Nestorius, weakened by distance and the need to rely on Latin translations of his Greek writings.<sup>210</sup>

In Alexandria Patriarch Cyril followed the events against the background of the critical tradition of his episcopal see, the prosperity of Egypt, and the many monks living in the wilderness. He has been described as both an active theologian and a zealot in ecclesiastical politics. In 429 Cyril wrote to the monks in the wilderness at Easter, warning them of Nestorius's errors. The letter reached Constantinople immediately, as Cyril had anticipated. Nestorius immediately preached against Cyril's letter and commissioned one of his priests to draft a detailed refutation, which he sent to Cyril. If each side had made a genuine effort to understand the other without compromising its convictions, agreement might well have been found, and the Nestorian and miaphysite dispute over the relationship between Christ's divine and human nature might have been avoided – or at least its escalation.<sup>211</sup> In addition to the theological problem the ferocity of the confrontation between Cyril and Nestorius was motivated by ecclesiastical and national politics.<sup>212</sup> This situation provided an opportunity for Cyril to raise his profile when the patriarchate of Alexandria was seeking its old place as second in rank to Rome while the decision of the Third Canon of the Second Council of Constantinople in 381 on the place of honour of the episcopal see of Constantinople after Rome was awaiting confirmation.

## Theological controversy: the term *Theotokos* and the divine-human person of Christ

The controversy began with the term *Theotokos*, but the thinking of defenders and opponents was underlaid by Christological differences. To put it simply, Nestorius represented the Antiochian tradition; Cyril the

<sup>210</sup> Davis 1990, 141.

<sup>211</sup> Chadwick 1967, 194; Davis 1990, 142; Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 91–92.

<sup>212</sup> Pihkala 1997, 237.

Alexandrian. Antiochian (separation) Christology started with the Jesus of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke), seeking to explain how this man was also God. Alexandrian (unity) Christology started with the prologue of the Gospel of John, seeking to understand what it meant that the Word became flesh (*Logos-sarx*). The successors of Eustathius, who was deposed from Antioch in 330, kept alive his dual Word-human Christology (*Logos-anthropos*).<sup>213</sup> Simply put, the difference between the two schools of thought is summarized by the Alexandrian school's emphasis that if Christ was truly to save us, he must be God. The Antiochian school emphasized that if Christ was truly to save us, he must be one of us.<sup>214</sup>

The Antiochian movement was also represented by two important theologians: Diodorus of Tarsus (d. 394); and Nestorius's teacher, John Chrysostom's friend Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428). According to Diodorus's Word-human Christology, grace associated the Word with the human. The connection was not understood as essential, nor did grace change human nature. The Son of Man received only strength and wisdom. Because of this unity Christ could be honoured and worshipped. Diodorus rejected Apollinaris's theory of nature, but as a Platonist recoiled from the divine falling prey to human limitation, the rapprochement between divine and human nature.<sup>215</sup>

Theodore of Mopsuestia strongly defended Christ's full humanity. He sometimes seemed to imply that the Word took possession of a man who already existed. For him the human being was a sanctuary where God dwelt. It was one person (*prosopon*). Theodore was able to formulate the Christological union (*union*) in a way that came close to the Council of Chalcedon on the two natures of Christ: 'We must display a distinction of natures, but unity of person.' The intention was clear, but his dual

213 For example, Pihkala 1997, 214 says that the actual Christological controversies are usually described as a duel between unity Christology (*Logos-sarx*) and separation Christology (*Logos-anthropos*). The former was represented by the Alexandrian school; the latter by the Antiochian. Pihkala sees these descriptions as quite accurate if the focus is on the controversy's latest period, from the end of the 4th to the beginning of the 5th centuries.

214 Nichols 2010, 56. Cf. Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 85, note 5; the danger of the division between the 'Antiochian' and 'Alexandrian' schools is that they are seen as almost equally powerful sides, and that the definition of Chalcedon was a compromise between them.

215 Chadwick 1967, 192–193; Davis 1990, 142–143.

method could not express the unity of Christ's person sufficiently clearly. The fundamental difference between Word and human, between God and God's sanctuary, and between embracer and embraced emphasized the various elements of Christ's person too strongly. Although he insisted on the unity of the person of Christ, he preferred to use the term *conjuncture to unity*.<sup>216</sup>

From Cyril's perspective Theodore failed to acknowledge that the Word and 'I' were the same factor in Christ. 'I' was at the intersection of the divine and the human, as if it was a uniting element in this thinking.<sup>217</sup> The essential question was whether Jesus Christ was the same person as the Word of God, the Son of God, born in eternity.<sup>218</sup>

Nestorius's explanation of Christ started from separation and got into trouble with the unity of his person. Against Arius and Apollinaris he sought to do justice to Christ's full humanity. Calling Mary the *Theotokos* meant either Arianism – the Son was only a created being born of a woman – or Apollinarism – Jesus's humanity was perfected through the Word's presence. Nestorius held that *Christotokos* was a more theologically accurate title for Mary. She gave birth to Christ, a human being who was simultaneously an instrument of divinity. Some interpreted Nestorius as an adoptionist who saw Jesus only as an adopted son of God. Nestorius rejected this: there were two natures in Christ, both true, though not simultaneously observable. These two natures were unalterably and separately united. Divinity was in the human, and the human was in divinity, without mixing. Christ did not have two persons but united two elements within himself. Suffering and death were borne by the union of God and the human, not by God's Word or by the human alone and separately, but by the 'third'. The unity of the person was not clearly expressed.<sup>219</sup>

216 Chadwick 1967, 193–194; Davis 1990, 143–145; Müller 2010, 340–342.

217 Davis 1990, 145.

218 Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 90.

219 Davis 1990, 145–146. Pihkala 1997, 247 crystallizes the views of Nestorius and Cyril and their basic problems in the exaggerated difference of unity Christology: 'Nestorius's unity Christology seems to decompose Christ, but nevertheless he claims from beginning to end that because of the "united *prosopon*", ... the unity is real. For its part Cyril's Logos-centred unity Christology ... seems to evaporate the tangible human person and the duality it presupposes, but nevertheless he claims from beginning to end that God has become a real human being.' See also Müller 2010, 342–343.

Pope Celestine convened a council in Rome in August 430 that declared Nestorius's teaching unacceptable, ordering him to re-evaluate it and accept the teaching of Rome, Alexandria, and the worldwide church within ten days. Celestine commissioned Cyril to deal with the matter and by virtue of the authority of the bishop of Rome, or essentially the divine authority of Christ, to excommunicate the bishop of Constantinople if necessary. Emperor Theodosius II announced the convening of a general council that would also deal with complaints against Cyril himself. Empowered by the pontifical commission, Cyril convened a council in Alexandria to quote Nestorius and sent a third letter to him to remind him of the need for reassessment and his removal from office if this did not happen. Cyril then sent a letter to Pope Celestine, accompanied by a condemnation of twelve theological ideas, or anathemas, which uncompromisingly presented Cyril's theology. This was calculated to terrify the Antioch school's theologians. He insisted that Nestorius accept these anathemas within ten days or suffer the consequences.<sup>220</sup>

Cyril considered that his Second Epistle to Nestorius continued the Council of Nicaea's theological work. The Only Begotten Son of the Father, true God of true God, through whom the Father made the universe, became human, suffered, rose from the dead, and ascended into the heavens. These statements should be honoured when considering what it meant that God's Word became human. God's Word was personally associated with a human being, and he was called the Son of Man. This was not just about will or favour, nor was it just about appropriating the human person. The natures were brought into true unity, but the differences between them remained. Through the indescribable unity of divinity and humanity we received one Lord and Christ and the Son. The Word was personally associated with human nature for our sake and for our salvation in a woman, which was why he could be said to have been born in the flesh.<sup>221</sup>

Cyril emphasized that to reject this personal union (*unio personalis*) was to make the mistake of having two sons. The scriptures did not say that the Word united himself to the person of a human, but that he became flesh. The Virgin Mary was therefore called the *Theotokos* not because the divinity

220 Chadwick 1967, 198; Davis 1990, 148–149. For Pope Celestine see also Karkinen 2021, 299–307.

221 Davis 1990, 149–150; Müller 2010, 343–344.

originated from her but because the holy body of Christ with a rational soul was born of her. The Word was connected personally to this body.<sup>222</sup>

In his Third Epistle to Nestorius, Cyril added that flesh did not become divine nature, and divine nature did not disappear into human nature. The Word of God, which was visible as the infant Jesus, also filled the universe as God and sat at the right hand of the Father. The Word was connected to the human through a personal association so that it was not just a human who outwardly bore divinity in himself. Through the union of natures, the Word dwelt in the human as the soul lived in the body. Neither joining together nor confrontation was appropriate to describe this unity. In the eucharist we partook of the body of the Word himself. The basis was thus also laid for the idea of the real presence of Christ in the eucharist.<sup>223</sup>

Cyril added twelve sentences to this third letter, which Nestorius was ordered to accept. Mary was the *Theotokos* because she made the Word of God flesh. The Word was personally united with the flesh, and the same person was both God and human. Word and human were worshipped together. Jesus used his own power when he performed miracles, not just the power of the Holy Spirit. The Word himself became our high priest, not the human separate from him. The Lord's flesh was lifegiving because it was the Word's flesh. The Word suffered, died, and rose from the dead in the flesh. According to the Nicene Creed the pre-existing Word was the same person after the incarnation, now in the body, in the flesh. Unity was realized from the outset, at the moment of conception in Mary's womb. Mary was therefore correctly called *Theotokos*. It was a 'hypostatic' or personal union. However, the divine and human did not mix. The difference was not separation but was based on intellectual analysis. It was the constant descent of God's loving goodness among us. The Word became flesh to make humanity as a whole his own.<sup>224</sup>

Cyril rejected the expression 'in two natures' because he understood it as separation. Nature was synonymous with *hypostasis*, a tangible existence. He preferred to talk about two natural qualities. Cyril used Apollinaris's formulation 'one incarnate nature of the divine Word' because he thought

222 Davis 1990, 150.

223 Davis 1990, 150.

224 Davis 1990, 151–152.

it was Athanasius's. Realizing that talk of two natures did not always mean separation, he was willing to compromise. To settle the matter once and for all, Emperor Theodosius II convened a general council in Ephesus on Pentecost Sunday, 7 June 431. Like his predecessors, Theodosius considered himself to have the right to intervene in ecclesiastical affairs because he saw Caesar as dependent on proper worship. Before the council John of Antioch wrote to his old friend Nestorius and persuaded him to accept the term *Theotokos*.<sup>225</sup>

## Divided meeting in Ephesus

In June 431 fifty of Cyril's bishops, sixteen of Nestorius's, and twelve from Pamphylia and fifty from the province of Asia, assembled by Memnon of Ephesus, attended the meeting. Many were opponents of Nestorius because he had tried to bring them under the control of the episcopal see of Constantinople. Memnon had closed the churches of Ephesus to Nestorius and his followers. Juvenal of Jerusalem arrived with fifteen Palestinian bishops and joined Cyril. Flavian of Philippi and his delegation came from Macedonia. There were no bishops from farther west. Augustine, bishop of Hippo, had died the previous summer. The metropolitan of Carthage had sent word that the Vandal invasion had so shaken the northern coast of Africa that none of its bishops could attend.<sup>226</sup>

## The judgment of Nestorius and the decision's theological essence

Encouraged by the support of Pope Celestine, Cyril announced on 21 June that he would convene the council the following day. Immediately, sixty-eight bishops, twenty-one of them metropolitans, protested. However, Cyril

225 Davis 1990, 152–153. Pihkala 1997, 214–215 describes Cyril as representing the Alexandrian Christological school well. Cyril does not deny the existence of Christ's human soul, but he does not elaborate this theologically.

226 Davis 1990, 153–154. For the meeting in Ephesus see also e.g. Kelly 2009, 40–41.

opened the meeting on 22 June in the Church of Mary in Ephesus.<sup>227</sup> About 160 bishops were involved. Nestorius refused to attend a meeting at which his prosecutor served as judge. Juvenal of Jerusalem suggested that the faith of Nicaea should be proclaimed. No new doctrinal formulations were needed, nor would a fragmented meeting have produced them.<sup>228</sup>

At the beginning of the meeting the priest Peter of Alexandria read the 318 Fathers', or Nicene, Creed. This was followed by the reading of Cyril's Second Epistle to Nestorius. Cyril asked the Fathers to declare the letter orthodox and in accordance with the Nicene Creed. Under Juvenal's leadership everyone declared this was their faith. Nestorius's response to Cyril was then read. The bishops voted that Nestorius's doctrine was blasphemous and anti-Nicaean. The meeting's essential doctrinal conclusion was that Cyril's Second Epistle to Nestorius was in accordance with Nicaea; Nestorius's response was not.<sup>229</sup>

Contrary to true faith, Nestorius was said to have taught that he could not call a baby God who had been breastfed by a virgin or believe in a God who was two or three months old. He followed his own rule that only Christ's human nature or united person had human qualities, not divinity. A series of patristic texts compiled by Cyril and texts by Nestorius was read next. They were included in the meeting's appendices. The council passed a resolution stating: 'Our Lord Jesus Christ, whom he has blasphemed, decrees through the Holy Synod here present that Nestorius is excluded from the episcopal dignity and every priestly assembly.' Ultimately, 197 bishops signed the document.<sup>230</sup>

The emphasis on the person of Christ's unity was theologically essential to the decision. There were no two subjects in Christ – that is, the bearers of his divinity and his humanity. The subject of unity was the Word of God, the Logos himself. He constituted the reality of the unity of the God-human. What was essential was the doctrine of salvation, *the soteriological* motive. In Jesus Christ God had come into human reality, been born, suffered, died, and risen from the dead. God was the author of the salvation event.

227 For the decisions of the Council of Ephesus see e.g. <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils>

228 Davis 1990, 154–155; Pihkala 1997, 258.

229 Davis 1990, 154–155.

230 Davis 1990, 155.



A hypostatic union in the person of Christ also resulted in the exchange of qualities between natures, not at the level of natures but in relation to Christ's divine-human person. This was crystallized in Mary as *Theotokos*. She gave birth to the person of God's Word so that he derived his human nature from her. The Logos himself was the author of his incarnation.<sup>231</sup>

Nestorius was harshly addressed as 'Nestorius, new Judas...'. He protested: 'I was summoned by Cyril who assembled the Council, by Cyril who presided. Who was judge? Cyril. Who was accuser? Cyril. Who was bishop of Rome? Cyril. Cyril was everything.' When the bishops finished their long day's work and came out of the Church of Mary, the church people of Ephesus cheered. The people thought Christ had overcome heresy; Mary, the mother of God, had defeated Nestorius.<sup>232</sup>

## The counter-campaign of Nestorius and his supporters

However, Nestorius and ten of his supporters launched an energetic campaign to thwart the assembly's decisions. On 26 June Patriarch John of Antioch and the bishops of the East arrived. They had been informed of the incident as they approached the city. They convened their own meeting at Patriarch John's lodgings, where they heard the report of the emperor's representative, Count Candidian. Forty-three bishops ignored the council's decisions and the pope and signed John of Antioch's creed. At the same time, they excommunicated Cyril, Memnon of Ephesus, and their followers. On 29 June the emperor's envoy arrived, annulled the decisions of the Council of Cyril and forbade the bishops to leave Ephesus. At the beginning of July papal envoys – two Italian bishops and the priest Philip – arrived with instructions not to interfere in the debate but to act as judges and rely on Cyril in all matters. By the 400s the pope had adopted the habit of sending his representatives to the council and assessing what others

231 Müller 2010, 344–345.

232 Davis 1990, 155–156.

were doing, rather than being just one of the participants, which would naturally have diminished his authority.<sup>233</sup>

The next day, at the third session, the decisions of Cyril's meeting were read to the papal envoys. They accepted what had been done and supported the decision to remove Nestorius. In his address the priest Philip described the pope as the holder of the power conferred on the Apostle Peter, the Prince and Head of the Apostles, the pillar of faith and the foundation of the Catholic Church, and the emperor who convened the council as the guardian of the Catholic faith.<sup>234</sup>

At the fourth and fifth sessions, which Cyril chaired in the papal envoys' presence, John of Antioch's decisions were solemnly set aside. John refused to attend the meeting but was not removed from office. He was, however, forbidden to support or harm others. At two additional sessions it was decided that the Nicene Creed took precedence over other creeds. The assembly also approved six canons of ecclesiastical law related to problems with Nestorius. Metropolitans who supported John of Antioch's party, supported Nestorius, or embraced the theology of Celestius of Pelagia must be excommunicated and stripped of episcopal dignity. Provincial bishops who joined John of Antioch must be stripped of their priestly privileges. The clergy whom Nestorius and his successors had suspended regained their rights. There were also warnings not to follow bishops who did not accept the meeting's decisions. Clergy who publicly or privately supported Nestorius or Celestius were to be deposed. Clergy who did not accept the assembly's decisions were to be deposed; lay people were to be excommunicated.<sup>235</sup>

The imperial commissary, Count John, did not arrive until the beginning of August. Without distinguishing between the meetings of Cyril and John he confirmed the dismissals of Nestorius, Cyril, and Memnon and convened a meeting of all parties for discussion. All attempts at reconciliation failed, so he placed all three bishops under house arrest. Supporters of both Nestorius and Cyril sought to influence the emperor, and the gifts provided by Cyril's personal doctor from the archbishop's reserve were better. The

233 Davis 1990, 156–157; Kelly 2009, 43.

234 Davis 1990, 157.

235 Davis 1990, 157–158.

emperor convened eight delegates from each party to form his own opinion. Even before this the term *Theotokos* had been agreed. Cyril's supporters included papal envoys. The discussion focused on the rejection of the twelve doctrinal ideas that Cyril put forward. The Nestorian side could not convince Cyril of the need to condemn him for making these statements. The emperor finally broke the stalemate and summoned Cyril's party and the papal envoys to the ordination of Nestorius's successor, Maximian, well known in Rome, as patriarch of Constantinople.<sup>236</sup>

Cyril was allowed to continue in Alexandria, and Memnon in Ephesus. Not everyone in Alexandria was happy with Cyril, as he was considered to have struggled more because of his own hurt than Christ's cause. Nestorius had in any case been deposed, and Alexandria had again defeated Constantinople. Pope Celestine was informed of the decisions of the Council of Cyril. The presence of papal envoys established a connection with the pope, making the council ecumenical in its participants' minds. The assembly's ecumenical nature was fully acknowledged at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, when the Nicene Creed and Cyril's Second Epistle to Nestorius were reaffirmed as a valid interpretation of it.<sup>237</sup>

## The Formula of Union 433

Controversy's dark clouds seemed to be fading. Doctrinal issues continued to cause friction, however. The bone of contention was Cyril's twelve doctrinal judgments against Nestorius's supporters. His opponents wanted them withdrawn or condemned. Cyril compromised with the ageing frontman Bishop Acacius of Berroea. The bishops of the East assured the official sent by the emperor that they would adhere to the Nicaean faith. Cyril responded by asking his opponents to end the controversy by agreeing to Nestorius's removal from office and condemning his teachings. Cyril also politely assured him that he only wanted orthodox faith and peace. Some bishops refused; others were sympathetic. John of Antioch decided

<sup>236</sup> Davis 1990, 159.

<sup>237</sup> Davis 1990, 160.

to accept Nestorius's judgment and ignore the twelve anathemas. He sent Cyril the creed he had prepared during the Council of Ephesus.<sup>238</sup>

Cyril responded that John's creed accorded with Nicaea, the fulfilment of its purpose. The key to resolving the dispute was that Mary was truly the *Theotokos* because the body of Christ did not come from heaven but from Mary, who bore Immanuel (God with us) according to the flesh. The Lord Jesus Christ, perfect in divinity, perfect in humanity, must be recognized as one person. His natures formed an inseparable unity. However, God must not be confused with flesh. The Word's divine nature did not suffer, but the Saviour of the world took upon himself the sufferings of his own flesh. All parties should abide by the Nicæan faith through which the Holy Spirit spoke. Cyril no longer spoke of accepting the twelve anathemas.<sup>239</sup>

Cyril now accepted the use of biblical terms and the language of the Word dwelling in the human body as a 'temple', and that 'two natures become one'. He also allowed references to the Bible that acknowledged some passages spoke of Christ's human nature, others of his divine nature, and together of his person. It was only when the patriarchs of Alexandria and Jerusalem agreed on the *Formula of Union* that Emperor Theodosius II and Pope Sixtus III were informed of the compromise.<sup>240</sup> Cyril's decision to bow to administrative and ecclesiastical political pressure meant that Antiochian Christology's essential features were now accepted.<sup>241</sup> Emperor Theodosius II acted as mediator, sympathetic to both the moderate Antiochians and Cyril. The result was that both sides resiled from their strongest demands and signed the Formula of Union.<sup>242</sup>

Acacius of Melitene and some other bishops felt Cyril had made too many concessions. In Antioch some Apollinarians accused John of Nestorianism, and one of his deacons refused communion with him. Theodoret of Cyrus and other Oriental bishops were horrified by John of Antioch's surrender to Cyril, who had not explicitly retreated from the twelve anathemas. The

238 Davis 1990, 160–162. For the development after Ephesus see also e.g. Kelly 2009, 41–44.

239 Davis 1990, 162. For the meeting at Ephesus and the Formula of Union see also Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 92–95.

240 Davis 1990, 162–163. For Sixtus III see Karkinen 2021, 299–309.

241 Chadwick 1967, 199–200.

242 Pihkala 1997, 259.

bishops of Tyana and Tarsus wrote directly to Pope Sixtus III seeking justice for the deposed Nestorius, who told him that the bishops of the East could turn to the pope for help in an emergency. Maximian died in Constantinople and was succeeded as patriarch by Proclus, who had already twice been a candidate. The emperor pressured Theodoret of Cyrus to accept the compromise. Theodoret agreed and signed the Formula of Union without condemning Nestorius. Fifteen dissenting bishops were deposed, and Alexander of Hieropolis was sent to Egypt's metal mines. Nestorius himself was first sent from Antioch to Petra in Arabia and from there to Egypt. There he published the *Bazaar of Heracleides*, pseudonymously because he was banned from writing.<sup>243</sup>

## The Armenian Church and the emergence of a new controversy

During the Nestorian controversy the Armenian Church was undergoing intellectual renewal under its presiding bishop, Catholicos Sahak, and its chief theologian, Mesrop. Classic texts of the Greek and Syrian Fathers were translated to Armenian. Among them was Theodore of Mopsuestia, the intellectual father of the doctrine of Nestorius. A few Apollinarians seeking refuge in Armenia wrote against the Antiochians. The staunch Cyrillians Bishops Acacius of Melitene and Rabbula of Edessa warned the Armenians not to accept teachings connected with Nestorius, who had been condemned as a heretic. The Armenian Council decided to send two priests to Constantinople to determine the truth.<sup>244</sup>

The new patriarch Proclus was a staunch supporter of the term *Theotokos*. In 437 he wrote a tome to the Armenian Church in which he emphasized that 'one and the same is with the Virgin and of the Virgin'. In formulating Chalcedon's decision, he stated: 'There is only one Son, for [his] natures are not divided into two *hypostases*...' Proclus was thus more precise than Cyril in distinguishing between nature and *hypostasis*. Proclus also sent his letter to the bishops of the East, asking them to subscribe to the condemnation

243 Davis 1990, 163.

244 Davis 1990, 164.

of the teachings of Theodore of Mopsuestia. The bishops of the East were astonished: Nestorius's case had already been dealt with! John of Antioch wrote on behalf of the bishops of the East that they condemned Nestorius and accepted the faith of Nicaea, but they would not condemn a man who had long been dead. The emperor supported them. John also wrote to Cyril asking him to stop agitating. Cyril forwarded the request to Proclus, who withdrew his proposal.<sup>245</sup>

Soon, however, Ibas succeeded the staunch Cyrillian Rabbula as bishop of Edessa. While a professor at the catechetical school in Edessa, Ibas had translated the works of Diodorus of Tarsus into Syriac and was an enthusiastic admirer of Theodore of Mopsuestia. The letter became infamous and the seed of new controversy. However, the patriarchs of Constantinople, Alexandria, and Antioch, supported by Emperor Theodosius, calmed the rising storm. Peace reigned in the East from 438 to 446. Patriarch Proclus extended his jurisdiction to Illyria, which had previously leaned towards Rome. He also extended it to Asia Minor at the expense of the metropolitan of Ephesus. In 438 Proclus solemnly returned the body of John Chrysostom to the capital, where it was buried in the Basilica of the Apostles among the other patriarchs.<sup>246</sup>

After Cyril's death in Alexandria in 444 he was replaced by his archdeacon Dioscorus, who had been with him at the Council of Ephesus, and, regretting the compromise of 433, represented a more Christologically extreme interpretation than Cyril. The new patriarch broke Cyril's family's six-decade rule in Alexandria. He deposed Cyril's nephew and forced the family to surrender their property. Cyril's supporters were purged from the patriarch's rule, but his teachings were preserved.<sup>247</sup>

Adherents of a strict one-nature doctrine have historically been called (pejoratively) *monophysites*. With today's emerging ecumenical consensus about Christ as true God and true human, the term *miaphysite* is used in ecumenical dialogues, and each church representing Cyrillian Christology is referred to as *Oriental Orthodox*. *Miaphysite* refers to the teaching of the

245 Davis 1990, 164–165, Pihkala 1997, 264.

246 Davis 1990, 165.

247 Davis 1990, 165–166.

Oriental Orthodox following Cyril. This church family's teaching recognizes the divine-human nature of the one incarnate Word of God.<sup>248</sup>

## Nestorianism and Assyrian Christians

Before his death Nestorius, having read Pope Leo's *Tomus*, stated that the truth had finally been reached, and he could die in peace. He also saw the Council of Chalcedon as expressing his deepest beliefs. The miaphysites saw Chalcedon as a return to Nestorianism and Alexandria's humbling before Rome and Antioch. Nestorianism continued to live in opposition to Arianism but partly for geopolitical reasons did not return to the mainstream church when it was outside the empire. A positive return to the Catholic Church was also hampered by the emperor's sometimes brutal church unification policy. Nestorianism became simpler and more radical, which also contributed to the simplification of miaphysitism. Cyril's radical followers, the miaphysites, began to take control of Syria, and the Nestorians moved to Persia, where Nisibis became their centre. The Persian Church officially accepted Nestorianism in 486.<sup>249</sup>

In 489, however, Emperor Zeno exiled the Nestorians to Edessa. The bishopric was established in Seleucia in Persia, in present-day Iraq, and in 498 the bishop of Seleucia became the catholicos of the Eastern Nestorians. Nestorian missionaries were active in Arabia, the Malabar coast of India, and Turkmenistan on the Chinese border after Babai the Great (569–628) established Nestorianism in his church. In 1625 the Sigan-Fu stone, erected in 781 to depict the arrival of Nestorian missionaries in 635, was found in northwest China. The church survived the Muslim conquest, but the catholicos were moved to Baghdad. During the Mongol invasion of the 1200s and 1300s the Nestorians fled to the mountains of Kurdistan, where they became known as Assyrian Christians. In 1897 Nestorius's *Bazaar of*

248 See <https://www.anglicannews.org/media/1416821/Anglican-Oriental-Orthodox-Agreed-Statement-on-Christology-2014.pdf> (referenced 28.10.2024). For the Oriental Orthodox as opposers of the definition of Chalcedon see also Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 104–106.

249 Davis 1990, 166; Pihkala 1997, 290–291.

*Heracleides* was discovered among the Assyrians of Kurdistan. It was printed in the West in 1910.<sup>250</sup>

Protestant and Anglican American and English missionaries discovered unknown Aramaic-speaking Nestorians of the Mountain Patriarchate in Urmia and the Hakkari Mountains in Persia. The Nestorians usually called themselves only Syrian Christians. In the second half of the 1800s the Anglican Church began calling them Assyrians to avoid any association with heresy. American missionaries' actions led to the emergence of Protestant Assyrian churches and the first emigration of Assyrians to the United States, including San Francisco, in the 1800s. Since the 1960s Assyrian Christians have moved in considerable numbers to Sweden and other places. The Assyrians claim that during the First World War an 'Assyrian genocide' coincided with the Armenian genocide. In 2007 the International Association of Genocide Scholars acknowledged the Assyrians as part of the genocide. Today the Assyrian Church of the East has about 350,000 members, and the East Syrian Chaldean Catholic Church about 630,000. Protestant Assyrian churches also include tens of thousands of Assyrians.<sup>251</sup>

Ecumenical debates have dispelled the image of 'heretics'; in 1994, for example, a joint Christological declaration was drawn up between the Roman Catholic Church and Assyrian Christians, which, referring to the Nicene Creed, states, 'Our Lord Jesus Christ is true God and true man'.<sup>252</sup>

## Chalcedon 451: basic Christological doctrine – one person, two natures

Before the Christological paradox of the Council of Chalcedon showed the limits of the pure forms of both Antiochian and Alexandrian Christology – to

250 Davis 1990, 166–167. For the Assyrian Christians see also Nichols 2010, 52–83 and Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 95–98.

251 Anton 2020, 200–205.

252 <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiesa-assira-dell-oriente/dichiarazioni-comuni/common-declaration-between-pope-john-paul-ii-and-catholicos-patr/testo-in-inglese.html>.



express and protect the mystery of God's incarnation – the road led to an escalation and a political attempt to make the extreme Cyrillian position orthodox and binding for the Catholic Church.

## The monk Eutyches's teaching about two natures before the incarnation and one after it

Emperor Theodosius II's reign continued, but new currents influenced his thinking and actions. The Grand Chamberlain, the eunuch Chrysaphius, and the archimandrite Eutyches, his godfather and spiritual director, became influential. Eutyches was archimandrite of a community of three hundred monks in Constantinople. He was a committed Cyrillian, with extensive connections in the monastic world. One of his friends was the Syriac-speaking archimandrite Barsumas, who from his monastery near the Armenian border acted against Bishop Domnus of Antioch and his theological adviser, Theodoret of Cyrus. Eutyches also exerted influence over the bishops and supported the opposition to Ibas the Nestorian in Edessa.<sup>253</sup>

Eutyches began to teach that Christ had two natures before becoming human, but after this there was one Christ, one Son, and one Lord in one *hypostasis* and one person (*prosopon*). Eutyches was not a clear thinker, so his teachings were obscure and inconsistent: the existence of two natures after the incarnation was contrary to the Bible and the Fathers' teaching. Yes, Christ was born of a virgin and was perfect God and perfect human. The Word and flesh had not mixed into one nature. However, Eutyches hated the idea of two natures after the incarnation because he thought it meant accepting two persons of Christ. In any case imprecise terminology and an imbalanced emphasis on Christ's divinity in Eutyches's thinking were in danger of erasing Christ's real humanity and the importance of historical reality.<sup>254</sup>

Theodoret of Cyrus opposed this, emphasizing the distinction between natures and unity in the person (*prosopon*). *Prosopon* signified the visible

<sup>253</sup> Davis 1990, 170–171.

<sup>254</sup> Davis 1990, 171; Kelly 2009, 42.

and tangible manifestation of the unity of God and human. Christ, not the Word, was the common author of divine and human words in the Bible. Theodore started as an Antiochian but ultimately accepted Cyril's basic view that the Word was the person of Jesus Christ. However, he opposed the view that divinity absorbed the human side of Christ's person. He emphasized that divinity did not suffer. Domnus of Antioch wrote to Caesar attacking Eutyches's Christological teaching for mixing the divine and the human by mixing the one nature, resulting in Christ's sufferings being counted as God's. The court responded in 448 by again condemning Nestorius's writings and all those that did not accord with the faith of Ephesus and Cyril of pious memory.<sup>255</sup>

Irenaeus, bishop of Tyre, and Ibas, bishop of Edessa, were deposed amid renewed turmoil, and the teaching of Theodore of Cyrus was also condemned. Eutyches himself wrote to Pope Leo in Rome, urging him to act against the rise of Nestorianism. Bishop Eusebius of Dorylaeum formally accused Eutyches before Patriarch Flavian and the episcopal council of Constantinople. Eutyches admitted that he believed Christ's humanity differed from ours, and that it lay somehow in the one nature of the incarnate Christ. The imperial commissary Florentius urged him to accept two natures, but Eutyches resolutely refused. The episcopal council of Constantinople excommunicated Eutyches and stripped him of the titles of priest and archimandrite. Twenty-three other archimandrites joined in the verdict. Eutyches appealed to the bishops of Rome, Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Thessalonica. Ibas of Edessa could temporarily return to his seat.<sup>256</sup>

Eutyches, Dioscorus, and Chrysaphius worked together to overturn the decision. Eutyches's protest to the bishop of Rome was supported by a letter from Emperor Theodosius. Convincing the pope proved difficult, however. Pope Leo I (440–461) was an able administrator and competent theologian, the most prominent of the fourth-century popes. He associated Rome as an

255 Davis 1990, 172. For Theodore of Cyrus as a defender of Antiochian Christology see Pihkala 1997, 248–255. Pihkala 1997, 255 summarizes Theoderet as understanding that the difference between the divine and the human lay in the natures and connection in the person. Yet the character of the incarnate Son of God remained unclear. Pihkala 1997, 268 describes the statements in Eutyches's confession as typically miaphysite. At the same time, they come close to docetism.

256 Davis 1990, 173–174.

ecclesiastical centre with the city's historical reputation and regarded Peter and Paul as replacing Romulus and Remus as the city's patrons. However, he was also an embodiment of pastoral simplicity and charity. Leo was a prominent representative of the city and a diplomatic figure, who had persuaded the Vandals to refrain from Rome's excessive destruction in 455. Leo considered Peter to speak directly through the ministry of pope and legally strengthened the doctrine of Petrine authority that had developed since Pope Damasus. For Western theologians Eutyches's position generally made no sense. Before the incarnation there was one nature; after it there were two, divine and human, united but without mixing. Leo considered Eutyches an immature and inexperienced old man.<sup>257</sup>

Emperor Theodosius attempted to settle the dispute by convening a council at Ephesus in 449, presided over by Patriarch Dioscorus of Alexandria, assisted by Juvenal of Jerusalem and Thalassius of Caesarea. The emperor appointed Barsumas, an implacable opponent of Theodoret of Cyrus, as the monks' representative to the council. At Edessa Ibas was again deposed. Patriarch Flavian was accused of irregularities in the synod's conduct and distorting its minutes. His resignation was denied, but he was invited to present his confession of faith to the emperor. He recited a powerful Cyrillian creed in which Christ's divinity and humanity of Christ were said to have appeared together in one nature.<sup>258</sup>

## The Christology of Leo's *Tomus* and the influence of Augustine: the oneness of the person of the God-human

As at previous councils the pope did not accept the invitation to Ephesus in person. Pope Leo sent his representatives and letters to Emperor Flavian, the council, and the monks of Constantinople. Among these letters was the *Tomus* to Flavian (*Tomus ad Flavianum* 13.6.449), in which he summarized the West's Christology. Leo was himself a talented theologian who was able to synthesize the Eastern and Western discourses. However, he had the *Tomus*

257 Chadwick 1967, 243–244; Davis 1990, 174. For more on Pope Leo the Great see Karkinen 2021, 310–328.

258 Davis 1990, 174–175.

drafted by his secretary, Prosper of Aquitaine. Augustine's Christology, which was at its core, represented the Antiochian Word-human (*Logos-anthropos*) Christology – emphasizing the Word becoming a whole human being without considering the Word and human separate. The Son of God's person created unity. Christ's unity was thus emphasized in accordance with the early Christian, including the Alexandrian, tradition. The emphasis on both the unity of the person and the humanity of Christ was central to the Council of Chalcedon's efforts for unity.<sup>259</sup>

Tertullian – a native of Carthage – had already prepared the terminology of the doctrine of Christ's two natures in the West. In his writing against Praxeas's modalism (27, 11) Tertullian stated: 'We see two ways of being, unmixed but united in one person (*una persona*), God and man Jesus... yet the intrinsic nature of each substance is preserved...' In *De Trinitate*<sup>260</sup> Hilary of Poitiers (315–367), who lived in southern Gaul, deliberately built a bridge between Latin and Greek theology and, like Athanasius, Nicæan orthodoxy and moderate *homoiousianism*. In Hilary's Christology, like Tertullian's, Christ had one unifying centre that could be called a person who was at once God and entirely human.<sup>261</sup>

Augustine, the most influential Church Father in the West, refined the theological heritage of Tertullian, Hilary of Poitiers, and the Cappadocians. He probably learned the connection between them from Ambrose. Like these theological predecessors, he placed nature or substance at a more general level than a person representing individuality and recognizability. The concept of the person was now applied in the West not only to the doctrine of the Trinity but also to Christology in a new way. Augustine's recognition of a clear correlation between the Cappadocian Fathers' Trinitarian ideas and Tertullian's formulation of one substance, three persons (*una substantia, tres personae*) is well illustrated by the fact that it is from Augustine that the crystallization of the Cappadocian model *mia ousia, treis hypostaseis*, one essence, three *hypostases*, or persons, comes. To Latin eyes it is a Greek

259 Chadwick 1967, 201, Davis 1990, 175, Pihkala 1997, 205–206, 271–273; Daley 2020, 119 mentions that Prosper of Aquitaine, Pope Leo's theological consultant, was in a direct exchange of letters with Augustine and a supporter of his doctrine of grace in his early years.

260 Müller 2010, 328.

261 Pihkala 1997, 200–201; Ayres 2004, 179–185; Ladouceur 2019, 2; Karkinen 2021, 229–230.

translation of Tertullian's formulation. Augustine's theological prescription provided Western theology with a foundation that created coherence for centuries to come.<sup>262</sup> Recently, the lesser-known influence of the bishop of Hippo's theology on the East has been highlighted.<sup>263</sup>

The theology of the *Tomus* is thus less speculative than Cyril's. It follows Tertullian, Augustine, and the Antiochians with extraordinary precision and intensity. For Leo the person of the God-human is identical to the divine Word. The Word received its body from the body of the virgin. Although God's birth as a human being entailed God's self-emptying, it did not diminish God's almighty nature. The divine and human persons were in one person without mixing. The two natures' properties remained unchanged and did not diminish each other. Redemption required that 'one and the same mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ, should be able both to die in relation to another [human] and not to die in relation to another [divine]'. According to the doctrine of *communicatio idiomatum*, however, the natures were interconnected.<sup>264</sup>

The pope urged Eutyches to adopt the concept of the similarity of Christ's flesh to ours because otherwise he would not have suffered for us. If he did not, Eutyches deserved to be condemned for his blasphemous and foolish doctrine. The Antiochians could find in Leo's text an idea of the

262 Chadwick 1967, 288; Davis 1990, 175; Pihkala 1997, 207–209; Ayres 2004, 364–383; Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 161–163; Lienhard 2020, 83. Tracy 2020, 277–280 calls Augustine's Christology 'proto-Chalcedonian' and welcomes the change of focus in the newer Augustine research from his Neoplatonist theoretical background to his deeply doctrinal, or Nicæan, side and thus to a richer Christology which can be found in Augustine's Bible commentaries and homilies. Cf. also Augustine's image of the church as a hospital in which we receive the medicine of the Mediator-doctor, word and sacraments, and deeds of charity according to the *ordo caritatis*.

263 For the reception of Augustine among the Eastern Orthodox see Demacopoulos & Papanikolaou (eds) 2020. Ayres 2020, 127–152 deals with the closeness between Augustine's and the Cappadocians' understanding of Trinitarian theology. For a response to him from an Orthodox perspective see Behr 2020, 153–165 and Hart 2020 196, note 6, in which Hart presents a critique of the interpretation of Behr, reminding us how important it is when comparing the Greek and Latin terminology to keep their historical 'home bases' in mind so that mutual understanding can grow. Hart avers that for Augustine the Father is clearly the Trinity's monarchical source, unlike Orthodox theology has often argued.

264 Davis 1990, 175–176.

two natures' reality and independence, as well as Alexandrians Cyril's basic view that the person of the incarnate was identical to the divine Word.<sup>265</sup>

## Miaphysite 'Robber Council' of Ephesus 449

Pope Leo's envoys at Ephesus were Julius, bishop of Puteoli, and Renatus the priest – the most capable of the delegates, who sadly died on the way – Deacon Hilary, the later pope, and the notary Dulcitius. They presented their credentials to Patriarch Flavian and attended a meeting chaired by Patriarch Dioscorus that began on 8 August 449 in the Church of Mary at Ephesus. At the opening ceremony he was flanked by Julius of Puteoli, the papal envoy, and, in order of seniority, Patriarch Juvenal of Jerusalem, Patriarch Domnus of Antioch, and Patriarch Flavian of Constantinople. About 170 bishops from Egypt, Palestine, and the East were present. Count Helpidius and the tribune Eulogius were present to see that Eutyches's position was restored, and that Flavian and all those accused of Nestorianism were deposed.<sup>266</sup>

The forty-two bishops who had participated in Eutyches's sentencing were immediately denied the right to participate and became spectators. Hilary requested that Pope Leo's letter be read. Dioscorus repeatedly rejected these requests on various pretexts. Bishop Julius did not speak Greek, so the situation was imbalanced, and Dioscorus could keep the reins firmly in his own hands. Eutyches was brought in and made his confession of faith, prompting new requests from Julius and Hilary to read Leo's *Tomus* – in vain. The minutes of the Local Synod of Constantinople were read at the council. When reading Eusebius of Dorylaeum's demand that Eutyches acknowledge the two natures of Christ, the bishops cried out, 'Cut him in two who divides Christ!' With Dioscorus leading the choir the bishops accepted Eutyches's confession of two natures before the incarnation, one after it, by a vote of 111 to 130. He regained his rank as priest and archimandrite.<sup>267</sup>

265 Davis 1990, 176.

266 Davis 1990, 176–177; Kelly 2009, 43.

267 Davis 1990, 177.

Dioscorus suddenly accused Flavian and Eusebius of teaching against the decisions of Ephesus 431 and the Nicene Creed, demanding their immediate removal from office. They denied Dioscorus's authority. Pretending to be attacked, Dioscorus called out to the imperial commissaries for help, who ordered the church's doors to be opened. The province's governor entered with a police force. A crowd of monks followed. Flavian was beaten, but he managed to seek refuge in the sacristy with the papal envoy Hilary. Eusebius of Dorylaeum was arrested. Everyone was forbidden to leave the church, and despite their protests 170 bishops signed the final documents. Eutyches's honour had been purged, and he was restored to his position, while his accusers Flavian and Eusebius were deposed.<sup>268</sup>

At the second session Ibas of Edessa and two of his nephews serving as auxiliary bishops were officially deposed. Irenaeus of Tyre, his consecrated auxiliary bishop, and Domnus of Antioch (though he had signed the Final Act) lost their offices. This culminated in the assembly's solemn approval of Cyril's twelve anathemas against Nestorius. Dioscorus, assisted by Juvenal of Jerusalem and Eutyches, and Barsumas, assisted by Chrysaphius, the emperor's chamberlain, had vindicated Cyril's theology. However, the church did not accept this council of Ephesus as ecumenical.<sup>269</sup>

Hilary managed to evade Chrysaphius's police force. Later, as pope, he erected St John's Chapel in the Lateran Church in thanksgiving for surviving his return from Ephesus to Rome. He brought a petition to the pope written by Patriarch Flavian before his imprisonment. Eusebius of Dorylaeum also managed to escape to Rome and bring his protest to the pope. Theodore of Cyrus's priests also arrived, asking the Apostolic See to give its assessment of the decisions of the 449 Council of Ephesus. Leo convened a local council in Rome and annulled the decision of the Council of Ephesus, accusing Dioscorus of being the main culprit. Pope Leo sent a protest to the emperor, among others, demanding that a new council be held in the West to correct matters. Emperor Valentinian III of the West supported the appeal, but Theodosius II formally accepted the outcome of the Council of Ephesus and affirmed that peace and truth prevailed.

268 Davis 1990, 177–178.

269 Davis 1990, 178.

The decisions were implemented. Flavian died while being transported to exile.<sup>270</sup>

Accusing the Council of Ephesus of being a band of robbers, Pope Leo refused to recognize Anatolius as the new patriarch of Constantinople until he signed Cyril's Second Epistle to Nestorius and his *Tomus* to Flavian. The situation took a new turn when Theodosius II's forty-two-year reign ended in July 450 with his fall from a horse. His older sister Pulcheria quickly seized power, ordered the execution of Chrysaphius, and married the senator Marcian, a former military commander. Pulcheria shared the religious views of Pope Leo and the mistreated Flavian. Eutyches was confined to a suburban monastery, and Patriarch Flavian's body was returned to Constantinople. Patriarch Anatolius signed Leo's *Tomus*. Only Dioscorus of Alexandria and Juvenal of Jerusalem refused to reassess their position. As the situation appeared to be settling, Leo felt there was no immediate need to convene a council. However, the emperor and empress wanted another meeting to be held in the East at Nicaea in 451. Reluctantly, Leo agreed, sending three envoys. Paschasinus, bishop of Marsala in Sicily, was to preside at the meeting.<sup>271</sup>

## The Council of Chalcedon sets boundaries for both Antiochian and Alexandrian Christology

The Huns' incursions meant the emperor couple Pulcheria and Marcian moved the meeting from Nicaea to Chalcedon, on the opposite bank of the Bosphorus. Patriarch Dioscorus continued his extreme course, and led by some monks and bishops from Egypt, Palestine, and Illyria, attempted another coup and excommunicated Pope Leo because of his rejection of the decisions of the 449 Council of Ephesus.<sup>272</sup>

The new council opened at Chalcedon on 8 October 451, lasting until 1 November. According to current estimates about 350 bishops attended the

<sup>270</sup> Davis 1990, 179.

<sup>271</sup> Davis 1990, 179–180; Kelly 2009, 44.

<sup>272</sup> Davis 1990, 180; Kelly 2009, 44.



meeting<sup>273</sup> – more than at previous general councils. As a reinforcement of basic Christological doctrine and the ecumenical nature of the Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Ephesus, the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon can be considered the most important of the first millennium.<sup>274</sup>

The meeting was held at the basilica of St Euphemia, the legendary fourth-century martyr and virgin. Beforehand the papal envoys demanded that Dioscorus, who had been condemned by Leo, be excluded. However, court officials demanded a formal trial. Eusebius of Dorylaeum attacked Dioscorus, who was placed in the midst of the church, and demanded that the decisions of Ephesus 449 be read to prove his crimes. One after another the members of the Robber Council left, excusing themselves, while Dioscorus became increasingly isolated. The decisions of the local Council of Constantinople, which had initially condemned Eutyches, were also read. After reading the Epistle of Cyril, which accepted John of Antioch's Formula of Union, the bishops cried out, 'This is what we believe!'. 'Murderer of Flavian!', they shouted at Dioscorus, who affirmed that he believed like Cyril. When asked whether Flavian's doctrinal statement to the emperor was orthodox, the papal envoy Paschasinus and the metropolitans on the left declared their agreement with Flavian. Juvenal of Jerusalem and his troops followed, siding with the accusers, as did the bishops of Illyria. Dioscorus continued to charge that the Flavians must be condemned because they spoke of two natures after unification. The only correct formulation for him was 'the one nature of the incarnate Logos'.<sup>275</sup>

Ultimately, all the bishops of the Robber Synod except Dioscorus confessed their error and sought forgiveness. The imperial commissaries declared that it seemed right to condemn Dioscorus, Juvenal, and four other key leaders of the Robber Synod at Ephesus if the emperor so wished. At the end of their day's work the bishops sang the Trisagion – 'Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us' – the first written evidence of its use.<sup>276</sup>

273 See e.g. Pihkala 1997, 278.

274 Müller 2010, 346.

275 Davis 1990, 181–182; Kelly 2009, 44.

276 Davis 1990, 182.

At the next session the imperial commissaries again asked the bishops to draft a doctrinal statement. Instead, they ordered the reading of the Nicene and Constantinopolitan Creeds with the following texts: Cyril's Second Epistle to Nestorius; Cyril's Epistle to John of Antioch; and Leo's *Tomus* to Flavian. Finally, the bishops acclaimed this as the faith of the Fathers and Apostles. Peter had spoken through Leo; Cyril taught the same; as did Leo and Cyril. Atticus of Nicopolis, spokesman for the Illyrians, now asked for a comparison to be made between the *Tomus* and Cyril's Third Epistle to Nestorius with its anathema, which had been avoided. Anatolius of Constantinople drafted a statement in response that convinced the Illyrians. They asked for forgiveness for all the participants at the Robber Synod, including Dioscorus. This was refused, and the sitting continued.<sup>277</sup>

When the meeting resumed after a three-day break, Dioscorus refused to attend if he was the only one to be questioned. The pontifical envoy Paschasius led the discussion. Hesitating to condemn one of their own, the bishops of the East entrusted the task to the papal envoys. Paschasius assembled a series of reflections. Dioscorus had accepted Eutyches into communion, even though his own bishop had condemned him. Dioscorus had not allowed Leo's *Tomus* to be read, and he had attempted to excommunicate the pope. Under the authority of Leo and St Peter they deposed him from episcopal office and the title of priest. Patriarch Anatolius of Constantinople presided over 185 bishops' acceptance of the verdict. Alexandria had been dealt a bitter blow. The other five leaders of the Robber Council were accepted into the council after they approved Leo's *Tomus* and the deposition of Dioscorus.<sup>278</sup>

At the fourth session 305 bishops met to decide the Egyptian bishops' fate. Eighteen acknowledged the meeting but said nothing about Eutyches, Dioscorus, or Leo's *Tomus*. When asked, they said they condemned Eutyches but asked not to be forced to sign Leo's *Tomus* or the deposition of Dioscorus. The council ordered them to remain in Constantinople until a new patriarch of Alexandria had been elected who could give them direction. The monks who had supported Eutyches followed. Supported by Barsuma, they demanded Dioscorus's reinstatement, saying they would

<sup>277</sup> Davis 1990, 182–183; Kelly 2009, 44.

<sup>278</sup> Davis 1990, 183–184.

adhere only to the Nicene Creed. After the turmoil had subsided, the monks were asked to condemn Eutyches and accept the *Tomus*. They refused and were handed over to the patriarch of Constantinople.<sup>279</sup>

At the fifth session the imperial commissary made it clear that the emperor and empress continued to demand a doctrinal declaration from the bishops – or the assembly would be moved to the West. Such a declaration had been drafted by the forces of Patriarch Anatolius of Constantinople, and this was presented to the meeting. The creed may have been based on Flavian's confession to the emperor when he was summoned to appear before the local synod after Eutyches's conviction. It did not involve Leo's *Tomus*. Most of the bishops accepted the statement, but the Orientals and papal envoys protested. Paschasius insisted on subscription to Leo's *Tomus*. Anatolius replied that Dioscorus had not been condemned for his doctrine but for the procedures at the meeting at Ephesus. The twenty-three-member bishops' commission, which included three papal envoys, six Orientals, and three bishops from Asia, Pontus, Illyria, and Thrace, met in the sanctuary of St Euphemia's Church and worked out the definition of the Council of Chalcedon. The key figure and secretary was Basil of Seleucia.<sup>280</sup>

The introduction expressed the desire to preserve peace by teaching the truth of common doctrine. The Nicene Creed was solemnly expressed, and it was decreed that 'the Creed of the 318 Fathers remains inviolate'. In

279 Davis 1990, 184.

280 Davis 1990, 184–185; Pihkala 1997, 279; Kelly 2009, 45. The decisions of Chalcedon, Leo's *Tomus*, and the Christological dogma in English: 'So, following the saintly fathers, we all with one voice teach the confession of one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and a body; consubstantial with the Father as regards his divinity, and the same consubstantial with us as regards his humanity; like us in all respects except for sin; begotten before the ages from the Father as regards his divinity, and in the last days the same for us and for our salvation from Mary, the virgin God-bearer as regards his humanity; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being; he is not parted or divided into two persons, but is one and the same only-begotten Son, God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ, just as the prophets taught from the beginning about him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ himself instructed us, and as the creed of the fathers handed it down to us.' <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum04.htm>.

the minds of the bishops this was the Christian faith's dogmatic basis. The First Council of Constantinople's authenticity was also examined, as many bishops were unfamiliar with it. The council then adopted the creed as an authentic interpretation of the Nicaean faith. The Council of Constantinople was thus elevated to the rank of an ecumenical council. The decisions of the Council of Ephesus of 431 were also adopted, and to refute the doctrine of Nestorius, the synodal letters of Blessed Cyril to Nestorius and the Orientals were also accepted as according with the Creeds of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Ephesus. Similarly, the explanation of the creed was accepted. Leo's *Tomus* was also adopted as a confirmation of orthodox faith.<sup>281</sup>

In this context the idea of the pope as the bearer of Peter's authority, strengthened under Pope Leo I, emerged very clearly. Although the East was unenthusiastic about a strong interpretation of papal authority, the pope was given the first honorary position as bishop of 'the greatest and older Rome', and this could be invoked as an authority in disputes. In the East the pope was seen as one of the five patriarchs (of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem), though the first among equals. However, Chalcedon's implementation in the East depended more on the emperor's practical church policy than on the pope's authority.<sup>282</sup>

The reason given for drafting the Christological definition at Chalcedon was that earlier stages had forbidden Mary's title of *Theotokos*, and that it had been said that both divine and human nature suffered. This led to the idea of two natures before the incarnation, and the teaching that the servant form, Christ's flesh, was from heaven, and that the two natures that existed before the incarnation were one after it. According to Chalcedon's famous definition Christ was one person in two natures, one and the same Son, and only begotten God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ, true God and true man 'without mixing, changing, dividing, separating'. Nature's characteristics were preserved in the incarnation. The definition ended: 'It is unlawful for

281 Davis 1990, 185–186.

282 Cf. Chadwick 1967, 244–245; Krötzel 2004, 32–33.

anyone to produce another faith, whether by writing, or composing, or holding, or teaching otherwise.’<sup>283</sup>

## Theology and sources of the Christological definition of Chalcedon

The council’s original aim was to deal with the problem of two natures based on the Nicene Creed without a comprehensive dogmatic definition. This was not enough: further clarification was required. Conceptual tools that increased analytical rigour but at the same time showed the boundaries of concepts in the face of mystery in the light of the Bible and the sense of faith were needed. Based on biblical texts and doctrinal tradition alone, the issue could not be resolved sufficiently clearly. The paradox needed conceptual demonstration of paradoxicality to rule out extreme interpretations. In considering the period’s philosophical context, Juha Pihkala points out that according to Stoic-Middle Platonism two separate natures could not have a common *hypostasis* (person), whereas for salvation and theology the unity of Christ’s person was a vital premise.<sup>284</sup>

The Chalcedon paradox juxtaposes impossibilities from the perspective of philosophical and transcendence-oriented theology and brings together their differences without negating them. Theology must both remain within the tension formed by these conceptual strains and the tension that creates dynamic movement: ‘without mixing, without changing, without sharing, without separating’. The philosophical concept of nature alone is insufficient to describe the person of the Son of God, or *hypostasis*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer summed it up: ‘Chalcedon is a matter-of-fact, lifelike statement about Christ that breaks all forms of thought. Most clearly, but paradoxically vividly, everything is enclosed in it.’ This avoids the extremes of both miaphysite unity Christology and Nestorian separation Christology. The Fathers of the council thus proceeded from the fact of God’s becoming human – that is,

283 Davis 1990, 186–187. For the definition of Chalcedon as an explanation of the Nicene Creed see Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 80–108. For the adoption of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as normative at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 see also Kinzig 2024, 379–397.

284 Pihkala 1997, 282.

the unification of natures as an act of God's self – and sought to formulate this theologically without contradiction.<sup>285</sup>

Christ is one and the same as God and human, but the unity of his person remains a mystery. The nature of Christ's person is unspecified, but narrowing speculation is excluded. The essential thing is to look towards Jesus Christ, who has become human and is simultaneously the Son of God and our Saviour, incarnate, crucified, and exalted. It is not about the psychology of consciousness and the consciousness of two people in the same person but about the presence in the God-human as the Word of God, born in eternity, and who received human nature from Mary. Christ forms one person to bring salvation to us in and through him. In the early church this is also called the deification (*theosis*) of a human being. The term is used especially when thinking of Christ's presence in the believer, united with him by faith. However, that presence is not the same as God's hypostatic presence in Jesus. In the latter case the subject of salvation is the divine nature unseparated and unmixed with human nature – a single person in whom divinity and humanity are fully realized. Nevertheless, Christ's presence means unity of being between a human being and the object of her faith.<sup>286</sup>

The union of two natures in one person entails the doctrine of hypostatic union (*unio hypostatica*). It follows that natures are not sterilely separated but affect each other. A reciprocal exchange of properties (*communicatio idiomatum*) occurs. The divine nature is dominant in the person, defining it as fire defines the iron, or the soul the body. Yet full humanity remains – as God intended when God created human beings in God's own image. Through Jesus God's image and likeness are corrected through participation in salvation, even though this remains unfinished in this life. The term personal union (*unio personalis*) also expresses the unity of natures in the same person. This in turn results in the union of natures (*unio naturalis*). God is tangibly and uniquely human in this person, but it cannot generally be said that divinity is humanity.<sup>287</sup>

285 DBW 12, 328, trans. Tomi Karttunen, Müller 2010, 347. Cf. Paul Tillich's critical evaluation of Chalcedon's Christological dogma, Welker 2013, 267–270 and Bonhoeffer's reflections: Welker 2013, 270–274.

286 DBW 12, 340–348; Pihkala 1997, 283; Müller 2010, 346–347.

287 DBW 12, 329.

Based on the idea of the exchange of qualities (*communicatio idiomatum*), Lutheran theology developed a three-part doctrine. First, what is true of one nature can be said of the whole person (*genus idiomaticum*). Thus, Jesus, or Jesus Christ, was born. Second, what can be said about the person of Jesus can be said about the one nature of Jesus Christ: Jesus Christ delivers us from sin (*genus apostelesmaticum*). Bonhoeffer emphasizes that it was particularly important to Luther that divine nature's majestic qualities could and must be said to be attributed to the properties of human nature (*genus majestaticum*). It can therefore be said that not only God, but Jesus is Almighty and omnipresent. The underlying idea is the true presence of Christ in the eucharist (*est*) because of his omnipresence. However, Bonhoeffer points out that there is also a danger of miaphysitism, in which Jesus's humanity disappears and becomes divine nature.<sup>288</sup>

A controversy arose between the Lutherans and Reformed in the 1500s, when the Reformed interpretation of the presence of the Holy Communion adhered to the traditional interpretation of the Chalcedonian formula against the Lutheran doctrine of *ubiquity*. Calvinist intransigence was supported by adherence to early church Christology's logic of the separation of natures, while Lutherans sometimes risked miaphysitism. In any case the doctrine of Christ's real presence in the eucharist combines Lutheranism with the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions. The Zwinglian idea of symbolic presence is especially associated with Berengar of Tours' (d. 1088) symbolist conception of the Holy Communion, which was condemned several times; the real presence of Christ was instead emphasized. At the Lateran Synod of 1059 the Toursians were forced to renounce this doctrine. This also marked the beginning of the application of the new philosophical-theological doctrine of being to the doctrine of transubstantiation, creating friction between official Roman Catholic teaching and Luther, who defended biblical expressions and his interpretation of the doctrine of Chalcedon's Christological definition.<sup>289</sup>

Current Lutheran-Catholic ecumenical doctrinal discussions have emphasized that what matters is the real and essential presence of Christ in the eucharist and the transformation of the eucharistic elements into

288 DBW 12, 330.

289 Braaten 1984, 508; Müller 2010, 694–695.

Christ's body and blood, not a philosophical-theological explanation of the matter. There has been significant convergence.

It has also been stressed that we should not draw overly speculative conclusions about the exchange of properties based on the two-nature doctrine: Chalcedon's intention is to avoid extremes. We should be careful about combining 'God' and 'human'. Misleading terms like the Arian phrase 'Christ is created' should be avoided.<sup>290</sup>

The bishops used Cyril's Second Epistle to Nestorius and the Epistle to the Antiochians, the second part of the Formula of Union of 433, the Confession of Flavian, and Leo's *Tomus* as textual sources for Chalcedon's doctrine of two natures. In their definition the bishops distinguished between person and nature. The person of Christ was one; there were two natures. The Apollinarian slogan of the one nature of the incarnate Word was rejected. Cyril and those who followed him mistakenly thought the phrase came from Athanasius. The paradoxical Greek adverbs 'without mixing, without changing, without diverging, without separating' showed the bishops were concerned about expressing that this was a mystery, a secret, and something incomprehensible.<sup>291</sup>

The West was somewhat satisfied with the definition, but the East wanted clarity about the hypostatic union, the subject of Christ's suffering and death, and the deification of the human that began in Christ. As many considered Cyril a better guide to Christology than the Council of Chalcedon, new controversies soon arose.<sup>292</sup>

## Canons of Chalcedon, or ecclesiastical legal decisions

On 25 October Emperor Marcian arrived to attend the ceremonies that adopted the council's definition of faith. The papal envoys, followed by 452 bishops, signed the document. The emperor asked the bishops to stay for

290 Müller 2010, 349.

291 Davis 1990, 187, Pihkala 1997, 280. Cf. Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 100 points out that the meeting saw Cyril of Alexandria's Christology as the criterion of orthodox Christology, especially his Second Epistle to Nestorius.

292 Davis 1990, 187–188.



a few more days to discuss church discipline. Theodoret of Cyrus regained his episcopal title after condemning Nestorius and accepting Leo's *Tomus*. Likewise, Ibas of Edessa was under investigation. Paschasinus and Maximus of Antioch testified that Ibas's letter to Maris of Persia was orthodox. Ibas was restored as a bishop after accepting the council's definition and Leo's *Tomus*.<sup>293</sup>

Thirty discipline-related canons were then discussed. They forbade bishops to sell ordinations, wander from place to place, receive another's clergy, delay episcopal ordinations for financial gain from empty seats, and conspire with the administration to prevent the division of episcopal sees. Synods were to be held twice a year, and a steward was to be appointed for the bishop. The clergy were forbidden to enter the service of the state. Deaconesses were to be at least forty years of age, duly examined, ordained by the laying on of hands, and celibate. Consecrated virgins were not to marry, but they were to be treated kindly if they did. Monks were subordinate to the bishop and were forbidden to marry. Monasteries were not allowed to be converted for secular use. There were warnings against conspiracies, abandonment of clergy, the seizure of a bishop's property after his death, and the lack of letters of peace and unity when on a journey.<sup>294</sup>

Three canons were controversial, and the papal envoys, lacking instructions, did not participate in their discussion. According to the ninth canon a priest or bishop in dispute with the metropolitan of his province could appeal to the bishop (exarch) of the diocese or directly to the patriarch of Constantinople. Ecclesiastical areas should correspond to those of secular society. What was new was the authority of the patriarch of Constantinople over the local bishops and their dioceses. The most controversial was the twenty-eighth canon, according to which the Council of Constantinople 'properly gave the primacy to the Throne of the elder Rome, because that was the imperial city'. Similarly, equal privileges were given to the episcopal see of the new Rome, second in rank to the first. The territories of today's Turkey, eastern Bulgaria, and Romania, an area

293 Davis 1990, 189.

294 Davis 1990, 189.

the same size as the patriarchates of Antioch and Alexandria, were placed under the patriarchate.<sup>295</sup>

The patriarch of Constantinople could also receive petitions from all bishops and metropolitans of the East. The intention was not to attack the bishop of Rome but to provide an ecclesiastical structure to the East so that the church could live in peace. In the Second Proclamation Jerusalem was declared the fifth patriarchate, along with Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Antioch. When the decision was made and read to the papal envoys, they expressed their surprise that the sixth canon of the Council of Nicaea, which did not mention Constantinople, had not been considered. Their instructions were to oppose everything that curtailed the bishop of Rome's rights. They refused to accept honorary status for Constantinople as second to Rome. Eusebius of Dorylaeum claimed to have personally read the third canon to Pope Leo, and that he approved it. The imperial commissaries approved the canon; the bishops accepted it despite the envoys' protests.<sup>296</sup>

## The West's rejection of the primacy of the city's episcopal see because of its secular status

We can probably already see the emergence of the bishop of Rome's special position in the Apostle Paul's independent activities in relation to the mother church in Jerusalem and in the attempt to concentrate the leadership of the church working among the Gentiles in the capital of the secular empire. The Roman church's role strengthened this position in responding to the heresies of the second century and through the memory of Saints Peter and Paul, which the city cherished in the name of apostolic continuity. Before the twentieth century, however, the preference does not seem to have been justified theoretically. The dispute between Cyprian of Carthage and Stephen the Roman led Stephen to argue for the authority of the bishop of Rome based on Matthew 18. Beginning with Damasus,

295 Davis 1990, 190.

296 Davis 1990, 191.

bishop of Rome, this text began to form an even more serious basis for the office of Peter in 382.<sup>297</sup>

The Arian controversy undermined the authority of the Synods of Bishops because so many councils had produced competing declarations. The councils remained prestigious – but less than they had been. Understandably, in the West scepticism was deeper than in the East, where the general councils were held. In the West, following Athanasius and Pope Damasus, the authority of the Council of Nicaea was emphasized, and Damasus boldly declared that respect for it was based on his predecessor Pope Sylvester's recognition of the decisions of Nicaea.<sup>298</sup>

So, on the one hand Pope Leo rejoiced, thanking the Fathers of Chalcedon for restoring the church's doctrinal fabric; on the other the request of the bishops of the East that Pope Leo accept canon 28 and its theory that an episcopal see's authority depended on the city's status fell on deaf ears. Leo took a completely different view of the foundations of the episcopal see in Rome. He cemented Western theory as part of the legacy of his seat: Peter was chosen to rule over 'all whom Christ also ruled originally'. Peter did not cease to be the chairman of the whole church, 'for the solidity which the Rock himself gave to the rock, he also gave to his followers'. Thus, the church 'always finds Peter in the See of St Peter', and the church of Rome occupied first place, primacy among all Christian churches. Leo delayed his response to the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon for six months. When he replied, he expressed gratitude for the elimination of error, while appealing to the apostolic see's authority. He thought it wise to forget the insults of Alexandria and Antioch.<sup>299</sup>

On 15 February 453 Emperor Marcian wrote to the pope demanding the council's approval because Eutyches's followers were benefiting from his silence. The emperor proposed that the Christological definition be separated from the canons. Leo accepted the gesture on 23 March, confirming the faith of Chalcedon, but not the canons. It was not until the sixth century that the Greek East accepted canon 28's canonicity, and

297 Chadwick 1967, 237–238.

298 Chadwick 1967, 238–239; Nichols 2010, 196–198, 204–208.

299 Davis 1990, 192–193.

the Catholic West only did so as part of ecclesiastical law in 1274 at the Second Council of Lyon.<sup>300</sup>

Chalcedon's decision was not exhaustive: It failed to bring the disputes related to the topic to a complete halt.<sup>301</sup> It was the early church's most extensive Christological confession, a binding interpretation of Nicaea's term *homoousios*, the incarnation of the Word, and the exaltation of Christ, which later ecumenical councils further elaborated. The early church's first four councils are considered the most significant: they established a method according to which doctrine could also be articulated with non-Biblical concepts to express its purpose with sufficient precision; and they formulated the basic Christian doctrine of the Triune God and Christology.<sup>302</sup>

## Miaphysite aftershow in the East

Paradoxically, after the Council of Chalcedon in 451 there was a recurrence of the events that followed the Council of Nicaea in 325. The disputes did not cease but became more intense. Immediately after the end of the meeting at Chalcedon the monk Theodosius hurried back to Palestine and gave a heated report on the fate of Patriarch Dioscorus. The object of his rage was Patriarch Juvenal, who had joined the camp of Dioscorus's opponents. The resignation of the 'traitor' Juvenal and his replacement by another patriarch were demanded. He returned to his seat amidst rioting. One of his auxiliary bishops was assassinated, and Theodosius succeeded in having himself elected patriarch of Jerusalem. He began to ordain his own bishops to replace the Chalcedonian 'traitors' with others.<sup>303</sup>

Juvenal was eventually returned to his seat by military force. Imperial and papal letters were sent to the city to mediate. The rebellious monk Theodosius was kept under arrest in Constantinople, but the widowed

300 Davis 1990, 193–194.

301 Pihkala 1997, 290.

302 Kelly 2009, 46.

303 Davis 1990, 194–195; Kelly 2009, 45–47. For clarification of the decision of Chalcedon in the East see Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 143–159. Daley 2020, 104 provides literature in the footnote for how Chalcedon's decision was dealt with in the East.

empress did not renounce her resistance until 455, when news came that her son-in-law, the Western emperor Valentinian III, had been assassinated, Rome was under Vandal rule, and the emperor's daughter and granddaughters had been taken as prisoners to Africa. There were also strong objections in Syria and Cappadocia to the council's definition. In Constantinople the monks demanded firm disciplinary measures.<sup>304</sup>

Unsurprisingly, resistance was even stronger in Alexandria. After Dioscorus went into exile Archpriest Proterius, who was entrusted as chargé d'affaires, was elected the new patriarch. A riot broke out in the city after this news broke. Not even military occupation persuaded the mob to accept Proterius. When Dioscorus died in exile three years later, riots broke out again. The resistance was concentrated in a group led by the priest Timothy 'the Cat' and the deacon Peter Mongus. The group was called the miaphysites because the Cyrillian design – one of the incarnate nature (*physis*) of the divine Word – served as their slogan. They considered the Chalcedonian formula Nestorian because it did not use this Cyrillian slogan. The doctrine of 'two natures' was considered Nestorian. There was no understanding or desire to understand the difference between the terms 'nature' and 'person' required by the Chalcedonian formula, and the fact that the incarnate Christ had only one *hypostasis*, or person or essence (*ousia*), even though the two natures were united, but without mixing or separating.<sup>305</sup>

Timothy and the other Cyrillians longed for the unexpressed statement at Chalcedon that the person united in Christ was the same as the pre-existent Word. Divinity and humanity both remained realities in the union, without separation, but the difference between them was understood intellectually.<sup>306</sup>

Secular politics further complicated the theological controversy. With the death of Empress Pulcheria in 453 and Emperor Marcian in 457 the Theodosian line was broken, except for some princesses captured by the Vandals in Africa. General Aspar had real power in Constantinople. He handed the crown to another general, Leo I (457–474). For the first time

304 Davis 1990, 195.

305 Davis 1990, 196; Kelly 2009, 46.

306 Davis 1990, 197.

Patriarch Anatolius presided at the coronation to support Leo's claim. With the change of power, the miaphysites seized the opportunity to elect Timothy the Cat patriarch in Alexandria. Timothy quickly returned and strengthened his position by deposing Chalcedonian bishops and clergy throughout Egypt. In this situation Emperor Leo asked the sixty-five metropolitans and 1,600 bishops of the East in his encyclical (*Codex Encyclicus*) two questions: should the Council of Chalcedon be approved; and should Timothy be recognized in Alexandria? The first question received a positive answer; the second a negative one. Pope Leo sent two envoys to the East and a conciliatory letter quoting Cyril's texts and avoiding the phrase 'two natures'. Timothy, however, rejected the hand of reconciliation, despite the serious consequences for the church's unity and the empire's stability.<sup>307</sup>

Based on the answers given to the decision of Chalcedon, we might also judge that the new confession was less pedagogically useful than the Nicene Creed. Rather, it was a theological tool for outlining the structure of faith in Christ that prevented the extremes of separation or unity Christology. As an internalized confession, it could also be freely applied in the context of the relevant situation, and different expressions could be allowed if at their core they accorded with the basis of doctrine.<sup>308</sup>

In 458 Gennadius succeeded Anatolius in the see of Constantinople. He was a staunch Chalcedonian – even a Nestorian. His interpretation of Chalcedonian terminology irritated the miaphysites, solidifying their belief that the assembly was Nestorian. The Duke of Egypt was ordered to drive Timothy away, and after some bloody showdowns he was arrested and exiled to Crimea on the Black Sea. He was replaced as patriarch by Timothy the White Turban, who was not more capable of containing the fanatical Cyrillians.<sup>309</sup>

In Syria, the old centre of Antiochian theology, Cyrillian doctrines gained a surprisingly strong foothold, vigorously advocated by monks. The Cyrillian emphasis on the divinity of Jesus became increasingly popular among the people. Zeno of Isauria married Emperor Leo's daughter,

307 Davis 1990, 197–198.

308 Pihkala 1997, 284–285.

309 Davis 1990, 198.

settling in Antioch as viceroy. One of his priests was Peter the Fuller. He had previously belonged to the 'sleepless monks', who were mighty defenders of Chalcedon. Peter became leader of the Cyrillians, and with Zeno's permission made himself patriarch of Antioch. Patriarch Gennadius of Constantinople expelled Peter but recoiled from the mob, and Peter returned. Gennadius drove him away again, but he returned in 475, only to be driven into exile again. Peter's successor was stabbed by bigots in 481. As the selection of a Chalcedonian patriarch was completely impossible, the patriarch of Constantinople installed the Chalcedonian priest Calendion as patriarch in Antioch, which was completely separated from the imperial church.<sup>310</sup>

After Emperor Leo I died in 474 Zeno succeeded in securing the throne. His origins, private life, and manner of government displeased the people. His mother-in-law, Empress Verina, led a group that replaced Emperor Zeno with her brother Basiliscus. In ending the religious dispute, the empress ignored Patriarch Acacius, who had replaced Gennadius in the episcopal see of Constantinople in 471, and recalled the ageing Timothy the Cat from exile to the episcopal see of Alexandria. Emperor Basiliscus drew up an encyclical in which he condemned Leo's *Tomus* and everything new that Chalcedon had brought to the faith of the 318 Fathers of Nicaea. Timothy was to display this encyclical throughout the East. If its message was not received, the clergy were to be deposed, and the laity to confiscate their property and expel them from the country. Timothy the Cat solemnly arrived in Constantinople, though the Chalcedonian monks prevented him entering the cathedral. Patriarch Acacius received Timothy coolly and refused to sign the encyclical. The Chalcedonians of Constantinople protested in vain against Timothy's reappointment as patriarch of Alexandria. The miaphysite bishop of Ephesus was summoned, and Acacius was deposed. Miaphysitism gained strength throughout the East.<sup>311</sup>

In Constantinople Patriarch Acacius was still firmly on the side of Chalcedon and gradually won over the people. The famous stylite Daniel stepped down from his column and joined him in a demonstration in the city against the miaphysites. Recoiling from the people's enthusiasm,

310 Davis 1990, 198–199.

311 Davis 1990, 199–200.

Emperor Basiliscus withdrew his encyclical. Zeno took possession of the capital and crown in 476. Basiliscus and his children starved to death in exile. Between five and seven hundred bishops who had subscribed to Basiliscus's encyclical returned as supporters of Chalcedon. Timothy the Cat saw his victory evaporate. After his death auxiliary Bishop Theodor hastily laid his hands on Deacon Peter Mongus and consecrated him new patriarch of Alexandria. Peter only had time to bury Timothy and flee Alexandria before the arrival of the imperial police, however. The gentle Timothy the White Turban returned to the patriarch's see from his monastic exile to restore order.<sup>312</sup>

By 482 the Western Roman Empire had fallen, and its reaction mattered even less: it was *de facto* outside the empire. The Germanic chieftain under the emperor of Constantinople, Odovacar, had himself formally made king but sent the imperial insignia to Zeno. They were no longer needed in the West. Patriarch Acacius of Constantinople now had second thoughts about the formula of Chalcedon. Most bishops in the East opposed it. He planned a compromise. The bishop of Rome and his Chalcedonian allies were surrounded by Arians and foreign pagans. In Alexandria the Chalcedonian patriarch Timothy Salophakiolos began to feel the weight of age. He sent his priest John Talaia to Constantinople to organize his successors against his rival Peter Mongus. The imperial court agreed to protect the Chalcedonians' interests. After Timothy's death Acacius wanted someone other than the controversial John Talaia to succeed him, and he fled to Rome. Acacius drafted the Act of Union (*Henotikon*) with Peter Mongus. With the support of Emperor Zeno it was sent to Egypt and Libya. The *Henotikon* accepted the Nicene Creed confirmed at Constantinople and Ephesus, and Cyril's twelve anathemas against Nestorius.<sup>313</sup>

Nestorius, Eutyches, and others whose teaching differed from the *Henotikon* were condemned at Chalcedon or elsewhere. There was no mention of the definition of Chalcedon or Leo's *Tomus*. The document was more an attempt by the church and national politics to commit the hardline Cyrillians to the imperial church than a theologically detailed clarification and reinforcement of common ground. Peter Mongus accepted

312 Davis 1990, 200.

313 Davis 1990, 201; Kelly 2009, 49–50.



the document and was elected patriarch of Alexandria, recognized by Acacius. However, the nod to the miaphysites was insufficient: many of them wanted a direct condemnation of Chalcedon and the *Tomus*. In Antioch the Chalcedonian Patriarch Calendion refused to accept the *Henotikon*. In the ensuing political unrest and attempted coup Patriarch Calendion was forced into exile in Egypt. The miaphysite Peter the Fuller became patriarch of Antioch for the fourth time. He quickly accepted the *Henotikon*; the miaphysites of the East seemed satisfied. He added the phrase ‘crucified for us’ to the Trisagion. This was understood as acknowledging the one nature of the incarnate Word. The Chalcedonians were smoked out of their posts throughout the East. The patriarch of Jerusalem accepted the *Henotikon* and presented it for approval by both the Chalcedonians and the miaphysites.<sup>314</sup>

In Rome the horrified Pope Simplicius received the news of Peter Mongus’s accession to the patriarch’s throne at Alexandria. In vain he protested, requesting clarification from Patriarch Acacius of Constantinople. By his death in 483 he had received no satisfactory answer. His successor, Felix III, tackled the question more decisively. Based on information from John Talaia, he sent a delegation to Constantinople to demand that Acacius respond to John’s accusations. Acacius managed to isolate the envoys, forcing them to accept his explanations.<sup>315</sup> However, the sleepless monks sent a report to Rome. Enraged, Felix III convened a synod of seventy-seven bishops in Rome in 484 at which both Acacius and the envoys were deposed. All bishops, priests, monks, and laity in communion with Patriarch Acacius were likewise condemned ‘at the behest of the Holy Spirit’. Monks loyal to the pope managed to slip the closing message into the patriarch’s vestments during the liturgy in the cathedral. The result was that Acacius erased Pope Felix’s name from the church commemoration book. Thirty-three years after the Council of Chalcedon in 484 there was an outright schism – the ‘Acacian Schism’ – between the churches of East and West.<sup>316</sup>

314 Davis 1990, 202–203, Pihkala 1997, 292–294; Kelly 2009, 50.

315 A commemoration book is a list kept in an Orthodox church concerning those who are prayed for, church leaders but also others, including family members who are ill.

316 Davis 1990, 203–204. For the *Henotikon* and its reception in the West see also Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 143–144; for Pope Felix III see Karkinen 2021, 347–349.

# Second Council of Constantinople 553: Word of God, incarnate – the triumph of neo-Chalcedonism

The aftermath of both the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon proceeded in much the same ways. Both meetings had presented a fundamentally Western response to an Eastern problem. It has been said that the West's readiness to fuse elements from different traditions contributed to finding solutions in the West. Of course, the institution and doctrinal authority of the papacy also played a part. Digesting decisions and theological reception in the East took a long time and did not go without controversy. In the case of Nicaea, the Roman world eventually accepted the Nicene Creed. Arianism lived on mainly among Germanic tribes, but they too gradually adopted the Nicenean heritage. After the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon parts of the Roman world and beyond fell into a schism that has continued to this day. Recent decades' ecumenical discussions have brought new rapprochement, but the division into Eastern Orthodox and Oriental churches and Assyrians still applies. The Second Council of Constantinople attempted to show the miaphysites that the definition of Chalcedon preserved theological values they considered important.<sup>317</sup> With the fall of Western Rome the time had come for the ecumenical councils of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>318</sup>

In 484 the majority of Eastern Christians accepted the *Henetikon* of Emperor Zeno and Patriarch Acacius and its interpretation of Cyrillian theology as an expression of correct doctrine. By 492 many of this interpretation's proponents had left the scene. As early as 489 the new Patriarch Fravitta had begun to build a new reconciliation with Pope Felix III and Patriarch Peter Mongus. Fravitta died, however, and was succeeded by the Syrian Euphemius. The new patriarch was a determined Chalcedonian. There were plans to remove Peter from office, but he died and was succeeded by the miaphysite Athanasius II. As a condition for achieving

317 Davis 1990, 207; Pihkala 1997, 200. For more detail about the decisions of the Second Council of Constantinople introduced in this chapter see e.g.: <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils>.

318 Kelly 2009, 48.

full communion with Rome, Felix III demanded that Acacius's name be removed from the commemoration book. However, the political situation prevented the patriarch doing this.<sup>319</sup>

These initial plans to repair the link suffered another setback when the Slavic-born Anastasius I, the first emperor crowned by the patriarch of Constantinople, became emperor.<sup>320</sup> He was known for his piety and philanthropy. As a layman, he had even been proposed as patriarch of Antioch after the death of Peter the Fuller. Unfortunately for hopes of reconciliation he was an unyielding miaphysite. The sixty-year-old emperor married Zeno's widow and was crowned emperor by Patriarch Euphemius. Euphemius had previously asked Anastasius to confess the faith of Chalcedon, which he did in writing. His reign started energetically. The empire was strengthened, but Anastasius was less successful in religious politics. In Egypt the patriarchs of Alexandria condemned Leo's *Tomus* and the definition of Chalcedon until 518. The patriarch of Jerusalem continued to support the *Henotikon*, while the monastery headed by Peter the Iberian in Gaza was a pillar of radical miaphysitism. One of the main defenders of miaphysitism, Philoxenus of Mabbug (450–523), reinforced Patriarch Palladius of Antioch in his anti-Chalcedonian view.<sup>321</sup>

Philoxenus's miaphysitism was essentially Cyrillian Christology supplemented by a somewhat primitive materialistic philosophy and monastic spirituality. It lacked the flexibility to see the Cyrillian elements of the Chalcedonian definition. For Philoxenus embracing two natures in Christology required the presence in Christ of two full beings, or persons, in which case the basis of salvation would have been erased. The incarnate Word preserved one nature, which took upon itself a changing humanity and became one with it together in that nature. Philoxenus, however, was neither a Eutychian nor an Apollinarian. Divinity and humanity did not mix.<sup>322</sup>

The struggle between the Chalcedonians and miaphysites was now concentrated in Constantinople. Patriarch Euphemius proved his loyalty by recognizing Chalcedon at a local synod in 492 and opening a correspondence

319 Davis 1990, 208.

320 Hohti 2021, 106.

321 Davis 1990, 208–209; Pihkala 1997, 295–297.

322 Davis 1990, 209–210.

with Pope Gelasius, Felix III's successor. The patriarch's and emperor's relationship was now tense. The patriarch angered the emperor by twice refusing to return his written confession acknowledging the decisions of Chalcedon. Euphemius made the mistake of criticizing the monarch for the fate of the rebellious Isaurians. He was accused of treason and deposed. Despite strong popular protests, the patriarch was driven into exile and replaced by Macedonius, nephew of the former patriarch Gennadius. He immediately declared his support for the *Henotikon*, much to the outrage of the sleepless monks and Chalcedonians. To appease them, he confirmed the decisions of Chalcedon at the synod without mentioning the *Henotikon*. The emperor did not intervene in this ambiguous situation.<sup>323</sup>

In Rome the new Pope Gelasius was a tough and unflinching man who did not shy from controversy. Obscure compromises were impossible in his day. Given the decisions of Nicaea, Gelasius did not hold the patriarch of Constantinople in high esteem. When Emperor Anastasius's envoys visited the Germanic king in Italy, they were instructed to refrain from any contact with the pope. Similarly, papal envoys travelling from Italy were advised to avoid contact with Patriarch Macedonius. The pope pressured the bishops of the Illyrian region to remove Acacius from their commemoration books. Gelasius had written theological treatises in which he had developed arguments against Acacius: it was the task of the episcopal see of Rome to confirm the ecumenical councils' decisions by its authority and to protect them through the gift of the presiding providence which the Lord gave by his word to the Apostle Peter, and which it still enjoyed through the Petrine office. According to Gelasius the pope's episcopal authority was in some ways greater than imperial power, just as moral influence was greater than physical power.<sup>324</sup>

Pope Anastasius II, who succeeded Gelasius in 496, was more conciliatory. He sent two envoys to Emperor Anastasius seeking peaceful mediation. They also negotiated with the patriarchs of Constantinople and Alexandria. The pope's death interrupted some promising developments. The next pope, Symmachus, was as intransigent as Gelasius. When the emperor asked to approve the consecration of Peter the Fuller, the pope

323 Davis 1990, 210.

324 Davis 1990, 210–211.

replied that a heretic's place was not an episcopal see but the penitent's chair. In the East, however, Zeno's *Henotikon* was an imperially confirmed declaration of faith. Outside Egypt there were Chalcedonian partisans. In Antioch the new patriarch Flavian was a Chalcedonian, as was Patriarch Elias in Jerusalem. Patriarch Macedonius of Constantinople also supported Chalcedon. However, Emperor Anastasius sought support from miaphysite Philoxenus and Severus, miaphysitism's new intellectual force.<sup>325</sup>

In his Christology Severus was a strict Cyrillian. He was resolutely opposed to the mixing of natures in Christ. Yet he emphasized that one nature involved all the human qualities. He taught true duality together in one nature. Christ was not one substance because, he averred, this would have meant denying natural qualities. It was better to speak of one nature. Before the incarnation the Word was simple, then connected, nature. *Hypostasis* and *physis*, or nature, were synonymous. Severus admitted it was intellectually possible to discern two natures in Christ, but the union of the divine and the human was such that there was only one nature in Christ. Two natures would have meant dichotomy, which would have meant separation. There was one actor and one action in Christ. He therefore condemned the statement in Leo's *Tomus* that both natures did things natural to them.<sup>326</sup>

The controversy between the Chalcedonians and the miaphysites culminated in the question of the relationship between divine and human nature. The miaphysites looked at the Word that became human and placed a strong emphasis on the unity of the Word incarnate, for which they used the term *physis*, or nature. The Chalcedonians admitted the sameness of the pre-existent and incarnate Word, the Logos. However, they also examined the human side of salvation. It was insufficient to treat humanity only as a theoretical state of the Word, without considering human existential questions. One might ask if human nature without human energy truly accorded with real human nature. This laid the foundations of the later controversy concerning whether Christ had one or two wills. Severus criticized Chalcedon for omitting Cyrillian terminology, and what seemed to result in a Nestorian dichotomy. Chalcedon used the term *hypostasis*,

325 Davis 1990, 212. For Pope Anastasius II see also Karkinen 2021, 355–360; for Pope Symmachus see Karkinen 2021, 360–373.

326 Davis 1990, 213.

but the miaphysites saw in it the Antiochian idea of the superficial union of natures. They were therefore not encouraged to accept the definition of Chalcedon.<sup>327</sup>

For Severus the fact that Chalcedon did not emphasize the concept of *hypostasis* meant the sameness of the pre-existing Logos with the Word incarnate was insufficiently clear. Between 506 and 507 Bishop Philoxenus undertook a miaphysite campaign against the neo-Chalcedonians in Antioch. He condemned older representatives of Antiochian theology – Diodorus of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus, and Ibas of Edessa – and incited the miaphysites against Patriarch Flavian of Antioch. Flavian defended himself by again condemning Nestorius, but Philoxenus demanded a clear condemnation of all who taught that Christ had two natures. This was coolly received by Patriarch Macedonius of Constantinople and the people, however. Philoxenus was forced to leave the city. Now Severus himself arrived in Constantinople from Palestine and began campaigning against Palestine's Chalcedonian monks, two hundred of whom came to defend themselves. The accusations fizzled out. Patriarch Macedonius now found himself between Severus and the Chalcedonian monks, whom he had angered with the *Henotikon*. Macedonius soon angered the emperor by calling Anastasius a Manichaeon.<sup>328</sup>

The emperor deposed the patriarch in 511. The miaphysites occupied the cathedral and celebrated the liturgy without mentioning the patriarch's name. Macedonius was expelled from the country. Timothy, the cathedral's steward, a moderate miaphysite who did not condemn Chalcedon, was made patriarch. The strict miaphysites would have preferred Severus, so the emperor's help was needed. Resistance to the miaphysites and Patriarch Timothy grew among Constantinople's monks and church people. In 512 the emperor allowed a miaphysite demonstration to sing the modified Trisagion, which mentioned God crucified for us. The Chalcedonian monks staged a riot, and eventually the mob drove away the imperial commissaries who had been sent to negotiate with them. Three days later a penitent

327 Davis 1990, 214.

328 Davis 1990, 215–216. Manicheanism: a religion founded by the Persian Mani (d. 277), which is strongly dualistic and emphasizes light and darkness.

Emperor Anastasius came bareheaded into their midst, and the crowd responded by singing the orthodox Trisagion.<sup>329</sup>

In Antioch Philoxenus continued his attack on Patriarch Flavian. Although Flavian accepted Severus's miaphysite statement of *Typos*, condemned the Antiochian school and the definition of Chalcedon, accepting the condemnation of Nestorius and Eutyches and all the proponents of the two-nature doctrine, Philoxenus continued to exert pressure. In 512 Flavian summoned a local synod to Sidon to calm the situation. The orthodox were staunchly opposed to the miaphysites, causing confusion among them. They showed letters from the miaphysite patriarch of Alexandria in which he affirmed ecclesiastical communion with the bishops who had accepted the *Henotikon* but had not condemned Chalcedon and Leo's *Tomus*. The imperial commissaries dissolved the council. Flavian of Antioch and Elias of Jerusalem wrote to the imperial court assuring it of their approval of the *Henotikon*. Yet Philoxenus tirelessly attacked Flavian, winning over monks and bishops until Caesar deposed Flavian, even though he had again condemned Chalcedon. Flavian was forced into exile in Petra. Severus replaced him as patriarch. At his installation he solemnly accepted the faith of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Ephesus, as well as the *Henotikon*, but condemned Nestorius, Eutyches, the Council of Chalcedon, Leo's *Tomus*, and adherents of the two-nature doctrine. He also persuaded the wider Synod of Tyre to accept the anti-Chalcedonian interpretation of the *Henotikon*.<sup>330</sup>

## Extreme miaphysite and neo-Chalcedonian fronts

Severus faced opponents on two fronts, however. Extremists accused him of being too moderate. The neo-Chalcedonians sought to show that Chalcedon expressed the deepest intentions of Cyril's theology. They corrected the widespread Antiochian interpretation of Chalcedonian Christology by adapting it to Cyrillian Christology and including Cyril's Third Epistle to Nestorius with its twelve anathemas. It was asked whether Cyril had not

329 Davis 1990, 216–217.

330 Davis 1990, 216–217.

allowed talk of human nature and the divinity of Christ; whether he had not taught that two *natures* were seen in one Christ; and whether he accepted the formulation of the *union of two natures* when he came into communion with the Orientals in 433. Thus, Cyril could have confessed in accordance with Chalcedon that Jesus Christ was one person in *two natures* after the union because he himself taught in the same way.<sup>331</sup>

Many theologians in Palestine promoted such a synthesis, including John of Skythopolis and John the Grammarian. The latter argued that the incarnate Christ's one nature did not mean one substance because there was a double sameness in Christ: with the Father; and with us. Severus did not accept this, however. Palestine's Chalcedonian monks strongly supported Patriarch Elias of Jerusalem until it became apparent that he had expressed some reservations about Chalcedon in a letter to the regime. Having lost support, Elias was driven into exile in 516. John, deacon and guardian of the Holy Cross, replaced him. The Chalcedonian monks opposed the new patriarch by supporting Sabas. As the controversy deepened, the patriarch made an unexpected appearance at St Stephen's Church with Sabas, and the crowd praised Chalcedon. The patriarch condemned miaphysitism and swore allegiance to the four councils and four gospels. Chalcedon again had the upper hand in Jerusalem.<sup>332</sup>

Vitalian, an officer of the Danubian garrison, appeared in the capital with a force of about sixty thousand men. To gain more authority and exploit discontent with Emperor Anastasius, he declared his support for Chalcedon. Anastasius and Vitalian also agreed to hold a council at Heracleion under the pope's leadership to deal with the religious question. Emperor Anastasius sent a conciliatory letter to Pope Hormisdas, who had succeeded Pope Symmachus in 514. Hormisdas encouraged communication, while demanding the recognition of Chalcedon and the judgment of Acacius. In 515 the pope sent more messengers to Constantinople to continue negotiations. However, the Vitalian rebellion soon subsided, and Anastasius again supported the miaphysites. Yet the bishops of Illyria and Macedonia declared their support for Chalcedon and communion with the pope. The time of Anastasius's miaphysite policy was approaching its end. In Egypt

331 Davis 1990, 218.

332 Davis 1990, 219.



miaphysitism was at its strongest because it had deep roots in the clergy and people. In Antioch Severus remained patriarch, but the neo-Chalcedonian front grew stronger. In Constantinople Timothy remained a moderate miaphysite. In Jerusalem Patriarch John had declared his accession to Chalcedon. The neo-Chalcedonians could use their theology to continue the stalemate. Having reigned for twenty-seven years, Anastasius died in 518.<sup>333</sup>

## Chalcedonian turn towards orthodoxy during the reign of Justin I

The former head of the palace guards, Illyrian Justin I (519–527), was the new emperor and an orthodox Chalcedonian Christian. At his side was his able, cultured, and orthodox nephew, Justinian. The neo-Chalcedonian theological groundwork now also found strong implementers. Six days after the coronation the people demanded that the new patriarch, John, who had succeeded Timothy, acknowledge Chalcedon and condemn Severus of Antioch. John celebrated a liturgy in honour of Chalcedon the next day, and soon the local synod of forty bishops decided to recall the exiled Chalcedonians. Justin ordered the bishops to accept Chalcedon and excluded all heretics from the army and public office. The synods of Jerusalem and Tyre recognized Chalcedon, but Syria and Egypt did not. Severus fled Antioch for miaphysite Alexandria. The emperor appointed Paul the Jew as Severus's successor, who began an energetic persecution of miaphysite monks.<sup>334</sup>

## Reconciliation of the East-West schism and reunion 519

The emperor now opened negotiations with Pope Hormisdas to end the twenty-four-year schism under Acacius. Justin invited Hormisdas to

<sup>333</sup> Davis 1990, 219–220; Kelly 2009, 50.

<sup>334</sup> Davis 1990, 220–221.

Constantinople to restore orthodoxy in the East. The pope sent five envoys. Hormisdas's conditions for reunion were as follows: confession of the faith preserved by Rome; condemnation of Nestorius, Eutyches, and their successors; the acceptance of Pope Leo's doctrinal letters; the removal of Acacius, his followers, and those in communion with them from the commemoration books; and the excommunication of Emperors Zeno and Anastasius. In 519 Justin welcomed the papal envoys with the greatest respect and was ready to discuss terms, which they refused, so the emperor accepted the terms as they were. The patriarch, all the bishops present in Constantinople, and the monastic leaders approved the instruction of pontifical reunion. The Acacian Schism was finally over.<sup>335</sup>

## God suffered for us: a proposed Theopaschite compromise

A new doctrinal problem arose. A Scythian monk allied with the rebel commander Vitalian began circulating a text that sought to reconcile the teachings of Leo and Cyril and exclude Nestorian interpretations of Chalcedon. A Theopaschite formulation emphasizing God's suffering was proposed as the basis for reconciliation: 'one of the Trinity suffered for us.' This was interpreted in accordance with Cyril's twelfth anathema. The refusal to this formula was considered crypto-Nestorianism. This was an attempt to reconcile with Severus and the miaphysites. The sleepless monks who among other things doubted the term *Theotokos* refused to accept the formulation. However, Justin's nephew Justinian accepted it.<sup>336</sup>

The pope thought the formulation unwise. However, it was translated to Latin and circulated for viewing in the West. The African bishops, who were on the run in Sicily under Fulgentius of Ruspe, approved the formulation. Encouraged, the monks approached the pope again, but he did not change his mind.<sup>337</sup>

335 Davis 1990, 221.

336 Davis 1990, 221–222.

337 Davis 1990, 222.

# Syria and Egypt as strongholds of miaphysitism and Gothic soldiers as a relic of Arianism

The instruction to reunite with Hormisdas was poorly received in many places. In Antioch, for example, the imperial patriarch Paul had so alienated the people with his harsh treatment of miaphysites that he had to be deposed. His successor died in the earthquake that destroyed Antioch in 526. In turn this successor, Ephraim of Amida, had to resort to military force to install orthodox bishops in place of the exiled miaphysites. The bishop of Cyrus allowed a procession in honour of Theodoret and a feast in honour of the great Antiochians and ‘saint’ Nestorius. The emperor deposed him. The exiled Severus remained in contact with Syria’s loyal and exiled miaphysite bishops. New miaphysite priests and deacons were ordained, but the imperial police intervened. However, despite the pope’s objection, the emperor allowed the consecration of Timothy III, a strong miaphysite, as bishop. Egypt was soon filled with miaphysite bishops fleeing persecution.<sup>338</sup>

Miaphysitism in Egypt began to separate increasingly clearly from the mainstream church. It fragmented into rival factions. Severus and his exiled episcopal colleague Julian of Halicarnassus disagreed on whether the flesh adopted by Christ was as corrupt as that of others. Christ’s suffering was based on his free choice of suffering to identify with people. Many bishops, and especially monks, sought to assert that the work of salvation’s totality and depth was thus underestimated. By 530, however, much of Egypt was Julian, or *Aphartodocetist*, downplaying the reality of the incarnation. Yet one of Severus’s followers concluded that if Jesus was a sinner like everyone else, he was just as ignorant. This was the beginning of a group called the *Agnoetae*, the ignorant.<sup>339</sup>

Arianism lingered among soldiers with a Gothic background. Justin ordered the closure of Arian churches in Constantinople and the exclusion of Arians from public and military offices. The Eastern Gothic king Theodoric considered himself an Arian ally of the emperor, who ruled Italy with his

338 Davis 1990, 222–223.

339 Davis 1990, 223–224.

consent. Theodoric sent Pope John to Constantinople on behalf of his Arian brethren with five bishops and four senatorial nobles. In 525 the embassy was received most respectfully. Pope John again crowned Justin emperor at his request. Justin partly granted Theodoric's request to restore the Arians' churches, but denied converts the right to return from the Catholic faith to Arianism. This displeased the king, and the pope received a hostile reception on his return. Pope John died in prison. Theodoric was preparing a legal ruling that would authorize the Arians to take over Catholic churches, but the matter remained after his own death. He was succeeded by his daughter Amalasuintha.<sup>340</sup>

The first millennium's most important emperors wanted to build the empire's unity based on the ecumenical councils convened by the emperor, who recognized the pope as first among equals. The pope's proposed solutions to combine the Western and Eastern traditions had also laid the foundation for the decisions taken at both Nicaea and Chalcedon.

## Justinian I's strong church policy for Chalcedon against heretics

In the spring of 527 Emperor Justin fell ill and was succeeded by his nephew Justinian. The patriarch crowned him and his wife Theodora. Justin died in the autumn. Justinian I (527–565) was about forty-five years old, well educated, and like his uncle, familiar with all aspects of government. He was an orthodox Christian, very pious, and enjoyed theological discussion.<sup>341</sup>

Justinian's goal was to restore Rome's power to its former glory. The church played an important role here, as it had gradually become the most important power in society. The patriarch's performance of the coronation contributed to the idea that the emperor's power came from God as part of a harmonious symphony of church and state. The church's unity was an important part of building the empire's unity. Justinian can be considered the most important ruler of Eastern Rome.

Justinian wrote of the church's importance to the empire:

<sup>340</sup> Davis 1990, 224–225.

<sup>341</sup> Davis 1990, 225. For Justinian as emperor see also e.g. 1982, 32–77 and Hohti 2021, 109–137; for Pope John see Karkinen 2021, 380–383.

When the clergy shows a proper spirit and devotes itself entirely to God, and the emperor governs the state which is entrusted to him, then a harmony results which is most profitable to the human race. So, it is then that the true divine teachings and the honour of the clergy are the first among our preoccupations.<sup>342</sup>

Justinian interfered more intensely and systematically in the church's affairs than any of his predecessors. To stabilize relations between the episcopal sees of Rome and Constantinople, he enacted laws stating, *inter alia*:

...in accord with the decisions of the Council... the most holy Pope of Ancient Rome is first of all the hierarch and that the holy bishop of Constantinople – the New Rome – occupies the second see, after the holy and apostolic see of Rome but with precedence over all other sees.<sup>343</sup>

In ecclesiastical politics Justinian continued his predecessor Justin's work to bring together the Alexandrian and Chalcedonian approaches.<sup>344</sup>

Justinian also worked resolutely to eradicate all remnants of paganism from the East. All Gentiles were to receive religious guidance and, under threat of confiscation of their property, to be baptized. Returning to paganism was to be punished by death. The monks organized the pagan mission under the leadership of the well-educated and strict-tempered John of Asia. According to the chronicler they converted a hundred thousand people and built a hundred churches and dozens of monasteries. In Egypt pagan ceremonies continued until the 600s. The closure of the University of Athens, which falsely claimed to date from Plato's time, was more sensational. The university was in any case already in decline. Some of its professors fled to Persia, where they translated Plato's Dialogues to Shah Khosrow's mother tongue.<sup>345</sup>

342 Davis 1990, 226.

343 Davis 1990, 226–227.

344 Pihkala 1997, 303.

345 Davis 1990, 227.

Justinian's treated all heretics harshly. They were strictly excluded from public and military posts, as well as the professions. They could neither testify in court nor inherit. All manifestations of their cult were banned, and churches were closed. The Manicheans, who considered creation the work of an inferior god and material reality evil, were sentenced to death. The tireless John of Asia burned down Montanist churches – sometimes even in the middle of a service – which promoted charismatic and ascetic Christianity. After the Vandal invasion of Africa, the Arians were driven out of their churches, which were made Catholic, priests were expelled, and civil rights were removed. This was a relatively small number of people, however. The largest secondary group in the empire was the miaphysites. The emperor was more tolerant of them, not least because Empress Theodora, herself a ruler in her own right, sympathized with them. At her palace she gave sanctuary to about five hundred miaphysite monks and many exiled bishops.<sup>346</sup>

Theodora's cool-headedness helped quell the Nika revolt (*nika!* = victory!) in 532 that arose in the Constantinople's Hippodrome in opposition to Justinian and the stress of war. Justinian overcame the rebellion, but its determined and bloody suppression tipped the scales, entailing the brutal defeat of the opposition to him.<sup>347</sup>

Justinian's miaphysite policy was based on two principles. First, the Christological definition of the Council of Chalcedon must be taken as a starting point. Second, it was interpreted in the light of Cyril's writings to involve the miaphysites in the totality of the Catholic and Orthodox Church. After the riot of 532 Justinian convened six orthodox bishops and six miaphysite bishops at the palace of Hormisdas. At the first session, presided over by the imperial court, the miaphysites strongly condemned the doctrine of Eutyches. The second session was less fruitful. The miaphysites expressed their dissatisfaction that the Council of Chalcedon had not accepted Cyril's twelve anathemas against Nestorius and had restored Theodoret to the church of Cyrus and Ibas of Edessa. Justinian himself presided over the

346 Davis 1990, 228. Hohti 2021, 129 avers that Justinian's conquests destroyed the governmental structures in both Africa and Italy that were stabler than those the conquerors introduced. This paved the way for the Lombards to arrive in Italy and the spread of Islam to Carthage.

347 Tajakka 1982, 36–43; Kelly 2009, 50; Hohti 2021, 117–120.

third session, at which the miaphysites proposed a Scythian Theopaschite statement in addition to the previous one. Ultimately, only one miaphysite bishop converted to orthodoxy.<sup>348</sup>

However, the discussion convinced Justinian that the Theopaschite formulation that one of the Trinity suffered for us was a good starting point for combining the teachings of Chalcedon and Cyril to achieve reconciliation with the miaphysites. At his own initiative he therefore drafted two resolutions explaining that this formulation represented the faith of Chalcedon. He sent one resolution to Constantinople and the Asian cities, the other to Patriarch Epiphanius. When the sleepless monks objected because of their Nestorian interpretation, the emperor sent a court statement to Pope John II. Having consulted the African deacon Ferrandus, the pope approved the formulation. When the sleepless monks continued to resist, John called them Nestorians, pointing out to Caesar that he had accepted Cyril's twelve anathemas. The miaphysites now began to appreciate the emperor, and Theodora actively worked in their favour.<sup>349</sup>

After Patriarch Timothy III of Alexandria died in 535 Theodora sent one of her chamberlains to Egypt to promote the election of the strict miaphysite Theodosius as patriarch. Later that year Theodora secured the election of Anthimus, bishop of Trebizond, as patriarch of Constantinople. Anthimus secretly sympathized with the miaphysites and sent a creed to Severus in exile in Egypt. Miaphysitism was thus growing in Constantinople and Alexandria with the empress's support.<sup>350</sup>

Justinian began to be hopeful of reconciliation with the miaphysites. He invited Severus to Constantinople in 535 to participate in discussions. Severus spent a year in the capital working to promote miaphysitism. To the horror of the Chalcedonians the miaphysites publicly baptized some children of the city's leading families on Holy Saturday in 536. However, division continued in Egypt. Patriarch Theodosius opposed the followers of Julian of Halicarnassus, who belittled the reality of the incarnation. Theodosius was deposed by the people, and Gaius, Julian's friend, was elected patriarch of Alexandria. The eunuch Narses was sent with an army

348 Davis 1990, 228–229.

349 Davis 1990, 229.

350 Davis 1990, 229.

of six thousand men to Egypt. He forcibly restored Theodosius as patriarch, and about three thousand died. Gaianus was exiled to Africa.<sup>351</sup>

## A turn towards neo-Chalcedonism and anti-miaphysitism

When Justinian's programme to integrate miaphysitism appeared to crumble, Pope Agapetus arrived in Constantinople. He became an envoy to Theodoric, king of the Eastern Goths. Reports that Justinian intended to retake Italy alarmed him. Religious issues were to the fore, however. The pope refused to associate with Patriarch Anthimus if he did not acknowledge the two natures of Christ, considering his election as patriarch contrary to the canons of Nicaea, as he was already bishop of Trebizond. The patriarch resigned and retired to the empress's palace to lead an ascetic life. Pope Agapetus himself ordained the patriarch's successor, Menas. The pope then convened a council to condemn the deposed Anthimus and to present the appeal from the monasteries in Syria and Palestine for the expulsion of all miaphysites from Constantinople. Before the meeting, however, the pope died. Patriarch Menas presided over the council, at which Anthimus and Severus were convicted. Justinian expelled Severus and the leading miaphysites from the city. Severus fled to Egypt, where he died in 538 and was canonized by the Egyptians.<sup>352</sup>

Deacon Pelagius remained in Constantinople as representative of the new Pope Silverius and theological adviser to the emperor. Patriarch Theodosius of Alexandria was invited to Constantinople. When he did not reverse his position, he was removed from office and driven into exile. Paul replaced him as patriarch. When he tried to reconcile his positions with the miaphysites, he was deposed at a synod presided over by the Roman deacon Pelagius. The imperial police had now become completely neo-Chalcedonian and anti-miaphysite and were instructed to prevent the ordination of new miaphysite priests. This would eventually expunge miaphysitism. Theodora thwarted this project, however. She allowed the

351 Davis 1990. 229–230.

352 Davis 1990, 230–231. For Pope Agapetus see also Karkinen 2021, 412–416.



miaphysite ex-patriarch Theodosius to lodge in her palace and travel secretly in Asia Minor to ordain new miaphysite priests.<sup>353</sup>

## Theodora's miaphysite resistance: from heresy to schism and a new church

In 543 an Arab prince allied with the empire asked Theodora for a miaphysite bishop. Theodosius, at the request of the empress, ordained an archbishop of Bosra for the Arab territory and appointed Jacob Baradaeus bishop of Edessa with the task of building a miaphysite hierarchy in the East. Until his death in 578 Jacob travelled around the East secretly ordaining bishops and priests. He claimed to have ordained two patriarchs, twenty-seven bishops, and a hundred thousand priests. Miaphysitism had become not just a heresy but a subject of division in the church, the cause of open schism. A separate ecclesiastical structure emerged alongside the imperial church. The church was called 'Jacobite' after Jacob Baradaeus, and his work was compared to that of St James, brother of our Lord.<sup>354</sup>

Today, the official name of the Jacobite church is the *Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East*. It spread early from its heartland in Syria to Persia in present-day Iraq around Mosul and Tikrit. Their numbers increased in the Persian Empire when Persia took areas of Syria and Palestine from Byzantium in the early 600s. The former East Syrian Nestorians constituted the vast majority of Christians in Persia, but the number of West Syrian miaphysites now also increased. The miaphysites refused to be represented by the Nestorian patriarch to the Persian ruler, and in 628/629 the Syriac Orthodox Church finally gained independence, and the bishop of Tikrit became its catholicos.<sup>355</sup>

353 Davis 1990, 231.

354 Davis 1990, 231.

355 Anton 2020, 152–153.

# The term ‘enhypostasis’ and Origenistic heresy

Leontius of Byzantium has been regarded as a typical representative of Origenist Christology based on the Church Father Origen’s theology in the form condemned at the Second Council of Constantinople in 533. Others, however, have seen him only as a Cyrillian. To develop this theme, it is essential that he introduced the term *enhypostasis* in his Christology – the inclusion of Christ’s human nature in the divine *hypostasis*. He distinguished between nature and *hypostasis*. Nature defined the genus; in turn *hypostasis* defined the individual. *Hypostasis* always had a nature, but nature did not always have its own *hypostasis*. The divine and the human, depending on the interpretation of the concept of *hypostasis*, could be combined in three different ways: (1) to contrast the two natures and the two *hypostases* in Christ; (2) to blur the distinction between two natures to result in a ‘third’; 3) the two natures could be in one *hypostasis*. Leontius’s distinctions were a step forward in the discussion of Nestorianism and miaphysitism, though the nature of Christ’s human subject remained open.<sup>356</sup>

When the papal representative Pelagius was summoned to Rome in 543, the Origenist Theodore Ascidas became the emperor’s chief theological adviser. As a path to reconciliation with the miaphysites, Ascidas suggested that the emperor condemn the sources of Antiochian theology. It was agreed that the person and works of Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428), the writings of Theodoret of Cyrus (d. 458) against the Cyrillians, and the letter of Ibas of Edessa (d. 457) to Mary of Persia would be condemned. Theodore of Mopsuestia was thus raised again, even though it had previously been decided that the deceased would not be judged after their death in connection with the church. Moreover, the Council of Chalcedon had explicitly restored Theodoret and Ibas to communion with the church.<sup>357</sup>

A compendium was compiled of these Antiochians’ writings, called the *Three Chapters Edict*. In 543 Justinian drafted a court decree which published the verdict. Patriarch Menas of Constantinople signed on condition that the pope approve it. The bishops of the local Council of Constantinople signed under duress, as they explained to the papal representative. The patriarchs

356 Davis 1990, 233–234; Pihkala 1997, 299–303.

357 Davis 1990, 234–235.

of Antioch and Alexandria also gave their approval, but Patriarch Peter of Jerusalem had to be summoned to Constantinople and threatened with impeachment before he agreed. The papal representative in Constantinople refused to accept and broke off relations with all who signed the edict. The then Pope Vigilius had been given office with the help of Empress Theodora. Bishop Dacius of Milan was visiting Constantinople and refused to accept the *Edict of the Three Chapters*. He hastened to warn the pope.<sup>358</sup>

Pope Vigilius's hesitation irritated the emperor, who transferred him to Syracuse in Sicily for several months. From Syracuse the pope called on the Western bishops to oppose the edict. Opposition mounted. Deacon Ferrandus of Carthage sparked a movement among the African bishops. The bishops of Sardinia declared their opposition. Patriarch Zoilus of Alexandria sent his representatives to inform the pope that his consent had been obtained by force, and that he had withdrawn it. Pope Vigilius arrived in Constantinople in January 547 and settled in the palace of Placidia, his envoys' customary residence. He refused contact with Menas and other bishops who had signed the edict. Meanwhile, Deacon Pelagius arrived in Constantinople and helped the pope firmly oppose the edict before returning to Italy. However, Vigilius began to cave. He accepted Menas into ecclesiastical communion and re-entered his name in the commemoration book. He wrote to the emperor that he would remain a Chalcedonian, but promised to accept the edict, though not publicly.<sup>359</sup>

The pope convened a conference of seventy bishops who had not signed the edict. The pope asked each to record his opinion and deliver it to him. On this basis Vigilius made his decision, called *Judicatum*, which he sent to Patriarch Menas in April 548. In it the pope accepted the edict with reservations but upheld Chalcedon. This caused a storm in the West. Protests came from the pope's own staff, Italy, Dalmatia, Illyria, Africa, and even Gaul. The pope suspended some members of his staff, including his nephew, Deacon Rusticus, who publicly broke contact with him at Christmas mass in 549. There were no longer just protest votes. In Illyria the Synod of Bishops deposed the metropolitan, who had accepted *Judicatum*. Aurelius of Arles sent one of his priests to investigate the situation in Constantinople.

358 Davis 1990, 235; Kelly 2009, 52–53. For Pope Silverius see Karkinen 2021, 416–418.

359 Davis 1990, 236; Kelly 2009, 53. For Pope Vigilius see Karkinen 2021, 418–426.

The priest returned, strongly opposing the adoption of the *Edict of the Three Chapters*. Reparatus of Carthage presided over a synod of African bishops who excommunicated the pope until he withdrew the *Judicatum*.<sup>360</sup>

Under such pressure the emperor allowed Vigilius to withdraw his *Judicatum* and explain the need to convene a general council in the West to gain more clarity on the Eastern perspective. Justinian began preparations for the council. He ordered an investigation into the veneration of Theodore in his episcopal see in Mopsuestia in preparation to sentence the dead man at the council. Bishop Reparatus of Carthage and other African bishops who had excommunicated the pope were brought to Constantinople. When Reparatus refused to accept the edict, he was removed from office and sentenced to exile on trumped-up charges. The bishops of Illyria refused to attend the council. Zoilus of Alexandria was deposed for not accepting the edict. His successor, Apollinaris, sat in the council as patriarch of Alexandria. To clarify his intentions, Justinian broke his agreement with the pope to remain silent and issued an edict setting out his position.<sup>361</sup>

## The key role of the distinction between ‘nature’ and ‘person’

The emperor insisted on accepting the Theopaschite formulation but did not wish to question the definition of Chalcedon. In the anathemas that followed it was found that the Chalcedonian definition was not Nestorian. The unity of the incarnate Word was repeatedly emphasized, the Theopaschite formulation was proclaimed, and Cyril’s twelve anathemas were accepted. The emperor in turn sought to reconcile Cyril and Chalcedon.<sup>362</sup>

The emperor’s creed activated Pope Vigilius. He demanded its withdrawal. Dacius of Milan protested it in the name of the bishops of Gaul and northern Italy. Ignoring these protests, Vigilius broke relations with Patriarch Menas and prepared to depose Theodore Ascidas, Metropolitan of Caesarea, and all who accepted the new edict. Fearing for his safety, Vigilius fled the

360 Davis 1990, 236–237; Kelly 2009, 53.

361 Davis 1990, 237–238.

362 Davis 1990, 238.

palace of Placidia in August 551 to St Peter's Church in Hormisdas's palace, where he signed but did not publish the dismissal of Ascidus. Justinian sent General Belisarius to negotiate with the pope. The imperial commissaries swore on the relics that they would look after the pope's safety, and he agreed to return to the Placidia Palace.<sup>363</sup>

The pope was now isolated from his advisers and even personal servants by imperial decree. Papal notaries were bribed to send forged letters to Italy in his name. The papal staff succeeded in sending a truthful account of the situation to Rome through the Eastern Gothic king's envoys, who were on a mediation mission in Constantinople. By December 551 the pope's situation had become impossible. He fled at night over the rooftops of the neighbouring houses and travelled across the Bosphorus to the Church of Saint Euphemia in Chalcedon. From his refuge the pope sent an encyclical to all Christians, describing his treatment and outlining the faith of the four ecumenical councils. He published the removal of Ascidus and deposed Menas and all bishops loyal to him. When the pope again refused to return to Constantinople, the emperor allowed ten Italian and two African bishops to be arrested and removed the pope's chief adviser, Pelagius, from the Church of St Euphemia. This did not help, but Vigilius published the judgments of Metropolitan Ascidus and Patriarch Menas in every public place.<sup>364</sup>

However, given the impending council, Emperor Justinian decided to seek a compromise. He ordered Ascidus and Menas to Constantinople, where they professed their faith in four councils and humbly asked for papal forgiveness. Satisfied, the pope returned to Constantinople. In January 553 the new Patriarch Eutychius submitted an orthodox creed to Pope Vigilius, which he himself had signed with Apollinaris of Alexandria, Domnus of Antioch, and Elias of Thessalonica. Vigilius approved the confession and the convening of a general council under the leadership of Patriarch Eutychius of Constantinople. The pope protested when it was announced that a hundred and fifty Eastern and twenty-five Western bishops would attend

363 Davis 1990, 238–239; Kelly 2009, 53.

364 Davis 1990, 239–240.

the meeting. The emperor countered that there should be an equal number of representatives from each patriarchate.<sup>365</sup>

## The contentious Second Council of Constantinople in 553 and its long aftermath

The Second Council of Constantinople opened on 5 May 553. Eutychius of Constantinople presided. There were also representatives of the patriarchate of Jerusalem and between six and nine bishops from Africa. Between 151 and 168 bishops participated. At the beginning of the meeting the imperial commissary read a letter from the absent Emperor Justinian in which he emphasized the faithfulness of his predecessors in preserving the firm doctrine of the four ecumenical councils. He drew attention to the adoption of the *Edict of the Three Chapters* in Pope Vigilius's *Judicatum* and raised the pope's hesitation in convening the meeting that was about to begin.<sup>366</sup>

The three patriarchs asked Pope Vigilius, who was in Chalcedon rather than Rome, to attend the council. The pope said he would not attend the meeting without the presence of some Italian bishops. At the second session the bishops were informed of the refusal, and at the third they accepted their creed, which contained the resolutions of the four ecumenical councils and a lengthy summary of the Fathers' teachings. At the fourth session on 12 and 13 May the bishops reviewed and condemned the person and teachings of Theodore of Mopsuestia. The pope had completed his statement on 14 May but delayed its publication. At the fifth and sixth sessions the Fathers of the Council condemned certain writings of Theodoret of Cyrus, and a letter addressed to Maris said to have been written by Ibas of Edessa. On 24 May Pope Vigilius appeared with a document called *Constitutum I*, largely drafted by Deacon Pelagius.<sup>367</sup>

The pope resolutely refused to condemn the three great Antiochians because they had died in connection with the Catholic and Orthodox

365 Davis 1990, 240; Kelly 2009, 53.

366 Davis 1990, 240–241, Kelly 2009, 54.

367 Davis 1990, 241.

Churches. He refused to condemn Theodore's statements but instead condemned four of Nestorius's. He also refused to condemn Ibas's letter because it had been declared orthodox at Chalcedon.<sup>368</sup> The pope's policy clearly reflects the transmission of the continuity of church teaching and apostolic heritage to councils which had been ecumenically approved and confirmed by the holder of the office of Peter himself.

In addition to the pope sixteen bishops and six members of the clergy, including Pelagius, signed *Constitutum I*. The emperor refused to accept it, saying that the council had already approved the *Edict of the Three Chapters*. At the beginning of June the council responded, demanding a collegial decision on the edict. For the seventh session Justinian sent the bishops a pile of documents intended to destroy the pope's credibility. The emperor asked for Vigilius's name to be removed from the commemoration books of the churches of Constantinople and the world. The bishops praised the emperor's determination to work for the pure faith and broke personal communion with Vigilius, who opposed the general council, though not with the Holy See. The bishops further stated that it was legitimate to condemn heretics who had died in connection with the church. Everything was ready for the eighth and final session, at which the bishops adopted their declarations, accompanied by fourteen anathemas.<sup>369</sup>

## Theology of Constantinople II: the synthesis of Chalcedon and Cyril

The Fathers of the meeting stated that to do nothing in the face of attacks on faith would be a dereliction of duty.<sup>370</sup> They mentioned Pope Vigilius respectfully, recalling that he had often accepted the *Edict of the Three Chapters* orally and in writing. They professed their faith according to the four ecumenical councils. The judgments of the three Antiochian bishops were also justified. The strengthening of continuity with Chalcedon was sought through speculation that the letter said to be Ibas's letter to Maris

368 Davis 1990, 241–242.

369 Davis 1990, 242.

370 For the decisions of Constantinople II 553 see e.g. <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils>.

could not have been approved by the Chalcedonian Fathers but may have been a letter from the clergy of Edessa defending Ibas. They pointed out that Ibas himself had been restored to communion at Chalcedon after condemning Nestorius and his teachings, as had Theodore.<sup>371</sup>

The meeting sealed the neo-Chalcedonian line as part of official orthodox doctrinal interpretation. The theology of Chalcedon and Cyril was now brought together, rejecting separation Christology on the one hand and the transformation of the divine and human through union on the other. Hypostatic union in Christ was now understood using the concept of *enhypostasis* John Grammaticus and Leontius of Byzantium had developed, so that the actual *hypostasis* was the Word of God, the Logos, and human nature became enhypostatically part of it. John of Damascus (650–754) later further developed this neo-Chalcedonian idea and Alexandrian unity Christology. The idea of *enhypostasis* also rejected the adoption of the human-Jesus as the Son of God by showing that human nature did not exist independently before the union of natures. Christ was ‘through one both’. The Apollinarian interpretation of union that belittled Christ’s human nature was also rejected.<sup>372</sup>

This doctrinal orientation was reflected in the anathemas appended to the decision. They condemned, first, those who did not accept the same-substance Trinity of one divinity in three persons; second, those who did not accept the two births of God’s Word in eternity and in time from Mary the *Theotokos*, the everlasting virgin; third, those who denied that the same incarnate Word of God performed miracles and suffered in his own flesh. Fourth, all were asked to say that in our Lord Jesus Christ the divine and the human were hypostatically united so that there was only one person. The fifth anathema also stated the hypostatic union of God’s Word with the flesh in one person. In this context the term ‘hypostatic union’ was first used. Sixth, those who denied that Mary was the *Theotokos* were condemned.<sup>373</sup>

The seventh anathema condemned those who made two different persons of the natures. The eighth dealt with Cyril’s battle cry about the

371 Davis 1990, 243–244.

372 Pihkala 1997, 305–306; Müller 2010, 350–351. For Constantinople II see also Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 144–149, which interprets the council as a theological success but a political failure.

373 Davis 1990, 244; Müller 2010, 351–352.



one incarnate nature of God's Word with the aim of uniting the idea of one nature (*miaphysitism*) and two natures (*dyophysitism*). The one Christ was both God and human, the same substance as the Father in divinity and the same substance as us in humanity. The ninth described the worship of Christ as one. The tenth accepted the phrase that 'Jesus Christ who was crucified in the flesh is true God and the Lord of Glory and one of the Holy Trinity'.<sup>374</sup>

The eleventh anathema brought together heretics from the previous three hundred years: Arius; Eunomius; Macedonius; Apollinaris; Nestorius; Eutyches; and Origen. Finally, in the three final anathemas the person and works of Theodore of Mopsuestia, certain writings of Theodoret of Cyrus, and a letter said to have been written by Ibas of Edessa were condemned. This decision of the general council crowned the work of the neo-Chalcedonians.<sup>375</sup> Now the council recognized the twelve anathemas of Cyril against Nestorius, which still lacked official status in Ephesus in 431 and Chalcedon 451, as an authentic expression of the Catholic faith.<sup>376</sup>

The Second Council of Constantinople attached fifteen doctrinal judgments against Origenist doctrine to its decisions. Several scholars have considered this the meeting's most important decision because it led to the widespread destruction of Origen's works. The anathemas also present two problems of interpretation. First, it is unclear how they are related to the council's decisions. Some assume that the Fathers accepted them as the emperor presented them before the meeting started; others that they were adopted at some point during the council's discussions. Scholars have also long debated whether the doomed doctrines were indeed derived from Origen.<sup>377</sup>

Inspired by Hellenistic thinking, Origen taught that God had created intelligent spiritual beings who were all equal as objects of God's goodness. However, these beings were differentiated from and joined with matter to varying degrees. They became angels, demons, people, and even heavenly bodies. Anathemas two to five condemned this view. The internal logic of

374 Davis 1990, 244–245.

375 Davis 1990, 245.

376 Müller 2010, 344

377 Davis 1990, 245–246; Kelly 2009, 54.

Origen's views was that they included a Platonist-influenced view of the pre-existence of human souls. Despite their fall into matter, they had existed for ever as creatures and would return to their original state if they were good. Anathemas one and fifteen condemned these views. These fallen beings, including Satan, could escape from this fallen state and attain their original perfection. Eventually, the material world would no longer exist. Anathemas eleven and twelve condemned these latter notions.<sup>378</sup>

Anathemas six, seven, eight, nine, twelve, and thirteen condemned Evagrius's Christology, which distinguished between the Word and Christ. The Word was the second person of the Trinity, Christ the created intellect, the only spiritual being who remained firmly in communion with God and did not fall. In becoming human, the Word of God was associated with the Christ-Mind, which remained in relation to the material body to save fallen spiritual beings and restore them to their original state. Final salvation would be achieved when they had the same relationship to the God-Word as the Christ-Mind. Anathema ten condemned the view, which possibly came from Didymus the Blind (c. 313–398), a staunch Nicaean, that Christ's resurrection body was round because it was the perfect form for Hellenistic thinkers.<sup>379</sup>

## Criticism of the council in the West and post-Justinian mediation attempts

After the council finished its work Justinian sent its decisions to all the bishops to sign. Those in the papal entourage who opposed the resolutions' adoption were exiled to Egypt. Deacon Pelagius was imprisoned. Pope Vigilius was allowed to stay in Constantinople. However, the Romans demanded the return of their bishop, and Vigilius was allowed to return if he

<sup>378</sup> Davis 1990, 246.

<sup>379</sup> Davis 1990, 247. Pihkala 2019, 5–6 maintains that Didymus the Blind (c. 313–398) ended up 'after his death a victim of much later Origenist disputes'. Didymus's teachings were condemned as heretical because of their Origenist influence. According to Constantinople II he had represented two rejected thoughts of Origen: 1) that the souls of humans were pre-existent; and 2) the *apokatastasis* doctrine, according to which all would be saved in the end. Most of Didymus's extensive literary production disappeared after the council's condemnation.

accepted the decisions of the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople. Vigilius finally relented in February 554, saying his advisers had misled him. In *Constitutum II* he reversed his earlier position. The pope now approved the assembly's declaration and anathemas. He died on his way home in Syracuse in Italy in 555.<sup>380</sup>

Although the Council of Chalcedon had met opposition in the East, opposition to the Second Council of Constantinople was strong and widespread in the West. The emperor's coercive actions and pressure on the pope created bad blood. In Africa the metropolitan of Carthage, appointed by the emperor, was not recognized by his auxiliary bishops. Vigilius was considered a traitor. Bishops who voiced criticism were removed from office and driven into exile across Africa. Deacon Pelagius wrote tracts in prison in which he criticized Vigilius's weakness. However, he also showed how Chalcedon and Constantinople could be reconciled. To promote the unity of church and empire, Justinian freed Pelagius and elevated him to pope after Vigilius so that he could mediate with the West. Pelagius assured the emperor that he would accept the council's decisions but simultaneously drafted a creed based on the four general councils, avoiding mention of the fifth. This pacified Rome, but the bishops of northern Italy and Dalmatia broke communion with him.<sup>381</sup> The period that began with Vigilius and Pelagius has been called the popes' 'Byzantine captivity'.<sup>382</sup>

## Justinian's legacy: the divide between East and West; the miaphysites of Egypt and Syria separate

Until the end of his life Justinian sought reconciliation with the miaphysites of Egypt and Syria, though his council had failed in this task. Finally, he placed his hope in the doctrine that Christ suffered by the power of his will non-naturally (*aphthartodocetism*). However, Justinian died at the age of eighty-two after reigning thirty-seven years. The church had expanded

380 Davis 1990, 247–248; Kelly 2009, 54.

381 Davis 1990, 248. For Pope Pelagius see Karkinen 2021, 426–431.

382 Karkinen 2021, 428.

through missionary work, but there was a serious rift between East and West, and the Syrian and Egyptian miaphysites were not aligned with the church.<sup>383</sup>

## Emperor Justinian's legacy in general

After Justinian's death much of the empire in Italy fell to the Lombards, apart from Ravenna and a few coastal cities. The provinces of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, weakened by the miaphysite and Nestorian disputes, were quickly lost to the Arabs. Only the patriarchate of Constantinople and the church of the West under the pope's leadership were in the empire's territory; the other patriarchates were not. Byzantium fell into a state of weakness in the 600s and 700s.

Justinian earned a lasting reputation as a builder. In the past Constantinople had taken its cue from Italy, which now became the receiving party. Byzantine architectural masterpieces can be found in the West, especially in Ravenna. The largest church in Christendom at that time, Hagia Sophia, dedicated to the Holy Wisdom or Word of God, was completed in Constantinople. Justinian also built numerous other churches and chains of fortifications on the empire's borders. The buildings' mosaics reached their peak in the 500s.

## Justin II's attempts at reconciliation between miaphysites and various groups in the orthodox church

After Justinian's death his most capable nephew, Justin II (565–578), became Eastern Roman Emperor, supported by the senate and the people gathered at the Hippodrome. He was married to Sophia, niece of Justinian's wife Theodora, who, like her aunt, favoured the miaphysites. Justin sought reconciliation between the various factions and recalled the exiled bishops. The miaphysites were still led by Theodosius, the former patriarch of

383 Davis 1990, 249; Kelly 2009, 55.

Alexandria, and Jacob Baradaeus, whose work was concentrated in the Arab region of eastern Palestine. There were large pockets of Syrian-speaking schismatics on the outskirts of Antioch and Apamea, as well as in the hills of the western Middle East. They had lost ground in Egypt because the orthodox Patriarch Apollinaris had confiscated their church in Alexandria and barred their clergy from the city. When Theodosius died in 566, they were leaderless. Fragmentation into countless small groups began, the largest of which was the apthartodocetists. They too were divided into three groups that disagreed on Christ's ability to suffer. The new three-god heresy horrified even the miaphysites. It spread throughout Egypt and as far as Italy.<sup>384</sup>

After a year of discussion with the miaphysites Emperor Justin II published the *Henotikon*, a revision of Zeno's, accepted the *Edict of the Three Chapters* without mentioning Chalcedon, and declared an amnesty for all miaphysites. The miaphysites quarrelled at Callinicum in 567 and did not accept the emperor's *Henotikon*. Justin produced a new *Henotikon* in 571. It recognized the nature of one incarnate Christ and only the conceptual difference between the two natures. Chalcedon was again omitted. Patriarch John Scholasticus of Constantinople enforced the new *Henotikon*. By 573 Justin II was beginning to suffer from mental instability. As his illness worsened, Empress Sophia persuaded him to appoint Count Tiberius as his successor. Justin continued until 578, but Tiberius held power from 576. He released Jacob Baradaeus after three years in prison and ended the persecution of the miaphysite leaders. Eutychius, the exiled former patriarch of Constantinople, returned to his seat after John Scholasticus's death in 577.<sup>385</sup>

Theological confusion reigned in the era – aptly illustrated by Patriarch Eutychius's support for a heresy that denied the resurrection of the body. The future Pope Gregory the Great, who was then the pope's representative in Constantinople, protested this doctrine to Emperor Tiberius, who forced Eutychius to burn the book he had written about this latest theological

384 Davis 1990, 249–250.

385 Davis 1990, 250.

novelty. After Tiberius's death he was succeeded by Maurice (582–602), who continued his predecessor's moderate religious policy.<sup>386</sup>

## Rise of the Jacobites and dispersion of the miaphysites

In 575, after Justin II's attempts to reconcile with miaphysites, all the empire's bishops adhered to imperial orthodoxy, and the miaphysites were hidden. Under Tiberius and Maurice, the orthodox bishops, called Melkites, lost more and more parishes to the Jacobites. In 575 the miaphysites of Alexandria elected Peter, an unlearned but powerful miaphysite, patriarch. Peter of Alexandria became patriarch of all miaphysites in the East. After his death in 577 the disputes among the Egyptian miaphysites were so intense that it took a year to choose a successor, Damian, who was a learned Syrian monk.<sup>387</sup>

Damian continued his predecessor's authoritarian approach to the miaphysites, but the group remained widely dispersed due to episcopal rivals and doctrinal differences. In 578 Jacob Baradaeus died during an attempt to reconcile the deposed Paul's Syrian sympathizers and the Egyptians under Damian's harsh rule. After Jacob's death Damian gained even more courage, travelling to Antioch to install a miaphysite patriarch who would recognize his authority. This was spotted by the imperial police. Damian fled to Constantinople. The Syrian miaphysites were increasingly divided when the clergy of Antioch elected Peter of Callinicum patriarch. The exiled patriarch Paul led the opposition. Peter of Antioch and Damian of Alexandria were soon at odds over Damian's attempt to deal with the doctrine of tritheism, which argued that the characteristics of the persons were equal to the persons themselves, who were partakers of the same divinity. When Peter condemned this latest theological confusion, the Syrian and Egyptian miaphysites were still at war with each other, though they were

386 Davis 1990, 250–251. For Gregory the Great as pope see e.g. Karkinen 2021, 440–460.

387 Davis 1990, 251.

united in their determination to reject the emperor's attempts to get the decisions of the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople accepted.<sup>388</sup>

In the East beyond the empire's borders the church remained Nestorian under the capable leadership of Catholicos Mar Aba, elected in 540. He pacified his church until his death in 552. Jacob Baradaeus, however, had attempted to spread miaphysite doctrine to Persia by consecrating a miaphysite bishop. In 585 the catholicos called a council in Seleucia, which condemned miaphysitism.<sup>389</sup>

The Armenian church officially declared itself miaphysite in 492. The Council of Chalcedon was repeatedly rejected. Although the Persian-controlled territory's catholicos and population were adamantly miaphysite, the Emperor Maurice installed an orthodox patriarch in his territory. In the West the bishops of northern Italy and Illyria continued to reject the decisions of Constantinople II, though the emperor's full support would have been needed in view of the Lombard invasion, which had begun in 568. The archbishop of Milan fled to Genoa, and the patriarch of Aquileia sought refuge in Grado in Italy. The Roman popes participated in the emperor of the East's attempts to negotiate with the Franks as a counterweight to the expansion of Lombard rule in Italy. By 590 Rome was besieged by the Lombard dukes of Spoleto and Benevento. In northern Italy, occupied by the Arian Lombards, many bishops continued the schism with the bishop of Rome, who remained politically subject to the imperial governor of Ravenna, until the seventh century. It was not until the reign of Pope Sergius I (d. 701) that the schism ended.<sup>390</sup>

Popes Pelagius I (d. 561), Pelagius II (d. 590), and Gregory the Great (d. 604) all accepted the Second Council of Constantinople's doctrinal definitions, but all had reservations about the judgments in the *Edict of the Three Chapters*, which they maintained failed to address the essence of the faith. The Lateran Synod of 649, led by Bishop Martin I (d. 653), demanded that the West accept Constantinople II. The Third Council of Constantinople, 680–681, approved all five previous general councils.<sup>391</sup>

388 Davis 1990, 251–252.

389 Davis 1990, 252.

390 Davis 1990, 252–253; Kelly 2009, 55.

391 Davis 1990, 253.

# Constantinople III, or the Ecumenical Council of Trullo 680–681: the two wills of Christ – the defeat of monothelitism and the triumph of Chalcedon

In 610 Heraclius, the son of an African governor from Carthage, deposed Emperor Maurice and the usurper Phocas (602–610), who had killed his family. In the first two decades of Heraclius's long reign the Central Asian nomadic Avars wreaked havoc in the Danube region's provinces. Slav masses pushed into the Balkan Peninsula towards southern Greece, destroying the Graeco-Latin Illyrian diocese and thus an important link between East and West. This contributed to the growing alienation of the Greek and Latin churches.<sup>392</sup>

At the same time the empire was engaged in a bloody battle in the East with the Sassanid Persians. The imperial army was defeated at Antioch in 611 and 613, and the Persians entered Damascus in the south and Tarsus in the north. Armenia also soon fell. What most terrified Christians in the East was Jerusalem's capture in 614. Having ravaged the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre of Constantine, the Zoroastrians<sup>393</sup> carried the Holy Cross in procession to their capital, Ctesiphon. They even reached the Bosphorus to threaten Constantinople itself.<sup>394</sup>

392 Davis 1990, 238. For Heraclius see also Frankopan 2021, 105–110 and Hohti 2021, 152–162.

393 Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic Persian religion which worships Ahura Mazda, the Lord of Wisdom. The religion dualistically emphasizes the battle between good and evil.

394 Davis 287, 259; Kelly 2009, 55.



# The victorious duo of rulers: Emperor Heraclius and Patriarch Sergius and Hellenization

Slowly, however, the heads of state and church, Emperor Heraclius and Patriarch Sergius, led their people in a defensive struggle. When the emperor needed a theological basis to unite dissenting Christians, Sergius offered it through the doctrines of Christ's one power (*monoenergism*) and one will (*monothelitism*). Once the government had been strengthened, the church's wealth was placed at the service of the state, and religious fervour had ignited, Heraclius was ready to launch a holy war to win back the Cross from the Persians. The Avars in the West (a nomadic people of Asian origin) were neutralized through treaties. Patriarch Sergius and Patrician Bonus were made regents. The emperor himself took command of the army. After a solemn liturgy at Hagia Sophia the emperor and his army marched from the capital on Easter Monday 622.<sup>395</sup>

By the autumn the emperor was victorious in Armenia, and the Persians were expelled from Asia Minor. Heraclius and his troops headed south to the Persian city of Ganzak, where he destroyed a large Zoroastrian fire temple in retaliation for the destruction of Christian churches in Jerusalem. After Shah Khosrow was deposed and murdered in 628 his son appealed for peace. Under Heraclius's terms Armenia, Roman Mesopotamia, Syria, and Egypt were returned to Byzantine control. The emperor personally returned the Holy Cross to Jerusalem in 630. Although the Slavs were firmly anchored in the Balkans, and the Western Goths had conquered southern Spain, Heraclius had humiliated his enemies during his twenty-year reign and had largely restored the empire.<sup>396</sup>

During this period the empire became even more Hellenized. Greece replaced Latin as the official language of government. In the next generation Latin was rare, even among scholars. A new wall to stop exchange of ideas thus arose between the Greek East and the West, where Latin as the language of the church had become the language of scholars. In the

395 Davis 1990, 259; Kelly 2009, 56.

396 Davis 1990, 259–260; Kelly 2009, 56; Peltonen 2021, 90.

East the old Roman titles *imperator*, *caesar*, and *augustus* were abandoned. The head of state became *basileus*. The title was becoming hereditary.<sup>397</sup>

## Dispute over the one power and one will of Christ

When the southern and eastern provinces were returned to the empire, the emperor again had to face the question of how to reconcile with the miaphysites without alienating the Chalcedonian regions of Asia Minor, Italy, and Africa. Patriarch Sergius's mission was to provide a theological basis for ecclesiastical reconciliation. In 617/618 Sergius wrote to the miaphysite leader Georgios Arsas in Egypt asking for texts on God-human activity in the person of Christ. Severus of Antioch, one of the miaphysite movement's former leading theologians, had already emphasized that in Christ there was one nature, one will, one action. Sergius's intention was obviously to hold on to 'two natures' but to reconcile this with Christ's one action.<sup>398</sup>

Theodore, the Chalcedonian bishop of Faran, near Mount Sinai, (also known as Theodore of Raithu) seems also to have provided metaphysical justification for the idea that there was only one power in Christ (*monoenergism*): the body was in Christ the instrument of the soul, and both were in turn instruments of the divine Word. All activity came from the Word. Through his human nature Christ bore our human needs in his flesh. In a letter to Paul the Blind, the leader of the Cypriot miaphysites, Sergius authorized him to forbid the archbishop of Cyprus to speak of the two powers in Christ after becoming incarnate. Cyrus, archbishop of Phasis in the Caucasus on the Black Sea, raised the question of how this aligned with Leo's *Tomus*, which spoke of actions characteristic of divine and human nature in connection with another nature. Sergius responded by emphasizing that the Word performed these acts by means characteristic of nature. Cyrus was also defeated for his monoenergism, and he propagated the doctrine in Egypt.<sup>399</sup>

397 Davis 1990, 260.

398 Davis 1990, 260–261.

399 Davis 1990. 261–262.

Emperor Heraclius achieved results through negotiations with the miaphysite Armenian Catholicos Ezra. The Synod of Armenians approved the General Council of Chalcedon in 633. However, this proved short-lived, as the Armenians opposed the fact that based on the meetings at Chalcedon, the Armenian church would be subordinated to the patriarch of Constantinople. The Syrians accepted *monoenergism* and its later form, the doctrine of the one will of Christ (*monothelitism*), so firmly that its defenders at the Third Council of Constantinople were mainly Syrians. There were two patriarchs in Alexandria: the Chalcedonian Melkite patriarch headed a small urban congregation; the miaphysite patriarch controlled the rest of Egypt.<sup>400</sup>

In 630/631 Emperor Heraclius sent Cyrus of Phasis to Egypt as patriarch, supported by ecclesiastical, state, and military forces, to achieve union with the Copts. Coptic Patriarch Benjamin fled Alexandria. In 633 Cyrus succeeded in negotiating a *Pact of Union*. Its theological core was its Chalcedonian-monothelete article seven: 'There was but one and the same Christ, working both the divine and human actions by one theandrical operation.' The miaphysites congratulated themselves, for recognition of one power and action was equivalent to recognition of Christ's one nature.<sup>401</sup>

## Theological struggle of Sophronius and Maximus the Confessor against monoenergism

In Alexandria, however, the monk Sophronius of Jerusalem denounced the attempt to establish unity on a non-orthodox theological basis. He was in contact with the orthodox Chalcedonian patriarch, John the Almsgiver (d. 619). Sophronius had met the monk Maximus the Confessor in Carthage, and they took on the struggle against imperial monoenergism. In 633 Sophronius was in Alexandria protesting the theology of Cyrus's *Pact of Union*. Christ's power did not come directly from his person but through his nature. Cyrus sent him to Constantinople. At the Local Synod of Constantinople, it was decided that although all activities of Christ must

400 Davis 1990, 263.

401 Davis 1990, 262–263.

be attributed to a single actor, the incarnate Word, the sources of power should not be counted. Speaking of one force seemed to erase the two hypostatically united natures in Christ; speaking of two sources seemed to signal that there were two opposing wills in Christ.<sup>402</sup>

To everyone's surprise Sophronius was elected patriarch in Jerusalem. As a monk, he had respected Sergius's demand to remain silent about the powers of Christ. As patriarch, he felt obliged to speak up. He held a synod in Jerusalem in 634 which defined the doctrine of two wills and powers. Sophronius sent his synodal confession of faith to Pope Honorius, Patriarch Sergius, and their brother patriarchs. In the Christological section he accepted that Leo's *Tomus* came from St Peter, the works of Cyril from St Mark. Sophronius presented the doctrine of the unity of the person and the duality of natures and their qualities: the duality of the forces of the person of Christ was the result of the duality of natures and their attributes. Since the natures were separate, their actions were also separate. Denying separation could lead to the mixing of natures. However, Sophronius emphasized that although there were two sources of power, there was only one actor in Christ, Christ, the Son of God, the Word of God. Yet this did not imply that there were two wills.<sup>403</sup>

Meanwhile, Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople had anticipated that having become patriarch of Jerusalem, Sophronius would soon turn to Rome. So, he sent a letter to the pope before Sophronius's Synodal Letter arrived. Sergius said he had been in contact with Patriarch Cyrus of Alexandria about avoiding talk of one or two forces (energy) in Christ. Talking of two actions would lead many to assume that there were two opposing wills in Christ. However, the Fathers taught that Christ was guided by the Word in all things. Rather, according to Sergius, it should be recognized with Leo the Great that all divine and human energy, without division or separation, proceeded from the same incarnate Word.<sup>404</sup> However, Leo I had already spoken of the two wills of Christ in his *Tomus*.<sup>405</sup>

402 Davis 1990, 264.

403 Davis 1990. 265–266.

404 Davis 1990, 266.

405 Pihkala 1997, 307.

Pope Honorius did not fully understand the situation in the East and responded favourably to Sergius's letter. He stressed three points. First, we should avoid talking about two forces and actions because this was a new and objectionable argument about words. It would be Nestorian to speak of two functions, Eutychian to speak of only one. According to the scriptures Christ was one actor in the Godhead and as human and acted in many ways. Second, Jesus Christ was one person. He had performed both divine and human works through the connection between natures. Third, we must hold fast to the unity of Christ's will (*monothelitism*). When the Word truly took over our nature, he did not assume our corrupt nature.<sup>406</sup> In general, however, in Honorius's model there was a danger that Christ's humanity would be portrayed too thinly, and that simultaneously the divine and human would be mixed.

Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople seemed to have won over the pope and continued to exert pressure in the East. He prepared a legal text called the *Ekthesis* in 636, to which Heraclius subscribed in 638 as defining church practice. The edict emphasized both that all Christ's activities, divine and human, must be attributed to the incarnate Word and the one will of Christ. The paradigm that Christ had one will became known as *monothelitism*. The change in terminology also prompted a storm of debate. There was a considerable amount of material for a discussion of Christ's will in the Bible and tradition as a basis for interpretative contortion.<sup>407</sup>

In the East most of the bishops adopted the *Ekthesis*. Sophronius of Jerusalem died in 638, and his successor was a monothelite. Patriarch Macedonius of Antioch and Patriarch Cyrus of Alexandria favoured the imperial creed. The local synod of Constantinople, held shortly before Sergius's death, approved the *Ekthesis*, as did the synod held by his successor Pyrrhus in 639. In the West, however, there was opposition to the edict when, after Pope Honorius's death in 638, his successors realized the full impact of the issue. It had been declared that Christ had only one will and one truly free and spontaneous activity, divine action, and will.<sup>408</sup>

406 Davis 1990, 266–267; Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 149–150.

407 Davis 1990, 267–268; Pihkala 1997, 307; Kelly 2009, 56; Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 150–151.

408 Davis 1990, 268.

## Patriarchates of Alexandria and Antioch outside the empire with Muslim conquerors

If Sophronius's protest upset the religious order outlined by the empire, it was the Muslim conquerors who brought the rift into the empire.<sup>409</sup> By 647 the Muslims had reached Rome's borders in Africa, and there was a decisive attack on Carthage in 698. By the time Heraclius died in 641 only Asia Minor, as well as territories in the Balkans, Italy, and North Africa, was under Byzantine control. What remained of the patriarchates was Rome and Constantinople and the shrunken Antioch, but those of Alexandria and Jerusalem were now outside the empire. Initially, the Muslims did not seek to acquire converts. A special tax was imposed on Christians; and they were required to wear special clothes and refrain from building new churches, carrying the cross in public, ringing church bells, and riding horses. At the same time the pressure to conform to the national orthodox standard of faith ended. The miaphysites and Nestorians were free to keep their own doctrines.<sup>410</sup>

The Syrian church under Jacobite Patriarch John I (d. 648) spread miaphysitism in Arab-controlled Mesopotamia and Persia. In Armenia the miaphysite church, led by its catholicos, remained firmly anti-Chalcedonian and Byzantine, while uniting the lives of Armenians. In conquered Persia the Nestorians had united based on the *Book of Union* of Mar Babai the Great (d. 628) and may even have flourished under Muslim rule. Muslims favoured Nestorian Christians, who were respected as doctors, teachers, and interpreters. Nestorian missionaries worked in Central Asia among the Turks, Tatars, and Mongols, and in India. The Sigan-Fu stone, discovered by the Jesuits in the 1600s, testifies to the Nestorians' arrival in China in 635. Orthodox Christianity's sphere of influence in the East was in practice reduced to the borders of the Byzantine Empire and the patriarch of

409 Davis 1990, 268–269; Kelly 2009, 57.

410 Davis 1990, 269; Kelly 2009, 57. Frankopan 2021, 126–127 refers to the perceived similarity between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity and to the fact that the non-Chalcedonian Christians and Jews were the most important supporters during Islam's first expansion. For example, admiration of Muslims' cultural and military achievements and the common ascetic tradition obscured the understanding of the differences between doctrines.

Constantinople's subordinates, who used Greek in theology and cultural life.<sup>411</sup>

In the Slav-occupied Balkan territories Rome was in the Byzantine sphere of influence, and the Christians were orthodox Catholics. Here the pope considered himself subordinate to the Byzantine emperor. The pope's contacts with the Germanic kingdoms were minimal, but they were all now largely Catholic. Western Gothic Spain abandoned Arianism under King Reccared I (d. 601). The church was governed by the primate of Toledo, assisted by his bishops. The land of the Franks declined after the death of King Dagobert (d. 639), but Irish missionary work, led by the monk Columbanus (d. 615), created vibrant monastic centres in an otherwise barbarian country. In England seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms joined forces when Theodore of Tarsus (d. 690), consecrated archbishop of Canterbury by the pope, organized the church according to the Roman diocesan model.<sup>412</sup>

## Maximus the Confessor as the architect of the Western response

The Catholic Church's unity was shaken by geography, political organization, language, and culture. The difference between East and West was incomplete, however. Persian and Arab invasions had forced many Greek monks to seek refuge in Byzantine Africa, Sicily, and on the Italian mainland. They taught an appreciation of Byzantine theology in the West. The most significant was the monk Maximus the Confessor, who can be said to have been the most capable theologian to deal with the Christological monothelite controversy. John Meyendorff has even suggested that Byzantine theology cannot be understood without an awareness of Maximus's synthesis.<sup>413</sup> It

411 Davis 1990, 270. For 'monophysites', i.e. the Oriental Orthodox, see also Nichols 2010, 84–142.

412 Davis 1990, 270–271.

413 Davis 1990, 271; Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 150–151; Hohti 2021, 165–167 uses the Greek name *Homologetes* for Maximus.

might be said that he dealt with Chalcedonian Christology more deeply than anyone else in antiquity.<sup>414</sup>

Maximus's anti-monothelitism is crystallized in his disputation *Against Pyrrhus* (645): 'The Word, according to both its natures, was capable of willing and acting for our salvation.' Leo's *Tomus* had already laid the foundation of this idea of two natures. It famously states: 'As God's mercy does not change him, so this value does not engulf man, for it affects the connection of what is characteristic of both natures (*agit utraque forma = natura*) with the other. The word influences what is the word, and the flesh accomplishes what is the flesh.'<sup>415</sup>

For Maximus the Confessor the God's birth as a human being was a key factor in human deification. Christ was the crossroads where God reached out to humanity, and correspondingly, humanity received direction from God towards the divine. Human beings were part of God's natural order. This internal natural order was realized through the exercise of free will. However, the will was not automatically good. Maximus distinguished between the created capacity for goodwill and its actual realization in a state alienated from God. Due to the Fall, human existence had changed and resisted human nature's inner aspiration. A way of being that was in harmony with human nature was restored only through Christ. If there really were two natures in Christ, the natures must also act in two ways. Action was essential to an object's existence. Only through their functions could a distinction be made between natures. Natures and their functioning were inextricably linked. In every object was a necessary desire for good that was characteristic of its nature. The good of nature was freely achieved in the human being. However, because of primordial sin, people's will was corrupt. The evil will ignored the real good. People chose only relative good, not the good that accorded with the law of their nature. The evil will therefore differed from the pristine natural will. What had not been appropriated had not been redeemed.<sup>416</sup>

Christ had a fully human natural will. However, he could not have ill will, which had always been linked to sin, and Christ was sinless. He could

414 Chadwick 1967, 211; Daley 2020, 103–111. Daley also reflects on Augustine's possible influence on Maximus.

415 Müller 2010, 353 quotes PG 91, 289 and DH 294.

416 Davis 1990, 271–273, Müller 2010, 353.



not have an ignorant, impatient will at odds with his divine will. The divine and human wills were in harmony because one divine person guaranteed the goodness of choices. Human salvation and deification brought the evil will, through Christ's redemption, into harmony with our natural will's inner aspiration towards God. According to Maximus Christ revealed the deepest fact about humanity by becoming human: 'As man he accomplishes in all truth the true human destiny that he himself had predetermined as God, and from which man had turned: he unites man to God.'<sup>417</sup>

If Christ's human nature lacked its own human will, it would only be a marionette of the divine Logos. In the light of creation and redemption, grace could not be merely a one-sided action of God towards man; it laid the foundation for human beings' free reception and realization of the purpose of their creation. The covenant relationship of theandric communication was realized through grace. Humanity included self-awareness and self-determination. God's Word in Christ participated through the hypostatic union in the human nature's spirituality and free self-determination. The wills of both the divine Logos and Christ's human nature contained the *hypostasis*. In the *hypostasis* of the Word the wills were 'without mixing and separating, without changing and dividing'. They were not two abstract and opposing wills; they constituted both's *de facto* unity. The definition of Chalcedon was not asymmetrical because Jesus's human nature was not directly connected with the properties of divine nature but with a logically separate *hypostasis* from the nature of the Logos.<sup>418</sup> However, he was not separate from the Son born in eternity, but the Son of God born in time, who received his human nature from the Virgin Mary.

Maximus considered miaphysitism to embody a pessimistic view of human nature. Chalcedon's dogma protected the human person's autonomy and gave the created freedom inherent in it, as well as a positive value to the order of creation. Maximus was also able to overcome superficial antagonisms and find a connection between the two natures of Chalcedon and the Cyrillian idea of the 'one nature of the incarnate Word' if the distinction between natures did not disappear after the incarnation.<sup>419</sup>

417 Davis 1990, 273.

418 Müller 2010, 353–354.

419 Chadwick 1967, 211.

For Emperor Heraclius Islam's conquests meant the collapse of his life's work. After his painful death in 641 Heraclius left the crown to his two sons, Constantine III and Heraclonas. The empire was even more divided, as different groups supported different emperors. Constantine died later that year, and the people turned against the boy-emperor Heraclonas and his unpopular mother Martina. The senate deposed them. Constantine III's young son, Constans II, was made emperor. During his reign the Arabs continued their invasions, and Byzantine maritime supremacy was lost in the Mediterranean. The Byzantines and Arabs concluded a temporary peace in 659. Constans seized the opportunity to stop the Slavs' advance in the Balkans and dominate the occupying Slavs in the West.<sup>420</sup>

## Western discontent with imperial monothelite religious policies

In Italy and Africa deep dissatisfaction with imperial religious policy and the *Ekthesis*, which advocated the single power, action, and will of Christ, continued. Pope Severinus, who had succeeded Honorius in 638, sent delegates to Constantinople seeking imperial confirmation of his election. In 640 the envoys returned with news of the *Ekthesis*. Severinus died before he could react, however. His successor, Pope John IV, convened a local council that condemned the *Ekthesis* in 641. Further communication between Constantinople and Rome was interrupted by a power struggle following the death of Emperor Heraclius. For political reasons Empress Regent Martina deposed Patriarch Pyrrhus, a staunch defender of monothelitism. Pyrrhus initially crossed over to maintain his position but then fled to Africa, where he found a nest of intrigue. The imperial governor of Africa, Gregory, was planning a coup d'état like Heraclius's in 610. Pyrrhus may have seen in Gregory an actor who, as emperor, could restore his status as patriarch. As Gregory was orthodox and opposed to monothelitism, Pyrrhus would have had to change his doctrinal conception. Pyrrhus confronted Maximus the Confessor in a public debate in 645 and allowed himself to be convinced of the error of monothelitism. In Rome he officially repented of his heresy in

420 Davis 1990, 273–274; Hohti 2021, 162–168.

St Peter's Basilica before Pope John IV's successor, Theodore. The pope also wrote to the emperor asking for the restoration of Pyrrhus as patriarch.<sup>421</sup>

However, the advancing Muslims defeated Gregory's forces and killed him in 647. Pyrrhus himself was summoned to Ravenna to the court of the governor of Italy. There Pyrrhus withdrew his recantation and rejoined the monothelite camp. He continued his journey to Constantinople. In Rome a disappointed Pope Theodore condemned him. Opposition to monothelite imperial policy intensified in Rome, especially after Maximus spent 645 and 646 in the city. The spirit of opposition was also influenced by Sophronius's pupil Stephen of Dora, who had been active in electing the Palestinian Theodore pope without imperial approval. Pyrrhus's successor in Constantinople was Patriarch Paul. For three years Pope Theodore demanded a confession of faith in the will of Christ from Paul. When he finally officially professed monothelitism, Theodore excommunicated him. Paul then asked Emperor Constans to reform his religious policy.<sup>422</sup>

In the new imperial edict of *Typos* in 648 the emperor confessed his constant concern for the Christian faith's purity, expressing his dissatisfaction with the empire's division over who recognized one, and who recognized two, wills in Christ. Declaring God's inspiration, he forbade further discussion of the matter. In future everyone should base themselves on the Bible, the traditions of the five councils, and the formulations of the Fathers, without personal interpretations. The *Ekthesis* was abolished, and punishments were imposed for violating the new imperial judicial decree.<sup>423</sup>

In 649 Martin I of Italy succeeded Theodore as pope without imperial approval, partly because there was then no imperial governor in Italy. The new Pope Martin was powerful and energetic, experienced in ecclesiastical affairs, and aware of theology and influential figures in the East, where he had served as papal envoy. After three months he convened a local synod at the Lateran Palace. A hundred bishops attended the meeting, which opened on 5 October 649. At the pope's insistence Maximus the Confessor was present. The pope opened the meeting and spoke about the history of the monothelite question. Stephen of Dora and Byzantine monks living

421 Davis 1990, 274–275.

422 Davis 1990, 275.

423 Davis 1990, 275; Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 150.

in Rome, as well as letters from representatives from Ravenna, Palestine, Cyprus, and Africa, protested the heresy. After two weeks the monothelite texts were compared with comments that revealed tension between their position and the teachings of the councils and the Fathers. The creed and twenty canons were signed by 105 bishops, including two from Lombardy.<sup>424</sup> The West had condemned monothelitism.<sup>425</sup>

The bishops professed the faith of Chalcedon and added their belief that our nature had completely and without restriction become flesh in Christ, God's self, yet without sin. The two natures were hypostatically united without mixing or separating in one and the same Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ. He had two wills, divine and human, through which he naturally desired our salvation. Two activities, divine and human, were united in Christ because he brought our salvation through both his natures. Theodore of Faran, Cyrus of Alexandria, Patriarchs Sergius, Pyrrhus, and Paul of Constantinople, and the imperial *Ekthesis* and *Typos* edicts were condemned.<sup>426</sup> Maximus the Confessor's theological expertise and the pope's authority were thus combined in passing on the five ecumenical councils' legacy.

The Lateran Synod's decisions were an attack on imperial policy, but Pope Martin duly sent the information to the emperor. The imperial response was swift and brutal. The new governor, Olympius, was given the task of enforcing the *Typos* in Italy and arresting the pope. When popular resistance impeded Olympius, he sought to exploit discontent with imperial policy and rebelled against the emperor. However, Muslim militants eventually killed him in Sicily. Another governor, Theodore Calliopas, was sent to Italy in 653. He was able to arrest the pope, who was on his sickbed, in the Lateran Palace and sent him on an arduous fifteen-month journey to Constantinople. There, the pope was beaten, insulted, and interrogated before the senate for treasonous complicity with Olympius's attempted coup. He was found guilty and sentenced to death. The pope was stripped of his badges of dignity as the mob mocked him. Pyrrhus became patriarch again. He tried to persuade Pope Martin to change his mind but failed.

424 Davis 1990, 276.

425 Chadwick 1967, 210–211; Kelly 2009, 57–58.

426 Davis 1990, 276–277.

He was sent to Crimea, where he was mistreated, and died six months later in 655.<sup>427</sup>

Eugenius was elected as the new pope even before Martin's death. Peter, who succeeded the dying Pyrrhus as patriarch, wrote a moderate letter to the pope, who ignored it. The imperial representative was sent to the West to discuss better relations between Rome and Constantinople. In turn the papal representatives arrived in Constantinople just as the imperial counterattack on Maximus the Confessor was underway. He and his partner were charged in court with political crimes. Maximus was exiled to Thrace, where imperial actors tried to win him over. Later Maximus was dragged to Constantinople and sentenced again. He was again exiled, this time to the Caucasus, where he died in 662.<sup>428</sup>

In the same year Emperor Constans, unpopular in Constantinople because of his brutality, moved his court to Syracuse in Sicily. He visited the monuments of Rome in 663, where he stripped the ancient buildings of their bronze ornaments and sent them to Constantinople. Pope Vitalian, who had been at peace with Constantinople since 657, welcomed the emperor with due ceremony. In 668, after the emperor's heavy taxation had angered the people, one of his chamberlains killed Constans, who lived in Sicily, in his bath.<sup>429</sup>

Constans's son Constantine IV (668–685) ascended the throne with Pope Vitalian's support. The new emperor was forced to intervene in the increasing Muslim offensives in Cyprus, Rhodes, and Kos. Constantine now had little time for religious matters. Between 667 and 677 the popes did not recognize the patriarchs of Constantinople. In 678, when the empire was finally secured from Muslim invasion, the emperor turned to religious questions. He sent an official letter, the *Sacra*, to Pope Donus, asking for bishops and representatives of Rome's Greek monasteries to be sent to Constantinople to discuss the religious differences between East and West. When the pope delayed his response, the patriarch of Constantinople

427 Davis 1990, 277.

428 Davis 1990, 288.

429 Davis 1990, 288.

erased his name from the commemoration book. Loyal to the pope who had helped him, the emperor deposed the patriarch.<sup>430</sup>

Meanwhile, Pope Donus had died, so his successor Agatho (676–681) sent the reply. He asked for time to consult the Western bishops. Local synods met throughout the West. The representatives the pope sent to Constantinople were the Roman deacon John and the subdeacon Constantine, both future popes, three Italian bishops, a priest representing the bishop of Ravenna, and four Greek monks. They were given clear instructions and a letter from the Western bishopric signed by 125 bishops. The letter underlined the Roman church's stability as the patron of the apostolic faith received from the Apostles Peter and Paul. The pope also expressed orthodox faith in the two wills of Christ.<sup>431</sup>

## The Third Council of Constantinople as the final arbiter of orthodox faith in Christ

The Sixth Ecumenical Council opened on 7 November 680 in the domed Trullus hall of the imperial palace in Constantinople – hence the name Council in Trullo. Only forty-three bishops were present. The emperor himself opened the meeting, presiding over eleven of the first half-sessions. There were eighteen sessions in all, and with occasional long breaks the meeting lasted until 16 September 681.<sup>432</sup>

The papal representatives began the meeting by demanding that the Constantinople clergy explain their teachings on *monoenergetics* and *monothelism*. At the emperor's invitation Patriarchs George of Constantinople and Macarius of Antioch explained that they taught only doctrines defined by the ecumenical councils. This was followed by the decisions of the Council of Ephesus, Chalcedon, and Constantinople. The envoys objected to the inclusion in the council's official documents from the Second Council of Constantinople of a letter from Patriarch Menas of Constantinople to Pope Vigilius. At the fifth and sixth sessions Macarius

430 Davis 1990, 278–279.

431 Davis 1990, 279.

432 Davis 1990, 280.

of Antioch presented three extensive collections of excerpts from the texts of the Fathers in support of his position. On examination the papal representatives said many of the texts were corrupt or out of context. The texts were sealed. The papal envoys produced their own series of texts, which were also sealed at the seventh session. At the eighth session George of Constantinople said that a comparison of the texts convinced him of the two wills of Christ. His bishops supported him and demanded that the pope's name be returned to the commemoration books.<sup>433</sup>

Patriarch Macarius of Antioch refused to accept the concept of Christ's two wills because he claimed it was Nestorianism. Macarius presented a collection of texts as evidence, and the archivists testified that they had been truncated and misinterpreted. The ninth session stated that Macarius and his disciple Stephen had knowingly falsified samples of the Church Fathers' texts. They were denied any priestly authority. The texts the envoys presented were declared authentic, and the bishops of the East and clergy of Constantinople made an orthodox statement of faith. At sessions eleven and twelve Macarius was questioned. All his letters and writings were reviewed, and some were found heretical. Macarius was deposed after he admitted the texts were genuine, and the emperor was asked to appoint a new patriarch in Antioch.<sup>434</sup>

At the thirteenth session Sophronius of Jerusalem's synodal letters were declared orthodox, and the condemnation of Sergius, Cyrus, Pyrrhus, Paul, Peter, Theodore, and Honorius was discussed. At the fourteenth session it was learned that Theophanes of Sicily was the new patriarch of Antioch. During the Easter octave the pope's representative, Bishop John of Porto, celebrated mass before the emperor and patriarch. The next two sessions witnessed extraordinary events: the priest Polychronius claimed to be able to raise the dead as a testimony to the correctness of monothelitism, and the priest Constantine argued that Christ abandoned his human will on the cross when he entered glory. The view was condemned. The assembly's definition was finalized at the seventeenth session. Signed by 174 bishops, it was solemnly promulgated at the last session on 16 September 681.

433 Davis 1990, 280; Kelly 2009, 58–59.

434 Davis 1990, 280–281.

Finally, Emperor Constantine IV signed the document, which the bishops greeted with acclaim. He had stopped trying to win the miaphysites back.<sup>435</sup>

## A doctrine based on the Chalcedonian definition of Christ's two wills and actions

In their definition of faith, the bishops again solemnly accepted the previous five ecumenical councils' decisions, reaffirming their commitment to the creeds of the First Council of Nicaea and Constantinople. The anathema condemned all patriarchs of Constantinople between 610 and 666, as well as Pope Honorius (d. 638). Theodore of Faran and Cyrus of Alexandria, the first monoenergists, and the last monothelites, Macarius of Antioch and his pupil Stephen, were also condemned.<sup>436</sup>

The bishops then addressed the heart of the matter of this council, declaring that in Christ there were 'two natural wills and two natural operations indivisibly, inconvertibly, inseparably, inconfusedly'. These two wills

are not contrary... but his human will follows and that not as resisting or reluctant, but rather as subject to his divine and omnipotent will... For as his flesh is called and is the flesh of God the Word, so also the natural will of his flesh is called and is the proper will of God the Word.

They added that 'as his most holy and immaculate animated flesh was not destroyed because it was deified but continued in its own state and nature, so also his human will, although deified, was not suppressed, but was rather preserved...' They appealed to Leo the Great's teaching on the matter: 'We glorify two natural operations indivisibly, immutably, inconfusedly, inseparably... according to the divine preacher Leo... "For each form does in communion with the other what pertains properly to it..."'

435 Davis 1990, 281–282; Kelly 2009, 59. For Constantine IV and his role in the council see also Hohti 2021, 171.

436 Davis 1990, 282; Kelly 2009, 59. For the decisions of the sixth ecumenical council see e.g.: <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum06.htm>.



This they balanced with the teaching of Cyril of Alexandria: 'believing our Lord Jesus Christ is one of the Trinity and after the Incarnation our true God, we say that his two natures shone forth in his subsistence in which he both performed the miracles and endured the sufferings...' <sup>437</sup>

In their conclusion the bishops stated: 'wherefore we confess two wills and two operations, concurring most fitly in him for the salvation of the human race.' The council's decisions were embodied in an imperial court decision that was hung in an open space amid Hagia Sophia and sent on 23 December 681 to all the empire's bishops for information. A letter was also being prepared for Pope Agatho, but news of his death reached Constantinople before the envoys departed. The letter was addressed to his successor, Leo II. Macarius and the bishops deposed with him joined in making an appeal to the pope. In Rome the sentence was confirmed, and the convicted bishops were confined to a monastery. Leo II accepted the council's definition, translated it to Latin, and sent it to the bishops of the West to adopt. Finally, there was peace in the church, which lasted until Constantine's death in 685. <sup>438</sup>

Neo-Chalcedonian theology preserves Chalcedon's Christological paradox, but modern research has also suggested that it undermines the position of human nature with a Cyrillian Christological emphasis on unity. Others, however, have seen the fifth and sixth councils as a legitimate development from Chalcedon that has deepened the Christological understanding from the birth of Christ to his death and of the relationship between wills. In any case, neo-Chalcedonian theology leaves room for the person of Christ's internal dynamics along the Antiochian school's biblical-historical lines. It recognizes that Christ's true humanity is not an abstraction but concerns the true psychology of his person and him as a concrete actor. However, mystery is allowed to be mystery, giving way at any given time to fresh and eloquent expressions as part of interpretive history. <sup>439</sup>

437 Davis 1990, 283–284.

438 Davis 1990, 284.

439 Pihkala 1997, 311; Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 148, 153.

# Controversy about the ‘Apostolic Canons’ and the backlash of monothelitism

Constantine IV was succeeded as emperor by his stubborn and reckless sixteen-year-old son, Justinian II. Some monothelites remained in Constantinople. The Jacobites and Copts living in the Islamic Empire’s territory resolutely rejected the definitions of the Third Council of Constantinople. After Patriarch George of Constantinople died the emperor restored Theodore, who had been deposed because he was unwilling to compromise with Rome. Unbeknownst to the emperor, he was sympathetic to miaphysitism. Justinian II wanted to emphasize his allegiance to the Third Council of Constantinople.<sup>440</sup>

Justinian I had published the Code of Law *Corpus Iuris Civilis*; Justinian II sought to codify canon law. The codex was to be binding on all the world’s Christians. A meeting was called in Constantinople in 692, which was later named the *Quinisext* (five-six). It was to remedy the omissions of the fifth and sixth councils in the enactment of ecclesiastical law and to apply ecclesiastical law to the new situation following the Germanic and Muslim invasions. Four Eastern patriarchs, the papal envoys present in Constantinople, and some 211 bishops from the East attended. The intention was for the council to be ecumenical, leaving room at the end of the decisions for the signatures of the pope, the bishop of Ravenna, and the Illyrian bishops. The meeting agreed on 102 canons. The first included the creed and the approval of six ecumenical councils, as well as the repetition of the judgments of the Third Council of Constantinople. The resulting canon confirmed the canons of ecumenical and regional councils, including only one from the West, the Council of Carthage. The legislation was largely valid, but the seed for trouble had been sown.<sup>441</sup>

The assembly approved all eighty-five ‘apostolic’ canons, which, however, were not from the first century but only from the 300s. In the West only the first fifty were considered authentic. In the East, unlike the West, deacons and priests were allowed to live with their wives. Contrary to Western

440 Davis 1990, 284–285. For Justinian II see also Hohti 2021, 173–175 and 178–179.

441 Davis 1990, 285. For the canons of the Quinisext Council see e.g.: <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3814.htm>.

practice, the council also decreed that during Lent no full mass should be celebrated during the week, but only the eucharist, or 'once-consecrated gifts'. According to Roman practice fasting on Saturdays during Great Lent was forbidden. The assembly also approved the twenty-eighth canon of Chalcedon, declaring that the Church of Constantinople was equal in power to Rome but second in honour.<sup>442</sup>

The papal envoys signed the canons. All closing paragraphs were sent for approval by Pope Sergius, a member of the family that had fled Antioch to Sicily. Sergius resolutely refused to sign or approve his own copy of the decisions. He especially rejected the marriage of priests, the authenticity of the Apostolic Canons, and the prohibition of Saturday fasting. Justinian II suggested that the troublesome pope be dealt with as Justinian I had done. He ordered two of the papal representatives' arrest. When the pope was adamant, he sent a commissary to arrest the pope himself. Soldiers from Ravenna and Rome rose to defend the pope, and the commissary was forced to flee for his life to seek the pope's protection. The coup deposed the emperor for his cruelty, greed, and arbitrary exercise of power. General Leontius was proclaimed emperor. The empire fell into disarray, and Justinian regained power with the help of the Bulgar khan in 705.<sup>443</sup>

The patriarch, who had supported the usurper Leontius, was blinded and sent to Rome. Justinian II wrote to Pope John VII, who was of Greek descent, asking him to evaluate the canons of Quinisext at the local synod and make critical remarks on them. Before he could react, he died. He was replaced in 708 by Pope Constantine, who soon made his way to Constantinople. The emperor and pope seemed to have settled their differences, and the canons of Quinisext were not applied in the West.<sup>444</sup>

Under Justinian and his son, the empire continued to shrink as Armenia and North Africa were lost to the Arabs. Justinian himself was overthrown a second time. He and his family were murdered by an Armenian general, who assumed the title, Emperor Philip. The new emperor was a powerful monothelite and refused to enter the imperial palace in Constantinople until a tablet commemorating the Third Council of Constantinople was

442 Davis 1990, 286.

443 Davis 1990, 286.

444 Davis 1990, 287.

removed. The orthodox patriarch was deposed. Pope Constantine was sent the head of Justinian II and ordered to teach monothelitism at all theological schools. The document containing the Second Council of Constantinople's original decisions was burned. All bishops convicted in 681 were restored to the commemoration books. Pope Constantine rejected the edict, the reception of Justinian's head, and the new emperor. Instead, he organized a procession to St Peter's to commemorate the six ecumenical councils. Happily for the peace of the church Emperor Philip was inept at dealing with Bulgarians, Arabs, and religious politics and was overthrown and blinded. The new emperor, Anastasius II, declared that he would adhere to the decisions of the Third Council of Constantinople and sent his confession of faith to the pope. The patriarch also swore his orthodoxy before the papal envoy. The imperial church again enjoyed peace, and the Christological disputes were at an end.<sup>445</sup>

## Second Council of Nicaea 787: image as a sign of the reality of becoming human – the triumph of orthodoxy

Emperor Anastasius ruled for only a few years. Theodosius III, a former tax official, reluctantly accepted the crown in 717. He was soon replaced by Leo, the military commander of western Asia Minor. Leo had risen rapidly through the bureaucracy and ruled as emperor from 717 to 740. Having ascended the throne, he had to face a Muslim siege of Constantinople from land and sea. For a year the outcome was unclear, until finally the famous Greek fire, bad weather and famine among the Muslims, and Leo's determined leadership brought a turnaround. Leo repelled the Muslim invasion.<sup>446</sup>

445 Davis 1990, 287.

446 Davis 1990, 290–291; Kelly 2009, 61. For Leo III see also Hohti 2021, 179–188.

## The emperor's theocratic rule

Leo's reform of Justinian I's code of civil law, called the *Ecloga*, says something essential about the spirit of the age: a combination of Christian values and a brutal culture with wild criminal punishments. Christian values were reflected in the expansion of women's and children's rights and the strengthening of the bonds of marriage. Leo saw 1 Peter 5:2 as giving him sovereignty to care for the faithful. There were no two swords or dominions but only the emperor's governing power. The emperor was the new Moses or Solomon.<sup>447</sup>

## The controversy sparked by the emperor over the destruction of images

In 726 Leo began a struggle for the destruction of sacred images throughout the Byzantine world. The result was an iconoclastic controversy that rocked the empire for a hundred years. The early church was influenced by the image-negative Jewish tradition, and it was confronted by the pagan world's various images. According to legend the evangelist Luke had painted an icon of the Virgin and Child, but it is not until about 200 that we can speak of Christian art. By the 300s churches were filled with Christian paintings. There was also strong opposition: the church historian Eusebius was critical of the portrayal of Christ, for example, because of his miaphysite Origenist Christology, which saw the miracle of the incarnation as only a passing and unimportant event.<sup>448</sup>

In the West Gregory the Great (d. 604) had to rebuke Serenus, bishop of Marseille, for tearing down images of saints because, according to Gregory, they were a tool for the illiterate to participate in the truths of the faith. In the East, after Justinian I, the use of images for educational purposes or as reminders gave rise to a new phenomenon. People viewed images as a link to the reality of the spiritual world, offering them help and protection. Icons

447 Davis 1990, 291.

448 Davis 1990, 292, Fortounatto & Cunningham 2008, 137; Kelly 2009, 61. For example, Korhonen 2022, 10–23 also provides a historical review of the theology of the Christian image.

moved from churches to homes for private devotional practice. There, the icons of Christ and the saints were beyond the ecclesiastical authorities' control.<sup>449</sup>

Stories circulated about statues that bled when unbelievers abused them, dry wells that provided water when an icon was lowered into them, and healing icons. The most famous was the image imprinted by the Lord himself on the canvas of the King of Edessa, 'Christ's Image Not Made by Hands'. Emperor Heraclius carried the icon of Christ before his army in the Persian Wars.<sup>450</sup>

The church began to promote the use of images for doctrinal reasons. Canon 82 of the Quinisext Council of 692 stipulated that Christ was to be represented not only in symbolic form as a sheep but in human form 'so that we may perceive through it the depth of humiliation of God the Word and be led to the remembrance of His life in the flesh, His passion and His death, and of the redemption which it brought to the world'. It has been suggested that this development was supported by the representation of the emperor's image in various contexts. In the fifth century this attitude towards the emperor's image was transferred to icons. Emperor Justinian II revolutionized Byzantine coins by placing the image of Christ on them for the first time, with the epithet 'King of Kings'.<sup>451</sup>

The 500s saw the beginning of the development of the theology of the Christian image. The work of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite<sup>452</sup> (400s and 500s) provided the basis for this, though he himself did not apply it to art. The chain of being towards the contemplation of intellectual reality through the material could also proceed in the opposite direction. A bodily image, sanctified by the Spirit, could reflect the divine who dwelt in it. Icons in Byzantium thus began to be not only a demonstration of human incorporation as a history but as a living and constant presence. The image's

449 Davis 1990, 292–293.

450 Davis 1990, 293–294.

451 Davis 1990, 294.

452 Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite is known as a Christian Neoplatonist who wrote at the end of the 5th century or beginning of the 6th century CE. In his own way he transformed pagan Neoplatonism in its entirety, from Plotinos to Proclus, but especially Proclus, and thought in the Academy of Plato in a specifically Christian context.

role was no longer merely educational but sacramental – it produced the reality it represented.<sup>453</sup>

## Leo III's iconoclasm the cause of a new schism between East and West

In this situation Emperor Leo III began his campaign against the cult of images in 726. The victors destroyed many documents of the period, making it difficult to form an overall picture based on sources. There has been some debate about the provenance of this idea of imagery. It is true that Leo came from northern Syria, where Jacobite miaphysitism, which shunned religious images, was stronger than imperial Chalcedonism. In 723/724 Caliph Yazid, perhaps at Jewish instigation, had ordered the destruction not only of all Christian icons but of all images of living beings. However, there seems to be little evidence of direct Jewish or Muslim influence on the imagery of Leo and early Byzantium in the 720s. The sources maintain his iconoclasm was biblically inspired by the prohibition of images in the Ten Commandments and was a rejection of images' devotional use.<sup>454</sup>

In the early church, for example, Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria had considered the ban on images absolute and binding on Christians. This was also the prevailing position now. Fish or shepherds were common Christian symbols. Dura's house church from 232 is the earliest example of paintings in the church. Nearby there was also a Jewish synagogue with paintings of Old Testament characters and scenes.<sup>455</sup> Later in the 300s and with the Constantinian turn images became more common in churches, but a tendency to distrust images lurked beneath the surface, re-emerging in the 700s.<sup>456</sup>

Leo III's campaign did not produce the expected results. He therefore ordered the destruction of the icon of Christ above the imperial palace's bronze doors. This provoked a riot in which many officers of the imperial

453 Davis 1990, 294–295.

454 Davis 1990, 296. For the age of iconoclasm see also Hohti 2021, 182–196.

455 Chadwick 1967, 277–279.

456 Chadwick 1967, 283.

palace died. However, Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople spoke in support of images. He based his argument on God's becoming human:

In eternal memory of the life in flesh of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of His passion, His saving death and the redemption of the world, which result from them, we have received the tradition of representing Him in His human form, that is, His visible theophany, understanding that in this way we exalt the humiliation of God the Word.

This 'proves that God really became man in all things', except for sin. His incarnation, then, was neither merely illusory nor imaginary. The image represented both the reality of Christ's humanity and that of our faith.<sup>457</sup>

The image controversy caused enduring tension between the church and emperor and increased the rift between East and West, as the pope was an iconophile who approved of the religious use of images. The weight of Western Christendom had increased as new regions had converted to Christianity and North Africa had fallen under Muslim rule. When Pope Gregory II learned of Leo's iconoclastic policy, he responded strongly, reproaching the emperor for interfering in the church's doctrine when its protection was a matter for the pope, not Caesar. The pope thus sought to uphold the doctrine of two swords or dominion, the roots of which lay especially in the Church Father Augustine's theology in *De Civitate Dei*. If Leo sent someone to tear down the image of St Peter, the emperor, not the pope, would be responsible for the inevitable bloodshed. A gap was opening between the pope and the emperor of Constantinople. However, Gregory did not support the project to elect an Italian emperor in protest against Leo's economic policies.<sup>458</sup>

The image controversy was both an understandable critique of the influence of pagan art and an attack on a means of expression that illustrated the message of words and supported spirituality, which had long been quite widely accepted in the Christian world.<sup>459</sup>

457 Davis 1990, 297.

458 Chadwick 1967, 283; Davis 1990, 297–298.; Kelly 2009, 60, 62.

459 Chadwick 1967, 283–284; Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 153–154.



# John of Damascus's theological resistance to iconoclasm

The patriarch and the pope strongly opposed iconoclasm, but its most prominent theological opponent was John of Damascus (675–749), whose *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* summarized the Greek Fathers' theological achievements concerning the Trinity and God's birth as a human being. Between 726 and 730 he wrote three important works in which he defended the veneration of sacred images. The fundamental argument was Christological:

If we made an image of the invisible God, we would certainly be in error, but we do nothing of the sort, for we are not in error if we make the image of the incarnate God, who appeared on earth in flesh, and who, in his ineffable goodness, lived with human beings and assumed the nature, quantity, shape, and colour of flesh.<sup>460</sup>

John of Damascus considered iconoclasm Manichaean contempt for matter.<sup>461</sup>

John of Damascus also taught that not only Christ could be depicted but spiritual beings, for they were finite and locally limited. We no longer lived under the old law but in a time of grace, in which the church's tradition gave sacred images their authority. The world and humanity were in God's image. If the material were not respected, one would fall into Manichaeism – consider substance evil. Worship in the strict sense, however, should be reserved for God. People – and especially valuable and outstanding objects – could be respected. These included sacred images, which were a tool for guidance in the truths of faith, memories of triumphs in the Christian life, and inspirations for the good life. Sacred images were thus even channels of grace with sacramental power. The person honouring them received sanctifying power from the person depicted. Living in the

460 Chadwick 1967, 212; Davis 1990, 298; Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 155.

461 Chadwick 1967, 284.

security of the Islamic empire, John of Damascus told Emperor Leo that it was not for him to decide on the question of images.<sup>462</sup>

When Leo's policies met with increasing opposition, he attempted to win over Patriarch Germanus, but to no avail. His dismissal was to be expected. When the patriarch refused to accept the emperor's legal decision to ban images in 730, Anastasius was elected patriarch in his place. However, Pope Gregory did not recognize the new patriarch. The emperor began a systematic destruction of sacred images. The defenders of images were hit hard. Sources speak of torture, crippling, and beheading. No martyrs from this period are known by name, however.<sup>463</sup>

Gregory II died in 731. His successor, Pope Gregory III, a Syrian by birth, convened a local synod in Rome attended by the archbishops of Ravenna and Grado and ninety-three bishops. The synod excommunicated anyone who did not follow the ancient custom of venerating images, and who committed blasphemy by destroying or secularizing sacred images. East and West were again in schism. After some difficulties the pope succeeded in bringing the meeting's decision to Emperor Leo's attention. Apparently around this time he removed Illyria, Calabria, Sicily, and Sardinia from papal control and subordinated them to the patriarch of Constantinople. This further embittered relations between Rome and Constantinople.<sup>464</sup>

## Constantine V's sharp iconoclasm and the meeting of Hieria in 754

Emperor Leo died, and his son Constantine V, who was even more radical than his father, ascended the throne. Pro-icon historians mocked him. Unhappily for the church's peace he intensified the campaign against sacred images. A year after his accession the leading Armenian general, Artabasius, revolted with the support of an orthodox party opposed to iconoclasm. While Constantine was secretly recruiting troops, Patriarch Anastasius crowned Artabasius emperor, and the restoration of images

462 Davis 1990, 298–299; Kelly 2009, 62.

463 Davis 1990, 299,

464 Davis 1990, 299–300; Kelly 2009, 62.

began. Within a year, however, Constantine defeated the usurper and restored iconoclasm, destroying icons and painting over religious images on walls. Only the cross, hunting scenes, circus events, or images of garden birds and plants were allowed.<sup>465</sup>

In the West the popes were less concerned about iconoclasm than the Lombard pressure on the city of Rome.<sup>466</sup> In the East Emperor Constantine strengthened administration by continuing his father's work. The emperor also began to move the population from newly conquered territories to sparsely populated areas in the Balkans. This had serious religious consequences, as miaphysites and other heterodox groups brought their faith to the heart of the empire. Asia Minor's army was loyal to the victorious emperor and his iconoclastic programme.<sup>467</sup>

Constantine issued a doctrinal statement in his own name in which he outlined the Christological grounds for iconoclasm. Constantine did not mention Chalcedon's formulation of two natures directly but spoke of a person (*prosopon*) consisting of two natures. The only true image of Christ was one of the same essence as the image's prototype. The image of Christ could only represent his human nature, separating it from his divine nature and presenting a false image. The attempt to describe both natures inevitably led to limits being set to the divine, which was impossible. The conclusion was that Christ could not be described. The eucharist was Christ's only true image.<sup>468</sup>

Constantine also convened a general council to define iconoclastic doctrine. It met on 10 February 754 in the palace of Hieria, north of Chalcedon. Three hundred and thirty-eight bishops of the East attended, led by Theodosius, bishop of Ephesus, who was one of the original iconoclasts. At his side was Sisinnius, bishop of Perga. None of the patriarchs, let alone the pope or even his representatives, was present. The episcopal see of Constantinople was vacant at the time and the emperor did not fill it until the meeting was nearly over. The council discussed the problem of sacred images for seven months. In August 754 the bishops voted on their final

465 Davis 1990, 300–301; Kelly 2009, 62; Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 155–156. For Constantine V see also Hohti 2021, 188–192.

466 Davis 1990, 301; Kelly 2009, 60–61.

467 Davis 1990, 301.

468 Davis 1990, 301–302.

decision, the *Horos*, which was included in the Second Council of Nicaea's final documents.<sup>469</sup>

The bishops called the meeting sacred and ecumenical. They pointed out that Satan himself had first tempted people to worship creatures instead of God, but the law of Moses and the prophets had corrected this pernicious course. To save people, God sent the Son and turned us away from idolatry to worshipping God 'in spirit and truth'. Based on the ecumenical councils and the Holy Spirit's guidance, the bishops declared: 'We found that the unlawful art of painting living creatures blasphemes the fundamental doctrine of our salvation – even the incarnation of Christ – and is contrary to the six holy councils.' Anyone who foolishly made an image and called it Christ was trying to portray a divinity that could not be described or confused with another. Yet if they said it represented only Christ's flesh, they were making a Nestorian distinction between the divine and the human. In conclusion, the bishops condemned all sacred images.<sup>470</sup>

The decision was also justified by a long list of Bible passages and quotations from the Fathers. Iconoclasm was now the imperial church's defined doctrine. In areas of Muslim rule, however, the Chalcedonian Melkite patriarchs refused to accept the decision. In the years following the meeting the emperor was initially moderate towards iconophiles for fear that the empire would be weakened by external controversy. An imperial court order obliged all his subjects to take an oath against images. In 766 Patriarch Constantine was deposed, despite being a faithful iconoclast. He was exiled and then returned to Constantinople, where he was beaten and publicly beheaded. His head was pinned to the patriarchal palace's door. His successor quickly destroyed all the palace's icons. Next, not only were icons attacked, but prayers to the saints were made illegal, and relics were destroyed. Amidst this enmity Emperor Constantine V was forced by illness to interrupt his campaign against the Bulgarians. He died in 775.<sup>471</sup>

469 Davis 1990, 302.

470 Davis 1990, 302–304.

471 Davis 1990, 304–305.

# King of the Franks, Pepin the Short, patron of Rome and Empress Irene, patron of Orthodoxy

These years were critical for the West. Stephen II, Pope Zacharias's successor, desperately needed help from the East against the Lombards. When it was not forthcoming, he travelled north to a council with Pepin the Short, king of the Franks, in 754. The pope gave the king the title of patrician, making him in a sense the patron of Rome. Pepin twice defeated the Lombards and gave the pope secular power over territory outside Rome. The donated territory became the nucleus of the later papal state, which lasted until 1870. Pepin's two sons succeeded him in 768. From 771 his most talented son, Charlemagne, took possession of the land of the Franks. Charlemagne's reign culminated in the pope crowning him emperor in 800. The religious schism between East and West over iconoclasm had unpredictable political and cultural consequences. The pope now allied himself with the Frankish dynasty instead of Constantinople. Its capital, Aachen, became the 'Third Rome', and culture flourished during the 'Carolingian Renaissance' in the 800s. The polarization of East and West was now also political.<sup>472</sup>

Leo IV succeeded his father Constantine V. He was married to Irene of Athens, who was a supporter of monks and images of saints. Leo was successful in his wars with Muslims and tolerated iconophiles. However, his reign ended after just five years in 780. He left a ten-year-old son, who became Emperor Constantine VI. Empress Mother Irene, whose chief adviser for a couple of decades was the eunuch Staurakios, immediately seized power. In 784 Patriarch Paul of Constantinople, weary of the church's internal strife, retired to a monastery to prepare for death, instructing Empress Irene to convene a general council to settle matters.<sup>473</sup>

The empress sent a messenger to Pope Hadrian to prepare for reconciliation. In Constantinople Irene began her own preparations. She was seeking a new patriarch to head the Eastern bishopric, which was deeply involved in iconoclasm. The choice fell on the lay administrator Tarasios.

472 Davis 1990, 305–306; Kelly 2009, 61; Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 179–180; Miettinen 2021, 114–117. For the role of Charlemagne, Frederick Barbarossa, Frederick II, and the medieval popes in shaping Europe see Krötzel 2004.

473 Davis 1990, 306; Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 156. For Leo IV see also Hohti 2021, 192.

He was installed as patriarch on Christmas Day in 784. The pope agreed to convene a council. He pleaded that Christ himself had given Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven. He had passed them on to his successors, the bishops of Rome. The pope recalled that the popes from Gregory II (d. 731) to Stephen III (d. 772) had condemned iconoclasm: based on the Bible and the Fathers' writings, sacred images could be revered. He therefore called for the condemnation of the 754 Council of Hieria, the return of the lands of southern Italy and Sicily to the pope, and the restoration of papal authority there and in Illyria. He protested the election of the lay Tarasios as patriarch and his use of the title 'universal patriarch'.<sup>474</sup>

However, the pope promised to send Archpriest Peter and Abbot Peter from the Greek monastery of St Shaba in Rome as representatives to the general council. The Melkite patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria could not attend but were represented by some monks and John the Chaplain, and later by Archbishop Thomas of Thessalonica. The council opened on 1 August 786 at the Basilica of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, attended by Empress Irene and Emperor Constantine VI. After the meeting began a group of soldiers broke in, threatening to kill Patriarch Tarasios. The empress and patriarch tried in vain to restore order as the image-destroying bishops shouted, 'Victory is ours!' The meeting had to be postponed. The pope's representatives were invited from Sicily, the Eastern bishops were invited to Nicaea, and the council could finally begin.<sup>475</sup>

## The Second Council of Nicaea allows the veneration of images compatible with the gospel

Patriarch Tarasios of Constantinople opened the Second Council of Nicaea on 24 September 787. Present were 228–335 bishops, including Western bishops – two from Sicily and six from Calabria – two papal envoys, and representatives from Antioch and Alexandria. The discussions were long but at a much lower intellectual level than previous councils. On 26 September

474 Davis 1990, 306–307; Kelly 2009, 62–63.

475 Davis 1990, 307–308; Kelly 2009, 63.

Pope Hadrian's letter was read and judged orthodox. Two days later, the iconoclasts were restored to their previous positions at the request of the papal representatives, and the letters of the absent patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria were accepted.<sup>476</sup>

Bishop Constantine of Cyprus now spoke, declaring, 'I accept images of the saints, but I reserve adoration exclusively for the Trinity'. On 1 October the bishops discussed several Bible texts and the Fathers' writings about images. Genuine and dubious texts were confused quite freely. At the sitting on 4 October the Fathers' texts were likewise discussed. Ultimately, the meeting declared that it was satisfied, and that images should be returned.<sup>477</sup>

On 6 October the bishop of Neo-Caesarea began reading the text of the *Horos* from the iconoclastic council in 754, while two bishops refuted it point by point. The meeting's decision was ready the following week.<sup>478</sup> After it was read it was signed by the papal representatives and then everyone present. The letter was sent for information to Empress Irene and Emperor Constantine. On 23 October the council moved to the Magnaura Palace in the capital, where Tarasios personally presented the decision to the imperial couple, who approved it.<sup>479</sup>

Although the bishops' discussion was rambling, the meeting's decision was concise and focused. It stated that Christ had freed us from idolatry and maintained his church, yet some priests had gone astray. They did not 'distinguish between holy and profane, styling the images of our Lord and of His saints by the same name as the statues of diabolical idols'. Thus, images of idols were distinguished from venerated sacred images. The bishops added that they accepted the six previous ecumenical councils' decisions, in particular the First Council of Nicaea, and joined the previous councils in condemning heretics. They affirmed that they would keep both the written and oral ecclesiastical traditions they had received intact. One was the preparation of pictorial representations in harmony with the gospel's

476 Davis 1990, 308; Kelly 2009, 63.

477 Davis 1990, 308–309; Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 156–158.

478 For the decision of the meeting see e.g.: <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum07.htm>

479 Davis 1990, 309 f.

historical sermon. At its core, then, was the demonstration of the reality of God's Word becoming human.<sup>480</sup>

Based on the traditions of the Fathers and the church in which the Holy Spirit's work was manifested, the bishops determined

with all certitude and accuracy that just as the figure of the precious and life-giving Cross, so also the venerable and holy images, as well in painting and mosaic as of other fit materials, should be set forth in the holy churches of God and on the sacred vessels and on the vestments and on hangings and in pictures both in houses and by the wayside, to wit, the figure of our Lord God and Savior, Jesus Christ, of our spotless Lady, the Mother of God, of the honourable Angels, of all the saints, and of all pious people ... and to these should be given due salutation and honourable reverence, not indeed that true worship of faith which pertains only to the divine nature, but to these, as to the figure of the precious and life-giving Cross and to the Books of the Gospels and to other holy objects. ... For the honour which is paid to the images passes to that which the image represents, and he who reveres the image reveres the subject represented.<sup>481</sup>

The bishops also voted on twenty-two canons that afford an insight into the problems the church was facing. In accordance with the Quinisext Council of 692, the bishops approved the Apostolic Canons, the decisions of the six ecumenical councils, and those of the local councils. They declared princely ecclesiastical appointments invalid. An annual council was to be held in each metropolitan area. Simony, the buying or selling of church offices, was a difficult problem, and the bishops ordered its cessation. Bishops who consecrated churches without relics were suspended.<sup>482</sup>

Bishops and abbots were also instructed to provide stewards to look after bishops' houses and monasteries, but they were forbidden to have women in their service and were not to lose the property of institutions

480 Davis 1990, 309; Kelly 2009, 63.

481 Davis 1990, 309–310. For more information about the Third Council of Constantinople's visual theology see Giakalis 2005; for the theology of icons see Fortounatto & Cunningham 2008, 136–149

482 Davis 1990, 310.



in their custody. Clergy were advised to remain in their own dioceses, dress appropriately modestly, and dine with women in public or private only in emergencies. Clergy were forbidden to serve two churches in Constantinople but could do so in rural areas. Anyone who had been improperly ordained was forbidden to take clerical office and read from a reading desk in church. Many canons concerned monastic life. New monasteries were not to be built if there were insufficient funds to complete the work. Nor were there to be twin monasteries for women and men, though existing twin monasteries were allowed to continue. The treatment of Jews was also harsher.<sup>483</sup>

## Translation errors and Charlemagne's protest against the Second Council of Nicaea's decisions

Patriarch Tarasios duly sent a letter about the decisions the general council had taken to Pope Hadrian. This time he did not ask the pope to confirm the decisions. Indeed, the pope's representatives had already signalled that he approved them. Hadrian did not reply to the letter for seven years, for he found himself in an awkward situation. The Second Council of Nicaea had reconciled Rome and Constantinople, but the agreement did not reach the level of secular government. King Charlemagne of the Franks, Hadrian's ally and protector, had received the decisions of Nicaea II in a hopelessly poor and distorted translation. The errors were so great in some places that the Latin text reversed the original Greek's intention.<sup>484</sup>

In 790 Charlemagne authorized the Western Gothic scholar Bishop Theodulf of Orleans to conduct a detailed overturning of the decisions of Nicaea II. On this basis Charlemagne informed Pope Hadrian that he would reject the council's decision. The pope defended the council's decisions, but Charlemagne had Theodulf draft a statement on the Franks' view of sacred images called *Libri Carolini*, according to which only God could be worshipped, not sacred images. Nor could images be given the same

483 Davis 1990, 310–311.

484 Davis 1990, 711; Kelly 2009, 63.

appreciation and reverence as saints, their relics, and the cross, or what could be paid to special living persons. The declaration refuted the principle that respect for images was based on their relationship with their origin, which led simple people to respect the image alone. Candles and incense should not be burned before images. Images could be used to decorate churches, and existing images must not be defaced or destroyed.<sup>485</sup>

*Libri Carolini* held fast to the church of Rome's primacy and its sacred and venerable connection with the church of the Franks. Citing the need for balanced consultation, Nicaea II was criticized because, contrary to ecclesiastical custom, it had excommunicated 'all the churches of the world' without consultation. Charlemagne thus rejected both the 754 Council of Hieria, which had forbidden images, and the Second Council of Nicaea, which had approved them. The document reflected the tension between East and West and outright hostility to the Greeks. This was especially directed at Empress Irene. The envisaged alliance of Charlemagne's daughter Rotrude and Emperor Constantine was now out of the question. Pope Hadrian drew up a detailed rebuttal of *Libri Carolini* and sent it to Charlemagne, but he did not change his mind. The king of the Franks would not allow a council held under the Byzantine empress to dictate the faith of his church. Pope Hadrian for his part replied to Empress Irene that he accepted the decisions of Nicaea II, but at the same time she was threatened with excommunication if the lands under her authority in southern Italy and Sicily, as well as in Illyria, were not returned to papal control.<sup>486</sup>

## Controversy over the inheritance of the Roman Empire between the emperors of the East and West

In 794 the Council of Frankfurt, convened by Charlemagne and focusing on Spanish Christological heresy, again dealt with sacred images. The false view that the Greeks taught images should be worshipped like the Holy Trinity was repeated and rejected. Yet *Libri Carolini* was not adopted unreservedly.

485 Davis 1990, 712.

486 Davis 1990, 312–313.

Relations between East and West deteriorated further when Pope Hadrian's successor, Leo III, crowned King Charlemagne emperor on Christmas Day 800. Byzantium did not accept the title until Charlemagne captured the Byzantine-controlled city of Venice in 812. The two enemy empires both considered themselves the Roman Empire's successors.<sup>487</sup>

However, the controversy about images was pushed to one side. It was not addressed until Emperor Michael II sent an embassy to Emperor Louis the Pious, Charlemagne's son, to restore good relations, agreeing that the worship of images was forbidden, but they were allowed in churches. Pope Eugenius II retained the pontifical approval of Nicaea II but rejected Louis's plan to convene a synod of Frankish bishops to discuss the issue. In 825, however, a conference was held either in Paris or outside the city at the Royal Monastery of St Denis at Archdeacon Hilduin's initiative. It achieved nothing, reaching a brief climax in the actions and writings of Claudius, bishop of Turin (d. 840).<sup>488</sup>

## The return and fall of iconoclasm in the East

Meanwhile, in the East, Emperor Constantine VI grew up and succeeded his mother, Irene. As a military leader Constantine was not the equal of previous emperors. He lost the army's loyalty and then got into trouble with the church. Having been abandoned by the army and the church, Empress Irene deposed and blinded him in the room where he was born. Tarasios and Joseph lost favour, and Irene was deposed and sent into exile in 802 in a palace revolution in which Nicephorus (802–811), the minister of finance, was placed on the throne.<sup>489</sup>

Emperor Nicephorus was orthodox and an iconophile. He appointed his namesake patriarch of Constantinople after Tarasios's death in 806. Together, they restored the priest Joseph to honour. Unfortunately for Emperor Nicephorus, Emperor Charlemagne's campaign against the Transylvanian Avars had freed the Bulgarians in the Eastern Empire.

487 Davis 1990, 313.

488 Davis 1990, 313–314.

489 Davis 1990, 314; Kelly 2009, 64.

Grand Khan Krum attacked in the east, and Emperor Nicephorus was killed in battle. The emperor's son was carried from the battlefield mortally wounded. Michael I (811–813), known as Rangabe, ascended the throne, with Theodore of Studium his chief theological adviser. Fearing a Bulgarian invasion, the crowd gathered at the tomb of the iconoclast emperor Constantine V and prayed for the return of the great military commander. During the Bulgarian War the weak but amiable Michael I was deposed when his army was defeated, partly because much of western Asia Minor had been deserted.<sup>490</sup>

Emperor Leo V (813–820), crowned by the new patriarch, Nicephorus, was more fortunate than his predecessors. Krum died unexpectedly, and the empire had a 30-year truce with the Bulgarians. As the Arabs had internal problems after the death of the caliph of Baghdad, Haroun-al-Rashid, the Byzantine Empire enjoyed a few years of peace. Emperor Leo restored iconoclasm. The leaders of the orthodox party were set aside. Patriarch Nicephorus was deposed, and Theodore of Studium was driven into exile. John Grammaticus laid the foundation for a new doctrinal statement. The Council of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople in 815 rejected the Second Council of Nicaea, and the iconoclastic council of 754 was now proclaimed the faith of the empire.<sup>491</sup>

In 820 Emperor Leo V was assassinated before Hagia Sophia's high altar. Michael II (820–829), founder of the Amorite dynasty, replaced him. He allowed the leading iconophiles, former Patriarch Nicephorus and Theodore of Studium, to return to the capital. However, Michael did not allow the return of sacred images. The emperor did not recognize Nicaea II, nor did he recognize the chamber assemblies of 754 and 815. After Theodore of Studium appealed to Rome as the Petrine church Michael initiated conversations in 824 with the Western emperor, Louis the Pious. The discussions were fruitless, and Michael continued the policy of moderate iconoclasm. The emperor had to face a claimant to the throne supported by iconophiles, but he retained power with the support of the Bulgarians. Faced with the growing Muslim threat, however, he was less fortunate.

<sup>490</sup> Davis 1990, 314–315.

<sup>491</sup> Davis 1990, 315.

Byzantium lost Crete in 826, and Sicily faced an invasion the following year. The Christian East was slowly shrinking by Michael's death in 829.<sup>492</sup>

In these years of new iconoclasm, the iconophile leaders were the monk Theodore of Studium and Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople. During Emperor Leo V's reign Theodore led the battle against iconoclasm. In his essay *On the Holy Icons*, he applied the dogma of Chalcedon. To say that Christ could not be described would lead to the conclusion that he had no genuine human nature, as the heretics who considered Christ's humanity apparent (docetism), or that his human nature would sink into his divinity, as the long-condemned miaphysites had taught. Theodore emphasized that when Christ was described, his *hypostasis*, or person, was described, not his divine or human nature. Thus, Christ could be the prototype of the image because his humanity could be described, though it was in his divine person. The image and prototype differed in substance but had the same likeness and name. Worship was directed at the prototype's likeness that appeared in the image. Theodore was sentenced to semi-exile after being allowed to return to Constantinople. He died in 826.<sup>493</sup>

Patriarch Nicephorus staunchly opposed iconoclasm. He rejected the Origenist notion that Christ's humanity's deification entailed a reduction in its materiality. He held fast to Christ's real humanity and his full and true experience of what it was to be human. As Christ was fully human with a human body, he could be described. Thus: '... the humanity of Christ if bereft of one of its properties is a defective nature, and Christ is not a perfect man or rather not Christ at all, but is lost altogether if He cannot be circumscribed or represented in art.' In exile Nicephorus accompanied Michael II to the tomb as a layman in the monastery he founded in 829.<sup>494</sup>

Michael II's son Theophilus succeeded him. He had been trained by iconoclastic teachers and loved non-figurative Islamic art. Theophilus soon fully restored iconoclasm. The prisons were filled with iconophiles. Monks had to flee their monasteries. The radical iconoclast John Grammaticus replaced his moderate predecessor as patriarch in 837. In 839 the imperial dynasty's hometown of Amorium was bloodily defeated by Muslim armies.

492 Davis 1990, 315–316.

493 Davis 1990, 316–317.

494 Davis 1990, 317.

Emperor Theophilus died in 842, but he made his heirs swear on his deathbed that they would continue his policy. Power passed to Empress Mother Theodora as guardian of the child emperor Michael III. Although pressed by the dead emperor's brother to return the images, Theodora hesitated to reverse her beloved husband's iconoclastic policy. However, he allowed the iconophile Methodius to replace the iconoclastic patriarch. The new patriarch believed Theodora's assurances that the deceased Emperor Theophilus had repented of iconoclasm on his deathbed and did not condemn him. Patriarch Methodius declared sacred images legal in 843 and condemned iconoclasm. The first Sunday of Great Lent was declared the Sunday of Orthodoxy. It is still celebrated in the Eastern Orthodox Church.<sup>495</sup>

## Conclusions concerning the dispute about iconoclasm

Politically, the long contortion over images was one factor in the West's alienation from the Eastern Empire at a critical moment. In resisting iconoclasm, the popes could not expect help from the emperor of Constantinople, who was busy removing images from churches. Pope Zachary therefore gave the Frankish king Pepin the Short moral support in his quest to win the crown from the passive Merovingian kings in return for military aid against the Lombards. Pope Stephen even approved the secular administration of the old Byzantine provinces. This laid the foundation for the papal state, which lasted until the Lateran Treaty with Mussolini in 1929. On Christmas Day 800 Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne Emperor of the West. In doing so, he created a new defender of papal authority who proved as ready to dictate theology to the church as his Eastern counterparts.<sup>496</sup>

Artistically, iconoclasm slowed progress and destroyed countless ancient treasures. Had it become the church's official doctrine, Western church art's greatest achievements would never have been created. After the iconoclastic interlude Byzantine art reached new heights, continuing its

495 Davis 1990, 317–318; Kelly 2009, 64; Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 157.

496 Davis 1990, 318–319.

strong influence in the West. The theological tendency to see the icon as a reflection of the reality it depicted influenced artistic style. Icons were seen as accurate and true depictions of their prototypes.<sup>497</sup> This remains especially evident in the strict rules of Greek iconography.

Ecclesiastically, monks' strong support for sacred images under imperial and episcopal pressure raised their status among the laity. Monastic churches filled with icons displaying their prototypes' spiritual power became places of vibrant contemplation between the divine and the human. In the Eastern tradition monks themselves became centres of holiness in the world.<sup>498</sup>

Theologically, the controversy was an attempt to express the meaning of Christ's humanity. The old Antiochian Christology, which had sought to do full justice to Christ's human nature, was in danger of subordination to the heightened Cyrillian Christology of miaphysitism and monothelitism. Imperial iconoclasm approached God only as an intellectually accessible abstraction or limited the meaning of Christ's humanity to the thirty or so years when he lived among us. Theologians who accepted sacred images emphasized the continuing importance of Christ's humanity. He was God who had become man and still was, even though he was exalted at the right hand of the Father. Jesus was and is the divine and human way to the Father. Sacred images of Christ that portray him as truly human, truly reflecting his divine and human prototype, are a permanent reminder of this through the eyes of faith.<sup>499</sup>

497 Davis 1990, 319.

498 Davis 1990, 319.

499 Davis 1990, 319.



### 3. Summary and evaluation of the importance of the Ecumenical Councils

In the first Christian centuries, when Christians were a persecuted minority, the councils were yet to have state-sanctioned ecclesiastical significance, though the purpose was to resolve issues of common faith and church life. The liturgical tradition and reading of the apostolic scriptures, as well as the bishops' and congregations' sense of faith, played a crucial role in fostering the unity of teaching and proclamation at the parochial level. A change began when Christianity gained religious freedom with the edict of the emperors Constantine and Licinius in Milan in 313. The granting of religious freedom intensified public debate about Christianity's place in the world of religions, which also led to speculation about the doctrine of the Trinity. The result of this discussion was the deepest crisis for the confession of Christ. Its protagonist was the Libyan-born priest Arius.

Philosophically, Arius's thinking was inspired by Gnosticism and Neoplatonism, but it was also influenced by the Old Testament and the Antiochians' literal interpretation of the Bible. Arius's basic idea was to emphasize God's absolute transcendence and unity in accordance with a theologically applied Christian Platonism. God in God's omnipotence could not directly approach the non-necessary and changing world, so God needed a created instrument to approach it. For Arius this instrument was the God-created Word. Admittedly, the Word was above other creatures but was still created – a kind of demigod.



The model upset the foundations of belief in Christ by denying 1) the full divinity of Christ and 2) his human soul. A god who on rational grounds is absolutely one and transcendent, who is not in relation to others through his persons in the manner of the Triune God, cannot ultimately reveal God's self. A prerequisite for the Christian doctrine of redemption is the unity of the substance of the Logos with the Father and God's inner unity as Triune.

## Council of Nicaea 325

Locally, Arius's views had already been condemned, but Emperor Constantine was concerned about the persistent dispute's implications, both politically and from the perspective of his perceived divine vocation, for the unity of the empire and the church. The emperor convened a general nationwide council in Nicaea in 325. Like the Roman Senate, the assembly was given a degree of autonomy that protected the church's independence from the state. Constantine occasionally participated actively in the debate. He confirmed the bishops' decisions and made them binding under Roman law. The emperor's convening of an ecumenical council and incorporation of its decisions into the state's public law also served as a model for future ecumenical councils.

The meeting's key concept was the Greek term *homoousios* (same essence), included in the meeting's creed, which describes the substance of the divinity of God the Father and the Son of God. An unequivocal biblical interpretative key could not be found. It therefore had to be chosen outside them so that the basic truths of the biblically based Christian concept of God and salvation could be expressed sufficiently clearly. Three basic premises were central to this Nicaean decision: 1) the Son is not created; 2) the eternal Son proceeds from the Father through 'birth' (as distinct from creation); 3) the distinction based on the relationship between the Father and the Son concerns the unity of substance in the reality of God's being.

Although the term *homoousios* had yet to be officially included in Western theology, it fitted the Trinitarian theology popular in the West and the concept of the Father as the source of the Trinity. It is likely that Constantine's theological adviser Bishop Ossius of Cordoba received support from Bishop Alexander of Alexandria in proposing the term, with

the emperor's involvement, as a key concept in the creed. Constantine may have been partly drawn by the term's ambiguity, which made the creation of a united front possible.

According to the Nicaean faith the law of love Christ proclaimed could also be contrary to Caesar's decrees. Christ's divine self-sacrifice ensured salvation for humankind and brought into force a new law to which the Christian ruler was also subordinate. Yet based on Arianism's low and thin Christology, the ruler could be seen as God's instrument in maintaining social order. The law of the historical Christ could not surpass the living law – that is, the emperor by the grace of God. According to the Nicene Creed obedience to the emperor could also entail the questioning of his ideas in a particular situation if the common orthodox Christian faith required it.

Under Constantine the Nicene Creed remained firmly established as a criterion of true faith. However, Nicaea was not immediately set in stone in the sense that it met with undivided approval. Both the ambiguous history of the interpretation of the term *homoousios* and church-political and political situations influenced this. The council's interpretation was influenced by the growing tension between the easternmost and western parts of the Roman Empire and its use in church-political wrangling, even though the leadership of the Eastern patriarchate of Alexandria and Rome were on the same side on this issue. In the East Arian leaders were able to build a relatively united front in the Greek churches. They received support from tolerant emperors, first from Constantine II (337–361), then from Valens (364–378). Arianism's final overthrow heralded the continuation of tension between East and West.

Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, can be considered the main defender of Nicaea and the true saviour of the council's theological core. Athanasius's premise was the doctrine of salvation, or *soteriology*. The basis of human salvation is that the Word of God, incarnate in Christ 'for our sake and for our salvation', is of the same substance as the Father, and that he has simultaneously become truly human. Athanasius emphasized that the Son had to become human to redeem the human family and for people to be deified – that is, to repair the image of God shattered by the Fall. Despite his unyielding reputation, it is noteworthy that Athanasius, with ecumenical wisdom, decided before his death to build harmony among those who, despite their terminological differences, held to the Son of God's full divinity

and his essential communion with God the Father against various forms of Arianism.

In the 360s and 370s, in addition to the old Arianism, new theological problems arose. The first headache was the unwritten doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Nicene Creed. There were theologians who embraced the Nicaean belief that the Son was of the same substance as the Father. They did not grant the same status to the Holy Spirit, however. Athanasius considered this untenable. The Nicaeans named them ‘Spirit-fighting’, *pneumatomachi* or *Macedonian*.

Second, there was terminological ambiguity regarding the concept of *hypostasis* and its relationship to the concept of essence, or *ousia*. Athanasius avoided using the term *hypostasis* until the 360s. In the circle of Basil of Ancyra, however, some had begun to say that the relationship between *hypostasis* and *ousia* should be understood as a relationship between the special and the common.

The third problem of the 360s was the most difficult. Apollinaris of Laodicea in Syria developed Word-flesh Christology (*Logos-sarx*), according to which the union of the divine with the human in Christ in one nature was possible only by replacing the soul of Jesus with that of the Son. This was not how Christ’s full humanity was expressed, however.

After Athanasius died in 373, he was succeeded by the Cappadocian Fathers Basil of Caesarea (the Great, 329–379), his friend Gregory of Nazianzus (the Theologian, 329–390), and Basil’s brother Gregory of Nyssa (331–396). Basil’s book *Of the Holy Spirit* picked up where Athanasius’s *Epistle to Serapion* had left off, marking a decisive advance in the discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Athanasius was the first theologian of the East to emphasize the absolute identity of the essence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Basil and Gregory of Nyssa, meanwhile, drew attention to a distinction within that unity. Basil sharply distinguished between one being (*ousia*) and three *hypostases*, or ways of being, while emphasizing the mutual existence of their *hypostases*. Gregory explained the relationships between differences in divine existence and the works of God proceeding from the Father, through the Son in the Holy Spirit. Basil brought Eastern thought in the same direction as the Western tradition, where Tertullian had already formulated God as having one substance but three persons (*una substantia, tres personae*). In Christological development Gregory of Nazianzus was a

true theological champion. He emphasized that what the Redeemer had not taken possession of had not been redeemed. All humanity was to be embraced, including its intellectual aspect. If Christ had a soul but no mind, he was not truly human.

The Cappadocians' further theological work on the doctrine of the Trinity and Christology provided a solid basis for rapprochement with the teaching of Tertullian in the West, creating the conditions for the consolidation of Nicaea and simultaneously the classical doctrine of the Trinity in Constantinople in 381.

Having been named emperor, Theodosius I (379–395) informed the Greek world that ecclesiastical recognition was conditional on acceptance of the Nicene Creed and communion with Pope Damasus and Peter (Athanasius's successor), bishop of Alexandria.

## Council of Constantinople 381

In May 381 Emperor Theodosius summoned an ecumenical council of 150 bishops to Constantinople to confirm the anti-Arian result achieved in the East. This meant the decisions of Nicaea were confirmed both theologically and ecclesiastically, and that the Cappadocian interpretation became part of state orthodoxy. The Nicene Creed was then also applied to the Holy Spirit, as had been done in baptismal teaching's early history.

Doctrinally and from the perspective of the continuity of the Nicæan faith, it is essential that the Council of Constantinople in 381 affirmed the key term 'same essence' (*homoousios*) of the confession adopted at the Council of Nicaea 325. At the meeting in Constantinople a carefully worded addition concerning the Holy Spirit relied on Basil the Great's argument that the Holy Spirit was worshipped and honoured in the liturgy with the Father and the Son, and that the difference between the Son and the Spirit was that the Son was 'born of the Father', but the Holy Spirit 'proceeded from the Father'. The council also condemned Apollinarism and Macedonianism.

The present Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed was adopted in written form at the Council of Chalcedon's second session in 451. It was then considered an extension of the Nicene Creed, which was its only name in the Middle Ages. In general, the Council of Constantinople only confirmed

the Nicaean faith's basic ideas. However, it added parts that dealt with problems yet not to be foreseen at Nicaea. The main protest of the creed was directed against the deniers of the Holy Spirit's divinity, who were called semi-Arians in the council's first canon.

As in Nicaea, several canons related to church practice were adopted at the Constantinople meeting. According to the third canon the bishop of the emperor's new capital, Constantinople, was second in precedence to the bishop of Rome because it was the 'new Rome'. This applied the principle of accommodation in Eastern Christendom, according to which a city's ecclesiastical weight was parallel to its secular weight. The new capital now surpassed Alexandria and Antioch in rank, which was regarded unfavourably by the former second city, Alexandria, and by the bishop of Rome.

In 382 Pope Damasus convened a council in Rome, stating that the church of Rome was not first because of the councils' decisions but by the words of our Lord to Peter: 'You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.' He also highlighted the importance of the Apostle Paul and Rome as the place of his death. Pope Damasus's reaction to the Eastern principle of accommodation was clear: the bishop of Rome's primacy was based on his succession from Peter and Paul, and the hierarchical order of the episcopal sees was based on Peter: Rome was Peter's first see; Alexandria, consecrated by Peter's disciple Mark, the second; and Antioch as Peter's residence before moving to Rome, the third.

At the level of political theology, the difference was that there was a symphony in the East, the idea of a common voice between church and state, and there was no such understanding in the West (cf. Augustine), which described church and state as two communities (*societas*). In the Eastern model they were parts of the same whole, striving for harmony. The emperor was seen as the secular equivalent of a divine monarch, or patriarch. He was expected to represent orthodox Christianity; if he did not, he met strong protest. In this theory, however, the balance could be seriously disturbed if the state sought to control the church. In the West, where the paradigm was more ambiguous, the church could similarly seek to dominate the state.

# Council of Ephesus 431

The reaction of the patriarchate of Alexandria to the priority given to Constantinople caused its patriarchs to seek only weak bishops in Constantinople. Bishop John Chrysostom (d. 407), known for his outspokenness and popular acclaim, was removed from office on two occasions with the help of Empress Eudoxia. He eventually died in prison. Alexandria had won the first round.

Even worse was to come. In 428 Nestorius, the head of a monastery in Antioch and known as a good preacher, had become bishop of Constantinople. Nestorius sought to remove the Arians from the church. Ironically, this nemesis of heretics was himself accused of heresy. The Antiochian clergy he brought with him began to preach against Mary being called *Theotokos* according to an old Greek prayer. Nestorius began to attack the title at every opportunity. Because it was part of the local church's religious heritage in Constantinople and congregations' liturgical sense of faith, church people protested.

In Alexandria Patriarch Cyril followed the events against the background of his episcopal see's critical tradition, Egypt's prosperity, and the many monks living in the wilderness. He has been described as both an active theologian and an ecclesiastical zealot. At Easter in 429 Cyril wrote to the monks in the wilderness, warning them of Nestorius's errors. Nestorius immediately preached against Cyril's letter and commissioned one of his priests to draft a detailed refutation, which he sent to Cyril. At the same time Cyril sent his first direct epistle to Nestorius. If each side had made a genuine effort to understand the other without compromising their convictions, there might well have been agreement, and the Nestorian and miaphysite dispute, or at least its escalation, might have been avoided.

The controversy began with the term *Theotokos*, but behind both defenders' and opponents' thinking lay differences in their understanding of the person of Christ. To put it simply, Nestorius represented the Antiochian tradition; Cyril the Alexandrian. Antiochian (separation) Christology started with the Jesus of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) and sought to explain how this man was also God (*Logos-anthropos*). Alexandrian (unity) Christology started with the prologue of the Gospel of John and sought to understand what it meant that the Word became flesh (*Logos-sarx*). The difference between the two schools is encapsulated in the Alexandrian

school's emphasis that if Christ were really to save us, he must be God, and in the Antiochian school's emphasis that if Christ were truly to save us, he must be one of us.

Nestorius started with separation in explaining Jesus Christ and got into trouble with the oneness of the person. Against Arius and Apollinaris he sought to do justice to Christ's full humanity. Calling Mary the *Theotokos* meant either Arianism – the Son was only a created being born of a woman; or Apollinarism – Jesus's humanity was perfected through the Word's presence. For Nestorius *Christotokos* was a theologically more accurate title for Mary. He spoke of the union of Christ's natures rather than of unification by grace, which was not essential. The unity of the person was not clearly expressed.

In his Second Epistle to Nestorius Cyril theologically considered how the Council of Nicaea's work could be continued. The Only Begotten Son of the Father, the true God of the true God, through whom the Father made the universe, became human, suffered, rose from the dead, and ascended into the heavens. God's Word was personally associated with a human being, who was called the Son of Man. It was not merely about will or favour, nor about appropriating the human persona. The natures were brought into true unity, but the differences between them remained. Through the unity of divinity and humanity we received one Lord and Christ, and a Son. The Word was personally associated with human nature for our sake and for our salvation in a woman, which was why he could be said to have been born in the flesh.

Cyril rejected the expression 'in two natures' because he regarded it as separation. He used Apollinaris's formulation 'one incarnate nature of the divine Word' because he thought it came from Athanasius. When Cyril realized that talking about two natures did not always mean separation, he was willing to compromise. To settle the matter once and for all, Emperor Theodosius II convened a general council at Ephesus in 431.

The meeting's essential doctrinal conclusion was that Cyril's Second Epistle to Nestorius accorded with Nicaea; Nestorius's response did not. Pope Celestine's letter to Cyril and Cyril's Third Epistle to Nestorius with its anathemas were included in the meeting's appendices. Nestorius had been deposed, and Alexandria had again defeated Constantinople.

The emphasis on the person of Christ's unity is theologically essential to the decision. A third person between God and human has not come into

being through the union of natures. There are no two subjects in Christ – that is, the bearers of his divinity and his humanity. The subject of unity is the Word of God, the Logos, who constitutes the reality of the unity of the God-human. What is essential is the doctrine of salvation, the soteriological motive. God's very self entered human reality in Jesus Christ, was born, suffered, died, and rose from the dead. He has not merely entrusted human beings with the redemption he affects. God is the author of the salvation event. God is the basis of salvation in Jesus and the subject of vicarious suffering and death. A hypostatic, or personal, union also results in the exchange of qualities between natures, not at the level of natures but in relation to the person of the God-human, Jesus Christ. This boils down to the term Mary as *Theotokos*. She gave birth to the person of God's Word: he derived his human nature from her.

## Council of Chalcedon 451

Before the Christological paradox of the Council of Chalcedon showed the limits of pure forms of both Antiochian and Alexandrian Christology in expressing and protecting the mystery of God's incarnation, the road still led to escalation and the political attempt to make the extremist Cyrillian position of the 'Robber Synod' of Ephesus in 449 an orthodox and binding position of the Catholic Church. Here, Alexandria was again victorious over Constantinople, as it had been under John Chrysostom in 404 and Nestorius in 431. The church did not accept this Council of Ephesus as ecumenical, however.

Western Christological thought, represented by Pope Leo the Great and his Christological writing, or *Tomus*, was first submitted to the Robber Synod of Ephesus and then discussed matter-of-factly at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. In the West Tertullian had already prepared the terminology of the doctrine of the two natures of Christ. Hilary of Poitiers (315–367), who lived in southern Gaul, was already consciously building a bridge between Latin and Greek theology. As in Tertullian's theology, in Hilary's Christology Christ has one unifying centre, which can be called a person who is simultaneously God and all-human.



Augustine refined the theological heritage of Tertullian, Hilary of Poitiers, and the Cappadocians. It is likely that he learned of their connection from Ambrosius, bishop of Milan. Like these theological predecessors, he placed nature or substance at a more general level than a person representing individuality and recognizability. The concept of the person was now newly applied in the West not only to the doctrine of the Trinity but to Christology. That Augustine recognized a clear correspondence between the Cappadocian Fathers' Trinitarian theology and Tertullian's formulation of a single substance and three persons (*una substantia, tres personae*) is aptly illustrated by the fact that it is from Augustine, not the Cappadocian Fathers, that the crystallization of the Cappadocian model *mia ousia, treis hypostaseis* (one essence, three *hypostases*, or personalities) comes. The Antiochians could therefore find in Pope Leo's *Tomus* an understanding of the two natures' reality and independence, and the Alexandrians Cyril's basic view that the incarnate person was identical to the divine Word.

A new council was opened at Chalcedon on 8 October 451, lasting until All Saints' Day. About five hundred bishops (350 according to today's estimates) participated – more than at previous general councils. As a consolidator of basic Christological doctrine and confirmation of the ecumenical nature of the Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Ephesus, the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon can therefore be considered the most important of the first millennium.

If by 449 the patriarchate of Alexandria had amassed a set of victories in relation to Constantinople, a bitter defeat now came when Patriarch Dioscorus of Alexandria, who presided over the Robber Synod, was convicted. He had accepted Eutyches into communion despite his own bishop's condemnation. Dioscorus had not allowed Leo's *Tomus* to be read, and he had tried to excommunicate the pope. He was therefore deprived of the episcopate and the title of priest. Patriarch Anatolius of Constantinople presided over 185 bishops when they accepted the verdict. Alexandria was dealt a bitter blow.

The introduction to the assembly's statement of faith expressed a desire to preserve peace by teaching the truth of common doctrine. The Nicene Creed was solemnly affirmed, and it was decreed that 'the creed of the 318 Fathers shall remain intact' in the form adopted at Constantinople in 381 as an authentic interpretation of the Nicaean faith. The Council of Constantinople was thus elevated to the rank of an ecumenical council: it

‘ratified and confirmed the doctrine communicated by the 150 Holy Fathers concerning the nature of the Spirit’. The decisions of the Council of Ephesus in 431 were also adopted, and the assembly approved the synodal letters of Blessed Cyril to Nestorius and the Orientals according to the creeds of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Ephesus to refute the doctrine of Nestorius. Similarly, the explanation of the creed was accepted. Leo’s *Tomus* was accepted as confirmation of orthodox faith. According to the decision it was issued by the ‘ruler of the greater and older Rome’, consistent with the confession of the great Peter and a pillar against the heterodox.

The meeting’s main dogma, the Christological doctrine of Christ’s two natures, emphasizes that Christ is one and the same as God and human ‘without separating, changing, dividing and mixing’. The nature of the person of Christ is not specified, but narrowing speculation is excluded. It is essential to look towards Jesus Christ, who has become human, who is at the same time the Son of God and our Saviour, incarnate, humiliated, and exalted. This concerns the presence of God’s Word in the God-human, born in eternity and receiving his human nature from Mary. Christ forms one person to bring salvation to human beings in and through him.

Chalcedon’s decision was not exhaustive in the sense that it prevented any pause in the disputes surrounding the subject. It was slow to win over the moderate representatives of separation and unity Christology. It was the early church’s most extensive Christological confession. It was a binding interpretation of the term *homoousios*, the incarnation, and the exaltation of Nicaea, which later ecumenical councils still unfolded in their own terms.

## Second Council of Constantinople 533

The aftermaths of the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon were similar. Both meetings presented a fundamentally Western response to an Eastern problem. The digestion of decisions and theological reception in the East was lengthy and not without controversy. In the case of Nicaea, the Roman world eventually accepted the Nicene Creed. Arianism lived on mainly among Germanic tribes, but they too gradually adopted the Nicaean heritage. In

the cases of the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon parts of the Roman world and beyond fell into a schism that has continued to this day. Recent decades' ecumenical discussions have brought new rapprochement, but the division between the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental traditions and the Assyrian churches remains. The Second Council of Constantinople attempted to show the miaphysites that Chalcedon preserved theological values they considered important.

The Second Council of Constantinople opened on 5 May 553. Eutychius of Constantinople presided, with the patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch as his deputies. Representatives from the patriarchate of Jerusalem and between six and nine bishops from Africa attended. Between 151 and 168 bishops participated. At the beginning of the meeting the imperial commissary read a letter from the absent Emperor Justinian in which he emphasized his predecessors' faithfulness in preserving the four general councils' firm doctrine.

The meeting's outcome sealed the neo-Chalcedonian line as part of the official orthodox interpretation of doctrine. The theologies of Chalcedon and Cyril were now brought together. The synthesis considered highlights and slogans important to both, rejecting separation Christology on the one hand and the transformation of the divine and human through unification on the other. Hypostatic unification in Christ was now understood, using the concept of *enhypostasis* developed by John Grammaticus and Leontius of Byzantium, so that the actual *hypostasis* was the Word of God, the Logos, and human nature became part of it. Later John of Damascus (670–754) developed this neo-Chalcedonian idea and Alexandrian unity Christology. The idea of *enhypostasis* also rejected the idea of adopting Christ as the Son of God by showing that human nature did not exist independently before the unification of natures. Christ was 'through one of both'. The Apollinarian interpretation of unification that belittled Christ's human nature was also rejected.

In addition to the heretics of previous centuries the meeting's anathemas condemned the person and works of Theodore of Mopsuestia, certain writings of Theodoret of Cyrus, and a letter attributed to Ibas of Edessa. The bishops hoped that after this the Council of Chalcedon would have done away with Nestorian connotations, and that it would be seen as protecting the deepest aspects of Cyril. This decision of the general council crowned the work of the neo-Chalcedonians. Now the council recognized

Cyril's twelve anathemas against Nestorius, which still had no official status at Ephesus in 431 and Chalcedon in 451, as an authentic expression of the Catholic faith.

During the long reign of Emperor Justinian, a diligent eradicator of heresies, the church expanded through missionary work, but there was a serious rift between East and West, and the Syrian and Egyptian miaphysites were still unreconciled with the church. Coercive measures, hierarchical pressure, and the emperor's own theological and judicial decisions had not worked in ecclesiastical life – not even the Second Council of Constantinople, promoted by Emperor Justinian. The provinces of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, weakened by miaphysitism and the Nestorian disputes, were quickly lost to the Arabs. Only the patriarchate of Constantinople and the church of the West under the pope's leadership were within the empire's territory, along with only part of Antioch. Byzantium fell into a state of weakness in the 600s and 700s.

## Third Council of Constantinople 681

In the 600s geography, political organization, language, and culture shook the Catholic Church's unity. The difference between East and West was incomplete, however. Persian and Arab invasions had forced many Greek monks to seek refuge in Byzantine Africa, Sicily, and on the Italian mainland. They imparted knowledge and taught an appreciation of Byzantine theology in the West. The most significant was Maximus the Confessor. He was the most capable theologian dealing with the Christological monothelite controversy about the one will of Christ.

Based on Chalcedon's Christology, Maximus laid the foundation for an answer to the idea of the one will of Christ (monothelitism), which arose fundamentally from the miaphysite paradigm. Christ had a harmonious relationship between his divine and human wills because one divine person guaranteed the goodness of choices. Human salvation and deification brought our evil will, through Christ's redemption, into harmony with our natural will's inner aspiration towards God. Maximus the Confessor's

theological expertise and the pope's authority were combined in passing on the five ecumenical councils' legacy.

The sixth general council opened on 7 November 680 in the domed room of the imperial palace of Constantinople, called the Trullus – hence the Trullo Council. Only forty-three bishops were present. Emperor Constantine IV himself opened the meeting and presided over eleven early sessions of eighteen in all, and with occasional breaks the meeting lasted until 16 September 681.

In their definition of faith, the bishops again solemnly accepted the previous five ecumenical councils' decisions, reaffirming their commitment to the creeds of the First Council of Nicaea and Constantinople. All the patriarchs of Constantinople between 610 and 666 were anathematized for teaching Christ's one will, contrary to the doctrine of two natures. Similarly, Pope Honorius (d. 638) was condemned. Theodore of Faran and Cyrus of Alexandria, who taught the one power and function of Christ (monoenergism), and Macarius of Antioch and his disciple Stephen, who taught the one will of Christ (monothelitism), were also condemned. The bishops then accepted the letter from Pope Agatho and 125 Western bishops to the council as consistent with that of the Council of Chalcedon, Leo's *Tomus*, and a letter of Cyril of Alexandria.

In their doctrinal statement the bishops declared that there were 'two natural wills and two natural operations indivisibly, inconvertibly, inseparably, inconfusedly' in Christ. These two wills

are not contrary... but his human will follows and that not as resisting or reluctant, but rather as subject to his divine and omnipotent will... For as his flesh is called and is the flesh of God the Word, so also the natural will of his flesh is called and is the proper will of God the Word.

They added that 'as his most holy and immaculate animated flesh was not destroyed because it was deified but continued in its own state and nature, so also his human will, although deified, was not suppressed, but was rather preserved...' They appealed to Leo the Great's teaching. They balanced this with Cyril of Alexandria's teaching.

Neo-Chalcedonian theology preserved Chalcedon's Christological paradox, but its Cyrillian Christological emphasis on unity weakened the

position of human nature. However, it also allowed an analysis of the person of Christ's internal dynamics in accordance with the Antiochian school's biblical-historical approach. It recognized that Christ's true humanity was not an abstraction but concerned the true psychology of his person and his concrete actorness. Too much detail should be avoided: let the mystery be a mystery, allowing fresh and evocative expressions as part of the history of interpretation. The Christological controversy in the imperial church was at an end.

## Second Council of Nicaea 787

The empire was then divided and eroded by a Christologically related controversy about the relationship between the divine and the human – iconoclasm. The image controversy caused relatively enduring tension between the church and emperor, increasing the rift between East and West because the pope was an iconophile who favoured images. When Pope Gregory II learned of Emperor Leo III's iconoclasm, he responded strongly. The pope reproached the emperor for interfering in the church's doctrine, when its protection was a matter for the pope, not Caesar. The popes did not interfere in state affairs, nor was the emperor to interfere in ecclesiastical affairs. The pope therefore wanted to uphold the doctrine of two swords or dominion. A gap was opening between the pope and the emperor of Constantinople.

The image controversy was both an understandable critique of influences from pagan art and an attack on a means of expression that illustrated the message and supported spirituality, which had long endured, was quite widely accepted in the Christian world, and was part of the people's sense of faith before the veneration of Mary as *Theotokos*.

Iconoclasm's most powerful theological opponent was John of Damascus (675–749), whose book *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* summarized the theological achievements of the Greek Fathers concerning the Trinity and God's human birth. Between 726 and 730 he wrote three important works in which he defended the veneration of sacred images. The fundamental argument was Christological:

If we made an image of the invisible God, we would certainly be in error, but we do nothing of the sort, for we are not in error if we make the image of the incarnate God, who appeared on earth in flesh, and who, in his ineffable goodness, lived with human beings and assumed the nature, quantity, shape, and colour of flesh.

John of Damascus considered iconoclasm a Manichaean contempt for matter.

The religious schism between East and West over iconoclasm also had significant political and cultural consequences. Under the emperors the pope switched from his memorable alliance with the emperor of Constantinople to a new one with the Carolingian dynasty of the Franks, culminating in Charlemagne's coronation as emperor on Christmas Day 800.

With the support of the young Constantine VI's guardian regent Empress Irene and the pope, Patriarch Tarasios of Constantinople opened the Second Council of Nicaea on 24 September 787. Between 228 and 335 bishops were present, including Western bishops, two from Sicily and six from Calabria, two papal envoys, and representatives from Antioch and Alexandria. The discussions were lengthy but at a much lower intellectual level than previous councils. Despite the condemnation of iconoclasm, the iconoclasts were restored to their former positions at the papal representatives' request. Bishop Constantine of Cyprus addressed the council, declaring, 'I accept images of the saints, but I reserve adoration exclusively for the Trinity'.

At the meeting the bishops distinguished between images of idols and venerated sacred images. The bishops added that they accepted the six previous ecumenical councils, in particular the First Council of Nicaea, and joined the previous councils in their condemnation of heretics. They affirmed that they would keep both the written and oral ecclesiastical traditions they had received intact. One was the preparation of images in harmony with the gospel's historical sermon. At its core, then, was the demonstration of the reality of God's Word becoming human.

Based on the traditions of the Fathers and the church in which the work of the Holy Spirit was manifested, the bishops stated:

... the venerable and holy images ... should be set forth in the holy churches of God and on the sacred vessels and on the vestments and on hangings and in pictures both in houses and by the wayside,

to wit, the figure of our Lord God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, of our spotless Lady, the Mother of God, of the honourable Angels, of all the saints, and of all pious people. ... these should be given due salutation and honourable reverence, not indeed that true worship of faith which pertains only to the divine nature, but to these, as to the figure of the precious and life-giving Cross and to the Books of the Gospels and to other holy objects ... he who reveres the image reveres in the subject represented.

In accordance with the Quinisext Council, which continued to elaborate the decisions of the fifth and sixth councils in 692 in ecclesiastical law, the bishops now approved the Apostolic Canons, and the decisions of the six ecumenical synods and the local synods. Among other things they declared princely ecclesiastical appointments invalid.

Unfortunately, the translation of the Second Council of Nicaea Charlemagne received was hopelessly poor and distorted. The errors were so great in some places that the Latin text reversed the original Greek's intention. Partly for this reason, but also for political reasons and in protest against Empress Irene's exercise of power over Charlemagne himself, the king rejected the decisions of Nicaea II, despite the pope's urging.

In the East, however, the struggle over images did not end; emperors and bishops appeared who supported it. The last of the iconoclast emperors Theophilus died in 842. Power passed to Empress Mother Theodora as guardian of the child emperor Michael III. Theodora hesitated to reverse her beloved husband's iconoclast policy. However, she allowed Methodius to replace the iconoclast patriarch. Patriarch Methodius declared sacred images legal in 843 and condemned iconoclasm. The first Sunday during Great Lent was declared the Sunday of Orthodoxy, which is still celebrated in the Eastern Orthodox Church.



# Evaluation

All seven ecumenical councils therefore considered themselves to join in the faith represented by the first, the Council of Nicaea in 325,<sup>500</sup> whose idea was that the Holy Spirit would lead the church into an ever deeper understanding of truth. At the heart of the councils' decisions were the concept of Trinitarian faith and Christology, both intrinsically linked to the doctrine of salvation, or soteriology. To save human beings, Jesus Christ must not only be human but also 'of the same substance' as the Father. As the Holy Spirit made salvation present in the church through the word and sacraments, the Holy Spirit must also be, as liturgical tradition implied, revered in the Godhead with the Father and the Son – that is, one of the persons of the Triune God.

Tertullian first formulated the idea of a single being and three persons which was shared, *mutatis mutandis*, after Nicaea in 325 and the First Council of Constantinople in 381 in both West and East. The Cappadocian Fathers had clarified the notion that *hypostasis* signified a single person and *ousia*, or essence, referring to the common and equal divinity of God's persons. The differences between the persons of the Trinity were manifested in their relations of origin with the Father, from whom the Son was born, and from whom the Spirit proceeded (through the Son). Yet the existence and communion of the persons of the Trinity, which also formed the basis for understanding the church of the Triune God as *communio sanctorum* and as a sign, instrument, and foretaste of salvation, became important.

The Council of Ephesus in 431 elaborated on the consequences of this 'substance' of Christ with the Father and human beings. It was essential to see the sameness of the person of Jesus Christ in eternity with the Word of God born of the Father. The author of the unity of the God-human was the Word of God, the Logos himself. In Jesus Christ God had come into human reality, was born, suffered, died, and rose from the dead. God in Christ was the basis of salvation and the subject of vicarious suffering and death. Convergence in person, or *hypostasis*, also resulted in the exchange of qualities (*communicatio idiomatum*) between natures, encapsulated in

500 For example, Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 159 summarize the ecumenical council's message as simply an answer to the question of God's incarnation: 'Can we ascend to God, or must God come down to us?'

Mary's title *Theotokos*. She gave birth to the person of God's Word; he derived his human nature from her.

The relationship between the divine and human was difficult to express, however. The decision of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 concerning Christ's two natures therefore sought to take both full divinity and full humanity seriously in the language of paradox. Theological concepts were used while showing the boundaries between them and human thought in general amid the biblical revelation of the mystery of the God who became human. Simultaneously, a model was set for the transmission of God's grace and love in the word and the church's sacraments. Christ bestowed himself sacramentally, or through material instruments, to those who received him and to be present in them. This was most evident in the eucharist but also in baptism and the word of absolution, for example. According to the same pattern an ordained person acted as Christ's instrument in administering the eucharist, baptizing, or proclaiming the word of absolution. A foundation was also laid for a holistic Trinitarian theology that took the value of created reality from an ecological perspective and human destiny's connection with the rest of creation seriously.

The Second Council of Constantinople in 553 belonged to a continuum of councils and Christological disputes between Ephesus and Chalcedon. Neo-Chalcedonism sought to assert that the paradox of Chalcedon also considered Cyril's unity Christology. The result sealed this approach as part of official Orthodox doctrinal interpretation, rejecting separation Christology on the one hand and the transformation of the divine and human through unification on the other. Yet the meeting placed greater emphasis on Jesus's divinity than his humanity compared to Chalcedon – after all, the intention was to include the miaphysites in the imperial church.

The Third Council of Constantinople in 681 continued to deepen the understanding of the doctrine of the two natures, rejecting the idea that Christ had only one will because this would mean that his humanity was subordinate to the divine nature, and the appropriation of the human and thus the salvation of humankind would be endangered. Again, there was a desire to protect the soteriological core not only of Chalcedon but of the whole Nicaean faith.

The Second Council of Nicaea in 787 showed what followed from the Chalcedonian understanding of the presence of the divine in a human being, according to a common interpretation of the church's faith, to the

use of sacred images. Icons and sacred images in general could be seen as a central part of spirituality without requiring the worship of images beyond their subject. This object was in turn connected with the Christian faith's overall message and communion with the Triune God, Christ, and the communion of saints, in which those who had already arrived were involved. Icons could strengthen faith in this connection.

The emperor convened ecumenical councils. He gave them a certain degree of autonomy, however, and generally respected the bishops' spiritual and theological expertise. Yet starting with Constantine, the emperors also sought to promote the church's unity and faith for the empire's unity. In the East, especially after Justinian I, emperors could also independently formulate proposals for solutions to strengthen the unity of church and empire. Charlemagne continued in the West in these footsteps.

Especially when the orthodox faith or the emperor's proposal to settle disputes was legislatively and harshly sanctioned, the consequences were reductive and polarizing factors related to theological and spiritual identity, reinforcing divisions at least temporarily. Through imperial appointments of loyal bishops, punishments, and laws positive results were not achieved, but controversy surrounding heresy intensified, and new denominations sprang up outside the imperial church. For example, this happened when Muslims conquered areas weakened by the Nestorian and miaphysite disputes in Syria and Egypt. Pressure to adapt to the imperial church's policies had ceased. Putting a common faith into words and strengthening and committing to theology were good, but forcing a common faith through sanctions was rarely effective and strengthened convictions – a lesson worth remembering.

Tension between East and West began to brew in early Christendom. The background was not only theological but the ecclesiastical and national political, cultural, and social situation. It was key for the ecumenical councils that while the patriarchates of the East enjoyed numerical superiority, and most participants were Eastern bishops, the decisions of both Nicaea and Chalcedon were essentially Western theological answers to Eastern questions. The West was a key theological force through Tertullian, Hilary of Poitiers, Augustine, Leo the Great, and the pope's apostolic see. The bishop of Rome's office, which cherishes the legacy of Peter and Paul, was the most important influence in the history of the church in the West, and its identity included fostering the deposit of faith. During the ecumenical

councils the pope was usually reasonably distant from secular power, while the patriarch of Constantinople owed much of his position to the emperor and their symphonic cooperation. In the 500s and 700s, however, the emperor also occasionally exerted strong pressure on the pope and starting with Charlemagne in the 800s in the West, the monarch intervened more in the church's internal affairs than previously, though the justification for the papacy was also strengthened in secular matters until the 1200s.

Western theology's significant influence was not because theological competence in the West was generally higher than in the East and its capital, Constantinople, or Alexandria – quite the opposite. In the East there was solid theological knowledge and tradition, starting with Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers, and Maximus the Confessor. It was essential that their basic aspirations were consistent with the theological ideas popular in the West, and that the most eminent Western theologians and the pope supported such ideas. Most importantly, however, the ecumenical councils were seen to be committed to these stated premises at Nicaea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon – the key ecumenical councils. The situation changed especially after the 800s, when clear theological priestly training began in the West as part of the development of the university system. In Byzantium, meanwhile, theology lacked higher education.<sup>501</sup>

The bishop of Rome also served as a resource for the bishops of the East who wanted to appeal to an outside party to obtain the justice, they sought in the dispute. The honorary title of bishop of old Rome was recognized, though the pope lacked the status he enjoyed in the West. The East's metropolitan institutions and patriarchates were more prominent in the ecclesiastical hierarchy than in the West.

In addition to the emperor, bishops, patriarchs, and popes, monks played an important role in fostering the Chalcedonian faith. Nor should we forget the importance of the people's sense of faith and its reception. Bishop Nestorius's sense of faith was insulted when he criticized calling Mary *Theotokos*, as was the iconoclastic emperors' and bishops' sense of

501 According to Hohti 2021, 218–219 the Orthodox Church recruited officials during the Byzantine period, mainly from monasteries and some from the laity. Hohti's view is that church-political reasons contributed to the lack of systematic theological education.

faith later. Nor was it enough to appoint a Chalcedonian bishop if the people had adopted miaphysitism.

What then is the value in modern theology of the ecumenical councils and their Trinitarian and Christological decisions, above all that of the Council of Chalcedon, which most significantly interpreted the Nicene-Constantinopolitan heritage and its Christological paradox?

The cultural Protestant tradition of the 1800s, influenced by German idealism, criticized Chalcedon's doctrine of Christ and sought to fade the incarnation into the background. This tradition and its various manifestations have been criticized for downplaying the reality of human incarnation – a new form of docetism. Jesus became nothing more than a moral role model or one teacher of wisdom when the 'essence of Christianity' was sought to be intelligible from the perspective of contemporary thought. Today, for example, the historian of dogma Adolf von Harnack's theory of the history of Christian doctrine as one of decline through Hellenization is generally considered not only historically inaccurate, simplistic, and erroneous but to have arisen from the philosophical prerequisites of its time and to have narrowed doctrine's theological core.<sup>502</sup> Nevertheless, it raises an important point: the theology of all times and its prerequisites must be critically examined.<sup>503</sup>

Concerning the critique of Chalcedon for example Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen has picked up and valued the claim that Christological dogma was related to the church's alliance with the Constantinian empire's power claims. This is hardly the crux of the matter. As this work has observed and historically demonstrated, it was the newly defeated Arian, not the Nicaean, party that saw the emperor as a god figure.<sup>504</sup> The Nicaean, and thus Chalcedonian, faith considered Christ's law of love superior to the law of Caesar. This was itself bound by the law of love, and truth could be spoken to power on its basis. Luther expressed the same idea, as did Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his opposition to the Third Reich.

Nor was it 'patriarchal Christology' to emphasize Christ's full humanity and divinity because it set limits to human abilities and showed the meaning

502 Bonhoeffer, DBW 11, 168–169; DBW 12, 320–321; Kärkkäinen 2013, 108.

503 McGrath 1994, 366.

504 Kärkkäinen 2013, 108.

of the Apostle Paul's declaration of the 'folly of the cross' and grace hidden in weakness. Abuse of power was one thing, but it did not invalidate the correct exercise of faith. Caesar was also shown his limits: there were powers higher than he, and he was also responsible for his actions before God and people. Despite their denials, dictators often direct people to worship themselves. Moreover, Christianity's development was a complex ecclesiastical-political process in which defeat came whenever power was abused. An example is Emperor Justinian's futile efforts to tie the core areas of miaphysitism in Egypt and Syria more tightly to the imperial church, frequently having consulted neither the patriarch of Constantinople nor the pope. The church was not always sufficiently bold in criticizing imperial or other power politics, but even here abuse did not invalidate correct use (*abusus non tollit usum*).<sup>505</sup>

Chalcedon's central concept of 'nature' is intuitively alien to a conceptual world that shuns our era's concepts of essence. However, it can be understood as expressing the simultaneity of paradoxical divinity and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. Another shortcoming of Christological dogma is that it does not bring out the totality of Jesus's proclamation and life as the New Testament describes. The boundaries erected in this formulation of doctrine 'without separating, changing, dividing, mixing' are in any case intended to point to the mystery of the theandric person at the centre – to God and the jagged reality of human life. It does so in a way that invites us to read more about the Bible and to live in the church's faith community as partakers of the Word, sacraments, and life of prayer – in connection with and participation in the person of the Word of God Chalcedon proclaims.<sup>506</sup>

Chalcedon shows the boundaries of concepts to allow the fundamental secret of faith and revelation to point dynamically to the presence of divine reality. In line with this and the entire Nicaean-Biblical heritage of faith the theological and faith community's creativity can vividly interpret the apostolic gospel in each context. The two-nature doctrine also challenges us to consider the relationship between the spiritual and the earthly

505 Cf. Kärkkäinen 2013, 108–109.

506 Cf. Kärkkäinen 2013, 113, who sees the observations of many critics of Chalcedon's two-nature doctrine as arising from the abstract use of the concepts 'person' and 'nature'. They should be anchored ecclesiastically and theologically.

more generally.<sup>507</sup> Here, Christology must be linked to Trinitarian faith, the theology of creation, and the workings of the Spirit, considering ecological challenges, church doctrine, and a balanced relationship between individuality and community.

According to a favourable and ecclesiological reading the two-nature doctrine is a mystery and paradox that uses and transcends intellectual tools, seeking to maintain a tension that is surprising from the perspective of everyday experience. Despite its shortcomings, it has succeeded quite well in its basic hermeneutic task of continuing to interpret the Christian faith. It speaks with the eyes of faith of things that actually happened but of a reality that transcends ordinary language's expressive power: it is a metaphor.<sup>508</sup> At the heart of Chalcedon is an explanation of the Nicene Creed's statement that the Son of God 'came down'.<sup>509</sup> The aim is not primarily to solve the last logical and speculative problems in an intellectually sterile manner – without underestimating this task, but with an understanding of the limitations of reason – but to speak simultaneously about the human being and God, who is truly present in mercy and love and invites us into this presence to share, preach, and serve.

From the perspective of ecumenical Christianity Chalcedon's Christological dogma belongs to the binding Christian tradition to the way the central content of the Judaeo-Christian tradition is expressed from the early centuries to the present day. It is increasingly part of the common heritage, as significant rapprochement has also been achieved with non-Chalcedonian churches (miaphysites and Assyrians) on interpreting the person of Jesus Christ and the articulation of doctrine in ecumenical discussions of recent decades, allowing faith in Christ as God and human to be expressed together. Consensus has also grown more generally on the tradition of the Nicaean faith as the ecumenical councils' central content. One unfinished task is to open the connection between the ecumenical councils' biblical, doctrinal, and spiritual heritage in relation to the canons governing the life of churches and their realistic interpretation today. The core task is simultaneously intertwined with the

507 Cf. Kärkkäinen 2013, 116.

508 Cf. Kärkkäinen 2013, 114–115.

509 Cf. Fairbairn & Reeves 2019, 107.

international Lutheran-Catholic dialogue's exhortation that we '... should together discover the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ for our day'.<sup>510</sup>

The ecumenical councils' indispensability for Christian churches and their interpretation of faith and living worship even today has been crystallized in international theological discussions between Lutherans and Orthodox. The Joint Commission of the Lutheran World Federation and the Orthodox Church succinctly stated this in its 1993 statement:

3. The seven ecumenical councils of the early Church were assemblies of the bishops of the Church from all parts of the Roman Empire to clarify and express the apostolic faith. These councils are Nicaea (325 A.D.), Constantinople I (381), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451), Constantinople II (553), Constantinople III (680/81), and Nicaea II (787). Of the councils it was stated at Crete, 1987: 'The Holy Tradition as ongoing action of the Holy Spirit in the Church expresses itself in the Church's whole life. The decisions of the ecumenical councils and local synods of the Church, the teaching of the holy fathers and liturgical texts and rites are especially important and authoritative expressions of this manifold action of the Holy Spirit' (par. 8). Ecumenical councils are the epitome of biblical theology, and they summarize main themes of the Holy Tradition. They are not merely of historical significance but are irreplaceable events for the Church's life. Through them the apostolic faith and tradition, brought about by the saving revelation of God in Christ, was confirmed by the consensus of the gathered representatives of the Church led by the Holy Spirit.

4. The teachings of the ecumenical councils of the early Church are normative for the faith and life of our churches today. The trinitarian and christological formulations of these councils are an indispensable guide for understanding God's saving work in Christ and are the foundation of all later dogmatic clarifications. The Creed of Nicaea/Constantinople is the best-known statement of faith from the ancient

510 From *Confrontation to Connection*, art. 242. The basic work on the interpretation of canons from an Orthodox perspective is Metropolitan Johannes's: *The Relationship between Unity and Uniformity in the Church in the Light of the Tradition of Ecumenical Synods* (Kuopio 1976).



councils, and now that its original form is increasingly common in the West, it is an ever more living bond between our churches. It shapes the language of prayers and blessings in our worship, and by its use the Church has remained faithful to the revelation of the Triune God.<sup>511</sup>

511 <https://blogs.helsinki.fi/ristosaarinen/lutheran-orthodox-dialogue/>.



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The book *Nicaea 325. The Legacy of the Undivided Church in the Twenty-first Century* begins by delving into how Christian traditions have understood the transmission of the apostolic heritage of biblical faith and the development of doctrine. This is the departure point for an examination of the seven ecumenical councils' decisions between 325 and 787, intended for Christians of all times, and their often-painful reception. Listening to each other and doing things together is the only sustainable foundation for a credible transmission of the heritage of faith.

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ISBN 978-951-789-826-3  
(PDF, accessible)

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN<sup>+</sup>  
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