

2009

The Council of Nicaea: Constantine's Sword or Shield?

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**The Council of Nicaea:
Constantine's Sword or Shield?**

*A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Liberal Studies*

by

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December, 2009

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Constantine's Sword or Shield?**

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Preface

A creed is a concise, formal, and authorized statement of important points of Christian doctrine.¹ It is a fixed formula summarizing the essential articles of faith for a religion and promotes the sanction of ecclesiastical authority; a creed is an official, textually determined confession of faith.² Historically, creeds are convenient summaries arising out of definite religious situations, designed to meet the needs of the church and serve as tests of orthodoxy.³ Furthermore, a creed also functions as a clear and communal statement of a community's faith, provides a sense of community, and challenges and places demands on members to affirm what they believe by reciting the creed.⁴

The Nicene Creed emerged from an empire that was newly anointed as Christian and ruled by a pagan emperor who exhibited favoritism towards the religion but did not fully convert by being baptized until the end of his life. Destabilizing events in the empire spurred the emperor to action, and he called for a council of bishops in 325CE to bring solidarity to the church. A product of this council is a creed that all members could recite in order to prove their orthodoxy to the early church. The intended consequence of this creed was uniformity in Christianity— which created a church that would be strong in its support for the emperor and God. Its development was not solely to determine a person's

¹ Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 3.

² Pelikan, 4.

³ Pelikan, 4.

⁴ Johnson, Luke Timothy. *The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why it Matters*. (New York: Double day, 2003), 301.

orthodoxy or beliefs, but it was designed to be a tool that ousted heretics and protected the integrity of the empire.

This paper examines events from the late third century to the Council of Nicaea in 325C.E. All dates that appear in this paper reference the Common Era unless otherwise noted. Also, all Biblical references are from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted. Furthermore, this paper does not question the authority of the scholars or their translation of ancient texts but accepts them as proven scholarly work. The scope of this paper is not to debate the differences in translation of ancient texts but rather to examine how the Council of Nicaea changed the path of orthodox Christianity and was used to fuel Constantine's ambition.

Chapter I

Why Has Jesus Not Returned? The Quandary Within The Early Church

The original followers of Christ faced a quandary when Jesus did not return after his ascension into heaven. His message was one of a triumphant return that also included believers obtaining the kingdom of heaven.⁵ As the decades passed and Jesus did not return to gather his followers, the apostles began reinterpreting his message in order to explain his absence. They set precedence for Christian scripture. As the church grew, so did the focus on Jesus' return, and a new directive emerged in the infant church.

Early, cryptic references to when the Kingdom of God will return to Earth are scattered throughout the New Testament. The elusive nature of the messages provides the foundation for how they would be reinterpreted decades later, when Jesus had still not returned to Earth to gather his followers. Beginning in Matthew 10:7, Jesus tells his disciples to go ahead, preaching, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." Directing them on their mission, he also tells his disciples that should they face persecution in a city, they should flee from the city; however, they will not have gone through all the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.⁶ As the decades passed and Jesus did not return, different sects began to interpret the meaning of this passage differently. One believed that this particular passage proves that Jesus returned⁷ in 70 C.E.,⁸ while another believes in the

⁵ Matthew 3:2, Matthew 4:17, Matthew 10:7 – Jesus' message to the people tells them to repent for the kingdom of heaven is near. He also tells his disciples that as they go forth to heal the sick and spread his message, they should also tell the people to prepare, for the kingdom of God is at hand. Reiterating this message in early chapters, the purpose is clear; those who follow Jesus believe that his return will be soon and they must prepare for it.

⁶ Matthew 10:23

⁷ "Preterism." Expert Archive Questions. <http://en.allexperts.com/e/p/pr/preterism.htm> (accessed November 2, 2009). Two arguments include those of preterists v. futurists. Preterism is a variant of Christian eschatology, which holds that all or some of the biblical prophesies concerning the last days refer to events,

prophetic nature of the passage and the future coming of Jesus.⁹ The evaluation of this verse in particular reveals the dualistic nature of scripture. Depending on one's ideological standpoints, the insight into Jesus' message to his disciples possesses a different significance to future readers. The ability to interpret the gospel enables faith leaders to illuminate the message they believe Jesus was trying to share with future followers and not just his personal disciples.

Additionally, in Matthew 24:34, Jesus tells his followers that this generation will not pass away until all the signs have been completed.¹⁰ Jesus also says in Matthew that there are men standing before him who will not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom and that all his followers should be ready for the Lord, because they do not know in what hour he will return.¹¹ Both Matthew 24 and Matthew 10 imply that the return of the Lord will occur within the lifetimes of his followers, making the return of Christ a quick event rather than something that would span the centuries. When he does not return within the lifetime of the original disciples, it became necessary to reevaluate the intentions of his words.

which actually happened in the first century after Christ's birth. This theory pertains to Matthew 10:23 because preterists see this verse as being in specific to the apostles and their time period. Jesus was stating that before they could finish their mission, he would return.

⁸ In this paper, all dates refer to the Common Era, C.E.

⁹ "Futurism." Expert Archive Questions. [http://en.allexperts.com/e/f/fu/futurism_\(christian_eschatology\).htm](http://en.allexperts.com/e/f/fu/futurism_(christian_eschatology).htm) (accessed November 2, 2009). Futurism states the fulfillment of the prophecies in the Book of Revelations are yet to occur.

¹⁰ In Matthew 24, the disciples asked Jesus, "What shall be the sign of that coming?" In response, Jesus listed the afflictions that would bound upon the Earth. Following these signs, the Son of Man will return; however, only the Father knows when this day will occur.

¹¹ Matthew 16:28 and Matthew 24:36-44.

The Gospels of Mark and Luke also highlight Jesus talking about the return of his kingdom.¹² The early gospels in the New Testament tout the message of Jesus returning to Earth quickly because his followers believed after his resurrection that the kingdom would soon follow. As the disciples spread Jesus' message, the notion that the kingdom of God was at hand grew as the numbers of followers also grew. This evidence in the New Testament shows there was a belief in the return of the Lord; however, as time passed and Jesus does not return, an obvious problem is at hand. As time progressed, and the church developed and became more organized, it later modified this belief in favor of a spiritual kingdom on earth until the "Second Coming."¹³ While not changing the literal message, the intended meaning of the kingdom of God and Jesus' return was altered in order to satisfy the desire of believers to know why Jesus had not returned to Earth.

As the second century approached without the return of Christ, many Christians started to reinterpret Jesus' message about returning to Earth. Rather than making it a physical return, the focus turned on spiritually preparing for the return of Jesus. The Book of Acts, written later in the first century as a follow up to the Gospel of Luke, explains that the moment of Jesus' return is unknown.¹⁴ This is significant because the Book of Acts provides an alleged written history of the early church.¹⁵ In the fifth chapter of Acts, Peter retorts to the Pharisees, who had imprisoned the apostles for spreading the message of God, that Jesus is now at the right hand of God so that he will forgive of sins in

¹² Mark 9:1, Mark 13:30 and Luke 21:29-33.

¹³ Kautsky, Karl; (Translator) Henry F. Mins. *Foundations of Christianity*. (New York: Monthly Press Review, 1925), 356.

¹⁴ Acts 1:7; 17:31.

¹⁵ "Book of Acts - Bible Survey." Bible Questions Answered. <http://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Acts.html> (accessed November 4, 2009).

Israel.¹⁶ Assigning Jesus a location in heaven, at the right hand of God, corroborates the first chapter of Acts stating the time Jesus will return is unknown. Proto-orthodox denominations,¹⁷ believe that Jesus connects to his followers through the Holy Spirit, whereas sects, such as the Gnostics, believe that Jesus reconnects directly through visions with his followers. While the mode of communication to followers on Earth varies, the belief that Jesus is ruling from a spiritual realm is congruent.

Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of obeying God's word, which includes the preparation man needs to make to be ready at any time for the coming of Christ.¹⁸ The individual must make himself ready at the end of his life, which would, in turn, denote the possibility of Jesus' return at any moment.¹⁹ Once Jesus' followers recognized that the physical return of the kingdom was truly uncertain, the focus shifted away from the sudden, literal, end-of-the-world prophecy. As the new sects and believers adapted to the changing interpretation, new paths developed for believers, and the apostles adapted their message in order to reflect this shift.

¹⁶ Acts 5:31.

¹⁷ Ehrman, Bart D.. *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*. (NY: Oxford UP, 2004), 10. Proto-Orthodox Christianity is defined by Bart D. Ehrman as one of the many religious sects following the teachings of Jesus Christ. As the sect grew and evolved, it became the dominant form of modern Christianity that is still practiced today. It incorporated ideas from Jewish-Christians, the Marcionites, and the Gnostics. Ehrman also says that this is a group which "stifled its opposition, it claimed that its views had always been the majority position and its rivals were and always had been, heretics who willfully chose to reject the true belief."

¹⁸ "Books of Acts – Bible Survey"

¹⁹ Tillich, Paul. *A History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 41.

Paul, a missionary apostle, mainly to the Gentiles, breaks from the first Christians who expected that the Lord would return quickly after his resurrection.²⁰ Recognizing his position as apostle to the Gentiles also involved him in a controversy in changing the focus of Jesus' message about his return.²¹ He perceived the doctrine about the apocalyptic return of Jesus was a liability in the Greek world where the focus was on the beginning of things and not the end of things.²² In his teachings of Jesus, as he knew them, he adapted a language that was conducive in the Greek world, becoming the first Christian apologist.²³ Furthermore, his teachings shifted to "Christ as the Wisdom of God in creation" rather than the Kingdom of God is at hand.²⁴ According to Paul, the Lord is spiritually present in his church as it grows. This church is united through its believers who have faith in Jesus and are baptized in his name.²⁵ Together, they look to the epistles and the message of Jesus as a model for their lives and a way to prepare for the return of their Lord.

Furthermore, Paul moves away from the Christian Jews who preached to the Gentiles that it is necessary for them to follow the Law as laid out in the Torah. His message to his followers tells them that anyone who follows the Law has misunderstood

²⁰ Chadwick, *The Early Church: The Penguin History of the Church*. (Boston: Penguin (Non-Classics), 1993), 20. Paul's notable achievement involved gaining the Gentile Christians equal status as members of the church.

²¹ Ibid, 20.

²² Chadwick, 20.

²³ Chadwick, 20. Paul is the first Christian apologist because he charged himself with defending and proving the truth of Christian doctrines

²⁴ Chadwick, 20.

²⁵ Chadwick, 20.

the gospels.²⁶ Paul separates himself from the Jews and the Law in order to persuade more believers in his message. If there are no stipulations attached to converting, such as following the Law, which included circumcision and the dietary laws, then Gentiles were more likely to convert to the new religion. As Paul's message to the Gentiles spreads farther from Jerusalem, the Gentile Christians were disinterested in the idea of the community of "last days."²⁷ The new Gentile followers were unaware of the message that the Kingdom of God was returning in their lifetimes. Looking forward, Paul deviated from the message of the quick return of Christ and instead looked for the wisdom of Christ in the surrounding world and how to teach the new followers to model their lives after Jesus' life.

Paul's message to the Gentiles was not unique in its deviation from the Jewish Christian sect. Other sects that centered around James arose that taught variations of Jesus' message and instructed different ways to find Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Marcion of Sinope,²⁸ a preacher between 85-160, was excommunicated from the church in 144 for his dissent with the proto-orthodox church.²⁹ The church teachers dismissed his teachings because he dismissed the Old Testament as not being relevant and he purged the New Testament of all Jewish references, which he felt were added by scribes

²⁶ Ehrman, Bart D.. *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*. (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2005), 98.

²⁷ Bultmann, Rudolf . *Primitive Christianity In Its Contemporary Setting*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1956). 176.

²⁸ Ehrman, Bart D, 103-104. Marcion and his followers were seen as a threat to the church. He completely rejected Jewish customs, scriptures, and the God of the Old Testament. The writings of Marcion and his followers have all disappeared; the only information that exists is information written by his opposition.

²⁹ Valantasis, Richard. *The Beliefnet Guide to Gnosticism and Other Vanished Christianities (Beliefnet Guides)*. (New York: Three Leaves, 2006), 63.

who did not understand Jesus' true message.³⁰ This view was heretical in the early church. Leaving only the Gospel of Luke,³¹ Marcion also preached to his followers that Jesus did not have a human body; thus, he did not have to be born of a human mother.³² His message to his followers also stated that Jesus came into this world in order to save it from the vengeful God of the Jews.³³ His level of threat to the Proto-Orthodox Church is evident in the amount of anti-Marcionite literature that exists and that his own work has not survived the millinea. The attack stressed the need of the organizing church to quash opposition and create uniformity. By denouncing Marcion's preaching, the new church flexed its growing power. Marcionites represented one faction that opposed the church and its teachings during a turbulent time when the bounds of Christianity were not completely limited to narrow interpretations. It existed among other schools of Christianity that held onto different beliefs and interpretations of Jesus' message and purpose on Earth.

Jesus' early followers were Jews because they knew he was a Jew. They believed he was the messiah and that he fulfilled the old covenant.³⁴ One sect of the first Jewish Christians were the Ebionites.³⁵ As with the Marcionites, the Ebionites left no writings;

³⁰ Ehrman, 108.

³¹ Valantasis, 65-66. Marcion removed the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John because he felt they were corrupt beyond repair. Only the Gospel of Luke was to be trusted because it presented Jesus in a Roman way rather than a Jewish way.

³² Valantasis, 66. This would solve the problem of explaining Jesus' divinity. If he was not a part of this world then there is no stretch to understanding how he could be an extension of God.

³³ Ehrman, 105.

³⁴ Chadwick, 9.

³⁵ Ehrman, 100. The source of their name is unknown, although it translates to "poor." One reason this name may have developed was because they gave up all of their possessions in voluntary poverty.

their existence is known only through writings from their opposition. By looking at the opposition's attacks, scholars know that the Ebionites taught Jesus was the Son of God because of his "adoption."³⁶ Thus, he was born of the flesh but invested with divinity by God after exhibiting the ability to maintain God's law and suffering self-sacrifice. Because the Ebionites still followed the Law and the Old Testament as Jews, Paul's mission to the Gentiles horrified them. They were further appalled by his baptizing them as Christians without requiring them to conform to Jewish laws and traditions.³⁷ The Ebionites were eclipsed because of their unwillingness to accept the Gentiles who were unwilling to convert to Judaism. The number of Gentile converts quickly surpassed the Jewish Christians. As the church continued to develop, the Jewish traditions were incessantly pushed back until they were forgotten.³⁸ As the church grew and developed, it constricted the development of other sects and worked to diminish their authority in order to eliminate opposition.³⁹

The organization of the early church was based on the idea that the apostles were chosen by Jesus to represent him on Earth. They were also the ones who spent Jesus' last days with him on Earth; thus, they possessed the true authority. Following this progression, it would be the apostles' decision whom to appoint as new leaders in the church.⁴⁰ For the proto-orthodox church, Peter was the first leader. His dominant

³⁶ Ehrman, 101. Jesus was considered by the Ebionites to have kept god's law so perfectly and was the most righteous man on Earth, thus god adopted him as his son.

³⁷ Ehrman, 102.

³⁸ Crabtree, Vexen. "Christian Ebionites: The Original Christians." *Bane of Monotheism*. <http://www.vexen.co.uk/religion/ebionites.html>, (Accessed February 4, 2009).

³⁹ Tertullian and Origen of Alexandria wrote against the Ebionites.

⁴⁰ Pagels, Elaine. *The Gnostic Gospels*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 10.

leadership position was based on Jesus' declaration that Peter would be the rock and shepherd of the new church.⁴¹ This delegation of how new bishops would be chosen assured the faithful a contemporary authority could be rightfully traced and verified while it also enabled a defense to be mounted against sects that had leaders who did not possess the rightful lineage.⁴² The assumed lineage of power behind the church was an effective tactic to oppose and eliminate sects such as the Marcionites and Ebionites.

The new church was geographically scattered though, and its unity depended on two things: first, that the believers had a common faith, and second, that there was a common way of ordering their life and worship.⁴³ One way to determine a common worship was to verify that all the churches were using the same gospels and letters written by confirmed apostles. The synoptic gospels gradually achieved a general acceptance, and by the late second century, the written word was preferred over the pastoral tradition, which, because of its fluidity, enabled alternate or unfavorable teachings to be excluded and removed easier.⁴⁴

The last weapon of orthodoxy that was developed in the late second century was a Rule of Faith, established by Irenaeus and Tertullian in order to further unify the churches.⁴⁵ It established a common belief, and enabled any heretics to be ejected from

⁴¹ Matthew 16:13-19 and John 21:15-19.

⁴² Chadwick, 42

⁴³ Chadwick, 32.

⁴⁴ Chadwick, 42-43.

⁴⁵ Chadwick, 44. "The whole church believes in one God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and Earth and the seas and all that is therein, and in one Christ Jesus the Son of God, who was made flesh for our salvation, and in the Holy Spirit who through the prophets preached the dispensations and the comings and the virgin birth and the passion, and the rising from the dead and the assumption into heaven in his flesh of

the midst of the true, orthodox believers. This tool, along with the established lineage of leaders, further built and strengthened the church.

The Gentile church community was building a strong foundation to remove any opposition which could deter believers from following its established path. In particular, the church sought to oust the Gnostics from their midst. The message of the Gnostics contradicted the formal structure of the church and presented an alternative perspective on what Jesus taught, to whom he taught it, and the necessary path to heaven. Viewed as opposition to the growing church, the Gnostics became a perilous target that needed to be eliminated.

The middle years of the second century belong to the Gnostics.⁴⁶ The leaders promoted an “authentic Gentile Christianity” that preached an acceptance of all knowledge and experience in a scheme that centered around Christ as the divine figure.⁴⁷ Their open acceptance of beliefs fueled the church’s opposition. Evidence for their impact is the sheer volume of writing opposing their teachings. Through the writing of proto-orthodox leaders, it is evident the Gnostics were viewed as a threat to the new church.

our beloved Lord Jesus Christ, and his coming from heaven in the glory of the Father...to raise up all flesh.”

⁴⁶ Frend, W. H. C.. *The Rise of Christianity*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 195. Between 130 and 180, a succession of teachers, working mainly in Alexandria spread their dominant influence to Rome and Italy and even as far as the Rhone Valley.

⁴⁷ Frend, 195.

The striking features of Gnosticism are dualism⁴⁸ and their preference for platonic doctrines. In regards to dualism, the Gnostics believed the material world is evil and the spiritual world is good.⁴⁹ The world is not directly of one true God, but of an inferior god, or a demiurge, and the soul is not of this world because it is connected to that one true God.⁵⁰ The preferred platonic doctrine lies within the immortality of the soul.⁵¹ Enslaved in this world, the soul can be freed, become conscious of its origin, and ascend to God “only by the grace of *gnosis*, the supernatural knowledge brought by the divine savior.”⁵² Ultimately, the supreme deity, God, cannot be described and is far removed from all human comprehension.⁵³ This greater, non-material God is the true God and not the one that created this world. The Gnostic, believed that he has an inner spark from the greater God within him, sought to understand the secret knowledge of God in order to find salvation and free his soul to reunite with the true God.

The Gnostic discourse embraced all types of knowledge and religious experience, feeding the dislike of the church. The Gnostics drew easily on philosophy and poetic

⁴⁸ Wiener, Philip P.. “Dualism in Philosophy and Religion,” In *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), vol 2, 42. A dualist is a person who believes that the facts which he considers cannot be explained except by supposing ultimately the existence of two different and irreducible principles. Gnosticism, however, is not completely dualistic because they believe the Creator is somehow related to the true god. Thus, the two divinities are not entirely separate in nature. Their dualism is neither absolute nor systematic. It resided in a feeling that the world is alien to God, and there is a gulf that exists between nature and god that can only be crossed by God.

⁴⁹ Ehrman, 119.

⁵⁰ Wiener, 42.

⁵¹ Chadwick, 34.

⁵² Wiener, 42.

⁵³ Ehrman, 120.

wisdom in their search for truth.⁵⁴ Accepting experiences and perceptions not contained within the acknowledged written word afforded them the ability to write or share new ways to salvation. The intuitions of the Gnostics kindled an inner, divine nature which meant participation in the deity they sought, ensuring bliss and safety for their soul in their life and after their death.⁵⁵ The Gnostic believer, by accepting the call of the Divine Messenger, Christ, could become enlightened and return home at the end of his life.⁵⁶

While the Gnostics believed that Christ provided the knowledge necessary for salvation,⁵⁷ they preferred their proprietary scripture as the source of saving information. They also permitted ideas from the Greeks, Iranians and Semitic mythology.⁵⁸ This variety of beliefs and allowance of diverse ideas left the Gnostics open to a wide variety of criticism; however, it influenced Christianity to later become a philosophical religion that grapples with moral and intellectual problems.⁵⁹

The Gnostic movement in the second century appealed to a wide variety of believers because of its practical synthesis on performing rites, mystic hope, and its speculative philosophy of the world and the soul.⁶⁰ Furthermore, it appealed to believers because it sought to answer the same questions Jews and pagans were searching for:

⁵⁴ Frend, 201.

⁵⁵ Moffatt, James. *The First Five Centuries of the Church*. (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1938), 82.

⁵⁶ Frend, 198.

⁵⁷ Erhman, 125.

⁵⁸ Frend, 194-195.

⁵⁹ Frend, 197. As the church developed and grew, intellectuals began to become leaders in the church.

⁶⁰ Moffatt, 83.

questions about evil, salvation, and why problems existed within humanity.⁶¹ The Gnostics claimed a richer understanding of God and the soul due to the revelations they had received during their quest.⁶² Gnosticism appealed to a different class of believers, those who were interested in knowledge and education, and it particularly appealed to the Hellenistic Greeks. Gnosticism enabled believers to take an active role in their salvation and search for the true message Jesus left for his followers. They used their own gospels, such as the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Mary, to corroborate their testimony that Jesus shared the true Gnostic interpretation of his teachings with his disciples.⁶³ Finally, the Gnostics' freedom through knowledge enabled them to have a freedom from the constraints of ignorance, the Law, and the fears of the final judgment.⁶⁴

The church viewed the Gnostics as serious opposition to the structure of the formation of the early church. The Gnostics organized like mysterious sects throughout the Greco-Roman world. Their leaders were male and female, and they had their own baptisms, passwords, sacred meals, and ceremonies of the bridal chamber.⁶⁵ They felt this was acceptable because even Jesus shared secrets with disciples that he did not share with anyone else and he only spoke in parables to the public.⁶⁶ The Gnostics, like Jesus, only passed their teachings onto persons who had proven themselves to be spiritually mature

⁶¹ Frend, 201.

⁶² Moffatt, 84.

⁶³ "Gnosticism." In Believe Religious Information Source Website. (<http://mb-soft.com/believe/txn/gnostici.htm> accessed November 11, 2009).

⁶⁴ Frend, 200.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁶⁶ Pagels, 14.

and capable of possessing the message of Christ. In addition to their secret rites, Gnostic leaders were ordained through inner visions, which enabled them to see the Lord.⁶⁷ This completely undermined the authority and hierarchy that the church was establishing because according to the Gnostics, there did not need to be a direct lineage to the original eleven apostles for legitimacy. “The resurrection, they insisted, was not a unique event in the past: instead it symbolized how Christ’s presence could be experienced in the present. What mattered was not literal seeing, but spiritual vision.”⁶⁸ The connection to Christ could be made through seeking knowledge and was not dependent upon an archaic lineage of material passed along among disciples.

To maintain control of the validity of Jesus’ message, it was important for the new church to establish itself as the keeper of orthodoxy. In the beginning, it spoke of the return of the kingdom, but as the decades passed and the Lord did not return, they needed to shift focus from a physical preparation to a spiritual one. The developing church had a variety of sects that did not always agree with the message it wanted to embrace. There were sects that developed their own doctrines in order to fit their own beliefs, and there were sects that were unwilling to accept believers outside of Judaism. The common threads that wove through these parties was a belief in Jesus and a desire to understand his message. It was the variety of interpretations of his message that caused inner turmoil in the early church. The church promoted a logical succession of ordained bishops and priests who could lead its followers down the path of God, while the Gnostics wanted its followers to seek the truth within and to find the inner spark that would lead them directly

⁶⁷ Pagels, 13-14.

⁶⁸ Pagels, 11.

to God. Because of the physiological differences, neither ideology could tolerate the existence of the other. As time marched forward, the growing church took take every measure necessary to guarantee its success over renegade sects, including uniting all of its followers under a specific doctrine and creed.

Chapter II

The Need for a Creed: The Development of Early Conflicts in Doctrine

Constantine's conversion enabled the formation of the early church in the fourth century.⁶⁹ His ability as an outsider to take control of the church stems from Christian leaders' conviction that God instilled Constantine's authority. Furthermore, at risk to his own family, he repeatedly rescued the church and sought to support and extend it. His support is what enabled the church to grow and expand as it did following terrible persecutions by previous rulers;⁷⁰ church bishops were grateful for him for saving the churches and reinstating their possessions. Soon after his conversion to Christianity, Constantine, along with Licinius, issued a proclamation that Christianity, and all other cults, would be tolerated throughout the empire. Also, any buildings and other materials destroyed as a result of persecutions would be restored.⁷¹ This edict was a great triumph for Christianity because of its great sufferings during the Great Persecution. Churches and church artifacts were destroyed as well as believers executed for their beliefs. Constantine could be seen as a savior to the church; without him the church may have crumbled like many other religions.

⁶⁹ Halsall, Paul. "Medieval Sourcebook: Eusebius: Conversion of Constantine." Fordham.edu., <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/conv-const.html> (accessed November 15, 2009). Constantine's conversion occurred in 312 C.E. at the Battle of Milvian Bridge, just outside of Rome. According to Eusebius, Constantine prayed to God earnestly for help in his impending battle and to reveal who to Constantine who he was. At exactly noon, Constantine looked up into the sky and saw the sign of the cross with the words, "Conquer by this." Constantine then went to his troops and had the insignia of the cross put on their shields and armor. He also had a banner made that the army would follow into battle. Against the odds, Constantine defeated Maxentius at the Bridge of Milvian. From that day forward, Constantine's army always went into battle wearing and following the sign of the cross.

⁷⁰ Dungan, David L.. *Constantine's Bible*. (London: Scm Press, 2006), 95.

⁷¹ Freeman, Charles. *The Closing of the Western Mind: The Rise of Faith and the Fall of Reason*. (New York: Knopf, 2003), 102, 159. The Edict described is the Edict of Milan, 313. This also included that martyred families would receive monetary compensation, and those who were exiled would be allowed to return to their homeland and their property.

After Constantine's conversion, he surrounded himself with Christian advisors to coach him in the ways of the new religion. Although he does not adopt Christianity as the only religion for his empire, nor does he himself become a Christian at the end of his life, he surrounds himself with Christian advisors, and he begins to support the new religion openly.⁷² A symbiotic relationship grew between Constantine and the church, and the church begins to adopt new, Roman values. The church evolved from a persecuted church of martyrs by shedding its hostile view of the world to one that embraced the values of Rome.⁷³ The formation of the church under Constantine reflected Rome's influence; the church adopted dioceses of Roman administration, the clergy took official titles of Roman government, and the clergy began to think like Roman officials.⁷⁴ Furthermore, Constantine established the church's dominance in Rome by making mandates that favored the followers.⁷⁵

The support of Christianity was not unproblematic for Constantine though. While he was hoping for a church that would be subservient to him and flourish under his rule, he discovered a church that was riddled with disputes and power struggles. He seemed to have been genuinely surprised by the diversity present in the Christian communities, and soon after adopting the church, he had to address whether to give patronage to all sects or favor some over others.⁷⁶ Ultimately, he favors the proto-orthodox sect, deems himself as

⁷² Pohlsander, Hans A.. *Constantine*. (New York: Rutledge, 1996). 22.

⁷³ Dungan, 95.

⁷⁴ Dungan, 96. The clergy began to live in stately villas and public worship was performed in ornate temples funded and built (or rebuilt) by the state.

⁷⁵ Dungan, 114. In 321, Constantine made Sunday the legal day of rest. He also made it legal to free slaves using Catholic Churches as a place of manumissions. Leaving assets to the church was also legalized.

⁷⁶ Freeman, Charles, 159-161.

a divinely appointed ruler, and places himself in a position as a type of common bishop who oversaw affairs of the church.⁷⁷ Furthermore, Constantine also used the church for his imperial policy and imposed his own ideologies upon it.⁷⁸ While his actions are significant in organizing a church that was once widely persecuted, he was not immediately able to quash the growing rivalries within the church and had to call upon the bishops to quickly find a tolerable solution. The roots of the problem lie in the arduous nature and development of the church. These problems developed over years as the church grew.

From the onset of Christianity, there were several issues that plagued believers. Some early questions raised in the church included examining if Jesus' life was a realistic model for all Christians or if it was attainable by only a few saints and martyrs. Other questions included: Could a unified church develop from Jesus' teachings? What would be the standards of beliefs and behaviors for leaders? What would cause someone to lose priestly authority?⁷⁹ These questions, and others like them, plagued Christianity during the first developing centuries of the religion. It is likely that the most important theology in early Christianity was affirming the proper belief about God and Christ and their relationship to one other.⁸⁰ The establishment of this relationship divided many of the sects and eventually led to a creed, which, if unsigned in agreement, meant

⁷⁷ Pohlsander 26

⁷⁸ Pohlsander, 27-28

⁷⁹ Rubenstein, Richard E.. *When Jesus Became God: The Struggle to Define Christianity during the Last Days of Rome*. (New York: Harvest Books, 2000), 40.

⁸⁰ Ehrman, Bart D., 151.

excommunication for the bishop by an appointed council or authority higher than the bishop.

During the first three centuries after the crucifixion of Jesus, the idea that the savior was separate from God and subordinate to him was not a radical idea.⁸¹ One martyr in the first century of the church, Ignatius,⁸² spoke of Christ as divine. He believed that God had come in the flesh and that Christ was initially human.⁸³ His belief that Jesus was born of the flesh, suffered, and rose again supported Ignatius' belief in martyrdom.⁸⁴ If Jesus had suffered, then it made sense to him that man should also suffer; this makes martyrdom have a purpose during the many waves of persecution during the development of the early church. During these persecutions, early Christians were forced to sacrifice to local gods or be executed. Those executed became martyrs for the new faith. The proto-orthodox authors considered the willingness to die for their faith one of the hallmarks of the new religion.⁸⁵ It was used as a boundary marker, separating true believers from heretics.⁸⁶ Furthermore, it exhibited a believer's acceptance of Jesus' status as a human being who suffered for mankind because like Jesus they were sacrificing their lives for their beliefs. The martyrs who followed in his footsteps believed by setting the same

⁸¹ Rubenstein, 10.

⁸² Ignatius was martyred during the reign of Trajan, 98-117.

⁸³ Ehrman, 151-152.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 152.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 138. This idea was not accepted by all sects of Christianity. The Gnostics believed that martyrdom was ignorant and foolish because a god that demanded human sacrifice was vain and the true God they served would not want this, but for his followers to seek more understanding and knowledge.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 138.

example, others could come to the faith and understand the sacrifice that had been given for them.

As time passed, the debate of the doctrine of Christianity continued, and groups that pushed Jesus' humanity to an extreme were expelled from the early church. In the first century, the Ebionites believed that Jesus was born human but made divine only after his death. Their belief in his humanity may be attributed to the Jewish influences within this sect. Jesus' human birth and life of purity and advocacy on behalf of God enabled God to look favorably upon him and make him a divine being after his death as a sign of his approval.⁸⁷ At the end of the second century, Theodotus, a Roman, pursued similar beliefs to the Ebionites: that Jesus was human, born of a sexual union between Joseph and Mary, and then chosen by God at his baptism.⁸⁸ The proto-orthodox church viewed the lack of belief in Jesus' initial divinity heretical, leading these groups to be purged.

Prior to Constantine's rule, the Great Persecution, led by Diocletian, was Rome's final attempt to limit the expansion of Christianity across the empire.⁸⁹ Beginning approximately 303 C.E., Diocletian's first edict commanded churches and holy sites razed to the ground, sacred articles also burned, and those who refused to stop practicing their faith be deprived of their freedom. Other edicts followed, including that if those imprisoned agreed to sacrifice to Roman gods, then they could be freed.⁹⁰ In North Africa

⁸⁷ Ibid, 152.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 152.

⁸⁹ Rubenstein, 31.

⁹⁰ Halsall, Paul. "Medieval Sourcebook: Diocletian: Edicts Against The Christians." Fordham.edu. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/persec1.html> (accessed April 7, 2009).

and Libya, during the persecution several bishops refused to sacrifice to Roman gods, resulting in their torture and death. During their persecution, these bishops declared they were the true church and all others who did not follow their path should be ousted as nonbelievers.⁹¹ For Tertullian⁹² and other proto-orthodox writers before and after him, the divine succor afforded to true martyrs in their time of torment was substantiation of the validity of the martyr's faith.⁹³ This emphasizes Ignatius' belief in martyrdom, and its place in early Christianity was a way to draw others to the faith and exhibit Christ-like qualities. Dying for one's belief, the ultimate imitation of Jesus, ensured a place in heaven for the martyr. Furthermore, martyrdom in Africa during the Great Persecution had been sought not only by saints, but also by men of immoral and dissolute life who thought sacrificing their lives would wash the sinful stains from their souls.⁹⁴ A variety of believers and followers of Christ embraced martyrdom, but other followers chose to avoid death by handing over sacred relics to the authorities and sacrificing to pagan gods in order for their lives to be spared. This division led to one of the first great controversies in the early church when Constantine took control.

Once Constantine possessed supreme control over the empire in 313, his Edict of Milan ended the persecution started by Diocletian. While Constantine may have hoped for peace after restoring the church, the reality he soon faced was the churches' own

⁹¹ Dungan, 104.

⁹² Bradshaw, Rob. "Tertullian of Carthage (c. 160 - 225)." EarlyChurch.org.uk: An Internet Resource for the Study of the Early Centuries of Christianity. <http://www.earlychurch.org.uk/tertullian.php> (accessed April 9, 2009). Tertullian was an early Christian writer in the late second and early third centuries. His writings have been controversial over the centuries; however, scholars now agree that his contributions should not be rejected based on past prejudices.

⁹³ Ehrman, 140.

⁹⁴ Firth, 160.

members threatened its stability, and the hatred that existed within it was almost as menacing to the tranquility of Constantine's rule as the strife that once existed between the Christians and pagans.⁹⁵ After the Great Persecution, there was unrest in the Christian community about the bishops, priests and believers returning to their homeland who had either fled, surrendered by sacrificing to pagan gods, or relinquishing blessed sacraments to be destroyed by the persecutors.⁹⁶ Many accepted these returning believers back into the fold of the congregation; however, strident protestors berated these returning leaders for not being true believers and giving into the persecutors. Protestors tried to prevent them from returning to their abandoned positions in the church; these protestors believed if returned members succumbed previously to persecution, the likelihood of their repeating this behavior was probable.

Donatus⁹⁷ led the greatest opposition to the returning bishops and priests branding them apostate for vacating their position. He and his followers insisted their uncompromising bishops and priests had true authority because they had not lost the grace of the Holy Spirit by denying their faith and God.⁹⁸ This led to a precarious position because the Donatists declared sacraments performed by sinful priests invalid, whereas the general population of the church held the opposite view by accepting their

⁹⁵ Firth, 159.

⁹⁶ Rubenstein, 38.

⁹⁷ Lettinga, Neil. "Western North Africa: Donatism." *African Christianity: A History of the Church in Africa*. www.bethel.edu/~letnie/AfricanChristianity/WNADonatism.html (accessed April 26, 2009). Donatus of Casae Nigrae, successor of Bishop Majorinus, was an articulate, outspoken spokesman for the sect, which came to carry his name, the Donatist. This group held that any Christians who had caved during the tumultuous years of persecution were no longer fit to hold office in the church because they had lost the grace of the Holy Spirit to effectively administer the sacraments to the congregation.

⁹⁸ Rubenstein, 38.

performed priestly deeds.⁹⁹ The main schism between the Donatists and the church began in approximately 311, when the Donatists refused to accept a bishop in Carthage whose mentor had succumbed in the Great Persecution. Appointing their own bishop, their intent was to maintain a wholly pure church, yet it effectively divided the African church into two factions.¹⁰⁰ The goal of the Donatists was not to create this division though; their intent was to maintain a wholly pure church.¹⁰¹ The departing faction believed they were in the right because their bishop had not succumbed to persecution. There is no evidence Donatus, was recognized as an ordained bishop by any of the churches of Europe, Egypt, or Asia.¹⁰² The tension and split was localized to Northern Africa.

Constantine was dismayed by the actions of the Donatists and their refusal to adhere to the letters that he sent attempting to smooth this matter. In the beginning he tried to be impartial, but the Donatists' unwillingness to compromise irritated Constantine. By 316 C.E., he withdrew his patronage from them.¹⁰³ By isolating the Donatists and withdrawing financial aid, Constantine defined for the western communities what was to later be known as the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁰⁴ In essence, the communities that were left were embodied with the spirit and influence of the Roman

⁹⁹ "Donatist." *New World Encyclopedia*. <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Donatist> (accessed May 16, 2009).

¹⁰⁰ "Donatist," Donatus was a succeeding priest of Majorinus in 313. Donatus was a leader of unbending faith whom the movement later took its name from.

¹⁰¹ Firth, 188.

¹⁰² Firth, 166. Although the Donatists do not appear to have affected the early church outside of Africa, the sect exists well into the sixth century and continued to extol its righteousness based on the idea of being true descendents of the church.

¹⁰³ Freeman, 162.

¹⁰⁴ Freeman, 162.

Empire and Constantine himself; they followed the edicts laid forth and developed an inner structure modeled after Roman influences. The western communities of the church, those outside of Africa, were not as heavenly Christianized and did not possess the tradition of intense debate as the Eastern church.¹⁰⁵ Although Constantine's behavior in ousting the Donatists contradicted his own toleration edict, his open favoritism towards the catholic faith marks his position in the camp of the church, which desired to remain undivided and whole.¹⁰⁶

While Ignatius advocated martyrdom as a way to mimic the behaviors of Jesus in order to share his message, the Donatists held firm to the idea that anyone who turned their back on the church and its message, even to save his own life, was a sinner and ineligible to be a leader within the church. These early divisions in the church were attempts to answer questions of early believers. Ignatius believed it was ideal to model one's life after Jesus just as the Donatists tried to establish guidelines and rules for what enabled a man to be a priest and maintain his status. Constantine believed a unified church was possible and it would strengthen the empire if the members of the church were more tolerant and more conciliatory. The growing church needed more than a common belief to survive. A stronger, established set of rules and beliefs was needed in order to solidify the church's place and manifest it as a dominating power in the world and not a floundering, disjointed religion. Constantine would use his influence to further

¹⁰⁵ Freeman, 162-163.

¹⁰⁶ Firth, 168. Constantine's desire to limit and stop turmoil in the eastern churches most likely led him to side against the Donatists because they were such a dividing group. Their refusal to compromise alluded to future problems had Constantine accepted their argument and sided with them. Considering that he was trying to unify an empire, he would have been naturally opposed to any group that would openly create a schism.

push the bishops to unify all the churches and band them together or face excommunication and exile.

Chapter III

The Road to Orthodoxy

Further conflicts within the evolving church continued to threaten Constantine's efforts to unify the church and empire. Constantine's desire to be recognized as a divinely appointed king by the Christian God was overshadowed by quarrels that existed within the church. Stemming from an attempt to determine whether Jesus was of divine nature or born of man and elevated after death, the early conflict that arose in the Eastern church threatened not only the stability of the church, but Constantine's political position.¹⁰⁷ Prior to this destabilizing argument, the early church wrestled both with statements of faith that qualified the message of Jesus and with the Donatism rupture. There was a growing need to clarify the succession of the apostles to the disciples and to distance the proto-orthodoxy from the Gnostic and outlying sects. There were several messages being disseminated, and many early church leaders attempted to clarify the proto-orthodox message as the true lessons of Jesus passed along by the apostles. The road to orthodoxy began long before the fourth century; it began with scattered versions of faith in the writings of early church fathers trying to find a commonality and cohesiveness in the emerging church.

The early church emerged from a Jewish culture that was permeated by Hellenistic culture and philosophy.¹⁰⁸ As Jews, Jesus and his disciples initially spread his message to their own people. Paul, near the end of the first century, began sharing the message of Jesus with the Gentiles, and the fracture that developed was irreparable. As

¹⁰⁷ Freeman, 163.

¹⁰⁸ Dungan, 22.

Christians came together, they brought with them many ideas from the pagan world.¹⁰⁹ To keep these believers from breaking off and forming another sect, church leaders needed to infuse order and stability into the infant churches.

The influence of the Greek philosophers peaked in the second century as leaders began writing public defenses of faith. Familiar with Greek philosophy and its formation, church leaders modeled their own arguments for the church after it.¹¹⁰ These early Christian philosophers, in the style of early Greek and Roman philosophers, wrote virulent tracts attacking rivals and their composure of new gospels.¹¹¹ Such analysis of the writings required the new gospels to be attributed to authors of apostolic origin in order to establish creditability.¹¹²

Valentinus, an early Gnostic teacher, was one such church father that later writers labeled heretical.¹¹³ Like many Gnostic teachers, Valentinus believed he had a vision of the risen Christ, which led to his teachings.¹¹⁴ Valentinus also alleged he possessed instruction from a direct disciple of one of Jesus' disciples, Theodas, a disciple of Paul.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Dungan, 23.

¹¹⁰ Dungan, 33.

¹¹¹ Dungan, 34.

¹¹² The authors of these gospels were not the actual apostle of Jesus. The specific writer is unknown; gospels are attributed to a community of followers who carried the message of the specific apostle from the time of Jesus.

¹¹³ Hoeller, Stephan A.. "Valentinus - A Gnostic for All Seasons." The Gnosis Archive. <http://www.gnosis.org/valentinus.htm> (accessed December 1, 2009). Valentinus was an active leader in the church from approximately 135 – 160. He had a large following in Rome and in 143 was a candidate for the office of bishop, which he refused. Little is known of his late career, but some of his works survive as well as writings against him by later Christian writers.

¹¹⁴ Brons, David. "Valentinus and the Valentinian Tradition." The Gnosis Archive. <http://www.gnosis.org/library/valentinus/> (accessed December 1, 2009).

¹¹⁵ Hoeller, "Valentinus." The claim of Theodas actually being a disciple of Paul is debated. Valentinians claim that he is, while other orthodox writers claim he is not. For the sake of Valentinus though, this claim

Valentinus taught the Lord Jesus had bestowed esoteric doctrine secretly upon a few, selected disciples. This secret was advanced teaching, which other church leaders were not privy to, but he had learned it directly from Theodas.¹¹⁶ Protesting Valentinus' teachings and writings, Irenaeus argued that Valentinus was not only erroneous in his teachings, but that he did not possess the necessary "succession of bishops" that preserved the truth of the apostles' message through unbroken successions.¹¹⁷ These two early writers played a great role in the early fissure of the church. Debates such as theirs continued to proliferate in the early church, broadening the rupture. Arguments about fundamental theological differences engendered the need for a concise definition of beliefs to be developed—an action Constantine will take in the early fourth century when he takes power.

In response to the diverse sects of Christianity and cryptic Gnostic teachings, Irenaeus¹¹⁸ elaborated on a version of the Christian faith that could be recited by followers to showcase their proper, orthodox, belief in Jesus. In the tenth chapter of the first book *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus opens with his version of the faith that churches

gives him a place in line with other church leaders who possess direct lineage from the original apostles, like the proto-orthodox church is trying to establish. Thus, by their guidelines, he is a qualified leader of the church.

¹¹⁶ Dungan, 45.

¹¹⁷ Dungan, 45. Irenaeus also argues that the succession Valentinus claims does not go back to Jesus, but have to Simon the Samaritan. Furthermore, because they claim to have secret gospels and mysterious writings that are not for all church leaders, then Valentinus' teachings are false and rejected by the true church.

¹¹⁸ Davis, Glenn. "The Development of the Canon of the New Testament: Irenaeus of Lyons." *The Development of the Canon of the New Testament*. <http://www.ntcanon.org/Irenaeus.shtml> (accessed November 18, 2009). Irenaeus (120 – 202) was an early, if not one of the first, great Catholic theologians. He also was an avid opponent of the Gnostics.

received from the apostles and their disciples.¹¹⁹ He insists that though orthodoxy was scattered in the churches, the message begun by the apostles was the basis of their faith, and this was what the church was to share with its followers.¹²⁰ Irenaeus' insistence on the divine succession was a countermeasure against the Gnostic heretics, "...who said they possessed a secret oral language tradition from Jesus himself."¹²¹ Further countering this heretical claim, Irenaeus insisted that the bishops from different cities should be able to be traced back to the apostles, and more importantly, proven not to be Gnostic.¹²² This articulated the "criteria of apostolic continuity" in a form that would set the standard in the history of the church.¹²³ Because these bishops were directly descended from the apostles, their interpretation of the gospel could be trusted as the accurate message from Jesus. Irenaeus devised a method to determine who was spreading the devout, sacred message of the church from those who were spreading a heretical message, which he believed to be based on misguidance and lies.

Irenaeus' version of the faith resembled prior creedal statements. Considering that not all Christian creeds survive in written form, the ones that did provide an insight into the nature of how believers professed their faith. Creedal statements, or confessions of faith, are positive affirmations in the church; they are statements of truth that the church

¹¹⁹ Johnson, 27.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 27.

¹²¹ Davis, "Irenaeus of Lyons."

¹²² Davis, "Irenaeus of Lyons."

¹²³ Pelikan, 21.

teaches the follower to believe.¹²⁴ Prior to Irenaeus' version of faith¹²⁵ in *Against Heresies*, there are four previous creedal statements that warrant examination for their influence on later creedal statements. Mimicking the previous creedal statements, Irenaeus' statement of faith not only clearly defines the belief in the Trinity, but it also adds the phrase "became incarnate for our salvation."¹²⁶ This phrase is a critical response to the Gnostic idea that God would not enter the material reality and that escaping from their material existence saves people.¹²⁷ Irenaeus was specifically presenting a statement of belief that the Gnostics could not accept, nor recite, thus making it easier to identify those of heretical beliefs.

Irenaeus, proto-orthodox, believed in the historical details of Jesus. This was the foundation of his faith, unlike the Gnostics who looked to personal insight and intuition to guide them in their faith. His version of faith was one in a lineage of creedal statements that outline a Christian's beliefs. Irenaeus echoes Ignatius' letter to Trallians in the first century affirming a physical Jesus.¹²⁸ In the ninth chapter, Ignatius emphasized Jesus' being fully human. Jesus was "descended from David, and was also of Mary; who was

¹²⁴ Turner, Cuthbert Hamilton. *The History and Use of Creeds and Anathemas in the Early Centuries of the Church*. (London: Society For Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1910). 21.

¹²⁵ Schaff, Phillip. "Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume 1." Welcome to the Christian Classics Ethereal Library. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.html> (accessed November 22, 2009). "The Church, though dispersed through our the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: [She believes] in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them. And in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation. And in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord..." For the complete version of faith, see the tenth chapter of the first volume."

¹²⁶ Johnson, 27.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 27.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 22.

truly born, and ate and drank.”¹²⁹ Ignatius continued by expounding that he was crucified, died, and raised from the dead in the same manner that the Father will raise up those who believe in him.¹³⁰ This creedal statement from the letter exemplifies Ireaneus’ belief in Jesus as a human being and solidifies a crucial orthodox belief: Jesus was human. This was an important statement of faith because of unorthodox sects who questioned Jesus’ humanity or his rising from the dead.

Further developing the foundation of creedal statements, the *Epistula Apostolorum*, the Epistle of the Apostles, contains another clear statement of Christian belief.¹³¹ The Epistle of the Apostles illuminates the position of Jesus among Christians; it contains a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples, explaining the message they will share with other followers.¹³² For the first time, the epistle contains a creedal statement concerning the church and the forgiveness of sins. The conclusion for the story of the feeding of the five-thousand, ends by stating that the loaves that fed the five-thousand “are the symbol of our faith in the Lord of the Christians (in the great Christendom), *even* in the Father, the Lord Almighty, and in Jesus Christ our redeemer, in the Holy Ghost the comforter, in the holy church, and in the remission of sins.”¹³³ The loaves are a symbol of the Trinity because from one loaf came many, just like from one God came the Son and

¹²⁹ Knight, Kevin, ed. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Vol. 1. Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co, 1885. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0106.htm> (18 November 2009).

¹³⁰ Knight, Chapter 9.

¹³¹ Johnson, 23.

¹³² Johnson, 23.

¹³³ Kirby, Peter. “The *Epistula Apostolorum*: Epistle of the Apostles.” *Early Christian Writings: New Testament, Apocrypha, Gnostics, Church Fathers*. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/apostolorum.html> (accessed November 21, 2009).

the Holy Spirit.¹³⁴ This proclamation of faith in the *Epistula Apostolorum* is interesting in its proto-orthodoxy statements about the Trinity considering its format contains non-standard speculations.¹³⁵ Regardless of its position in the canon, the statement of faith reveals the developing religion's need to define and hone its beliefs through a succinct statement.

Baptism, from the earliest age, was preceded by a confession of faith.¹³⁶ These creeds appeared as baptismal rites for new members into the church. The earliest questions asked of the people to be baptized were the first stages of the process by which a creed was developed.¹³⁷ In chapter sixty-one of Justin's *First Apology*, a third building block of creedal development appears; Justin focuses on the rites of baptism and the purpose for washing oneself clean, literally in water and figuratively in Jesus.¹³⁸ This chapter describes the rites of baptism and explains how it's practiced in the second century. It also shows how confession accompanies baptism, providing evidence for the natural expression of the elements of the confession.¹³⁹ Justin concludes the sixty-first chapter by telling the readers that baptism is "in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and in the name of the Holy Ghost, who through the

¹³⁴ Kirby, Peter. "Tertullian (Roberts-Donaldson)." *Early Christian Writings: New Testament, Apocrypha, Gnostics, Church Fathers*. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/tertullian17.html> (accessed November 23, 2009). The Trinity is first coined by Tertullian in the late first century. The use of the word in this statement is for clarification for modern readers.

¹³⁵ Johnson, 23.

¹³⁶ Bate, Herbert Newell. *History of the Church to AD 325*. (New York: Edwin S Gorham, 1908), 123.

¹³⁷ Turner, 14.

¹³⁸ Kirby, Peter. "Saint Justin Martyr: First Apology (Roberts-Donaldson)." *Early Christian Writings: New Testament, Apocrypha, Gnostics, Church Fathers*. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyr-firstapology.html> (accessed November 21, 2009).

¹³⁹ Johnson, 23.

prophets foretold all things about Jesus, he who is illuminated is washed.”¹⁴⁰ The development of a statement of faith is not only used to explain Christian faith in arguments against non-proto-orthodox sects but also used to explain why particular rites are performed. This is an important inclusion for believers because both acknowledges their action, and gives it purpose and meaning. They are being baptized in the name of the savior they believe in, the man who gave his life for theirs. Justin’s explanation for baptism is another piece in the building up to the writing of a formal creed as an example of a clarifying statement of belief.

A fourth inspiration also comes from an account of Justin, before his execution, when he makes a statement of faith before his accusers.¹⁴¹ Justin, persecuted for his belief in Jesus, is brought before the prefect of Rome, Rusticus. After being commanded by Rusticus to sacrifice to the gods, Justin refuses, retorting that it is against his dogma. Asked by Rusticus to define his dogma, he replies:

"Dogma is that according to which we worship the God of the Christians, whom we reckon to be one from the beginning, the maker and fashioner of the whole creation, visible and invisible; and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who had also been preached beforehand by the prophets as about to be present with the race of men, the herald of salvation and teacher of good disciples. And I, being a man, think that what I can say is insignificant in comparison with His boundless divinity, acknowledging a certain prophetic power, since it was prophesied concerning Him of whom

¹⁴⁰ Kirby, "Saint Justin Martyr: First Apology."

¹⁴¹ Butler, Alban. *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and Other Principal Saints Edited for Daily Use (Complete Set Volumes 1 Through 6 Which Includes Supplement)*. (New York: Virtue And Co., 1936.)

now I say that He is the Son of God. For I know that of old the prophets foretold His appearance among men."¹⁴²

Justin's explanation is a clear statement of his belief that God has spoken through the prophets.¹⁴³ The lineage of the prophets further authenticates the belief that Jesus is from the beginning of time and represents the only God throughout all time. This validated Irenaeus' later ideology that the church's orthodoxy came from the apostles who possessed a direct lineage to Jesus. Justin's influence was fundamental to later fathers who furthered the path to orthodoxy.

The development of a creed, as seen in the examples of the statements of faith above, continued as the Christian church moved into the third century and early church fathers further established the need for Christians to follow rules handed down by the apostles. For early church fathers, these rules established the conventions of the church and later built the foundation of the Catholic Church. One of the fathers of the early church, Tertullian, was a prolific writer against heretical teachings. In *The Prescription Against Heretics, Against Marcion, and Against Praxeas*,¹⁴⁴ Tertullian referred to the rule of faith by which genuine believers should live and provided a way to measure against the heresies of false teachers.¹⁴⁵ He further elaborated that the rule of faith was derived from the apostles and handed down faithfully through the lineage of disciples chosen by

¹⁴² Roberts, Alexander, and James Donaldson. "Martyrdom of Justin Martyr." Believe Religious Information Source website. <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txv/martyr8.htm> (accessed November 22, 2009).

¹⁴³ Johnson, 24-25.

¹⁴⁴ See Kirby, "Tertullian (Roberts-Donaldson)," for full translations of these texts. For references to the rules of faith Tertullian discusses, see specifically: chapters 12 and 19 in *Prescription Against Heresies*, chapter 3 in *Against Marcion*, and chapter 2 in *Against Praxeas*.

¹⁴⁵ Johnson, 28.

the apostles. Origen of Alexandria also believed that a rule of faith was necessary and that it was the basis and guide for theology.¹⁴⁶ He, too, pointed to the teaching of the apostles by Jesus and the transmission of these teachings through them to later disciples; thus, these teachings were to be the accepted truth of the church.¹⁴⁷ These two early church leaders established an important precedent by insisting that the leadership of the church was based on apostolic lineage. Furthermore, establishing a rule of faith maintained order in the church by providing followers a verbal testament of their faith. Their postulation was later picked up and expanded on by the framers of the Nicene Creed.

Toward the end of the second century and into the beginning of the third century, there was a concerted effort to define orthodoxy and heterodoxy.¹⁴⁸ Like the early Christian fathers who were developing early rules of faith for their followers, later church leaders expanded on this need for two reasons. First, there was a desire to create cohesion in the churches. Second, there was a challenge presented by a dualistic version of Christianity: especially one advocated by the Gnostics.¹⁴⁹ In order to eliminate the heretical sects, a clear definition of orthodoxy and heterodoxy was needed. The process in defining these would not be simple though. It would take another century for these elements to be hashed out and an orthodox church to emerge as victor over all other sects.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 29.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 29.

¹⁴⁸ Kelley, J.N.D.. *Early Christian Creeds*. (London: Continuum, 1972), 27.

¹⁴⁹ Kelly, 30.

The foundation for the definition of orthodoxy lies within the preliminary versions of faith.

The statements of faith presented in the writings of the early church fathers led to the development of the Nicene Creed in the fourth century. From the beginning, the early church was a believing, confessing, preaching church that saw themselves as the bearers of a unique story of redemption.¹⁵⁰ Embodied in the New Testament are-creed like slogans, tags, and catch words that possess rhythm and a general pattern that leaders developed and molded into creedal statements.¹⁵¹ While in the proper sense of the terms no creed, confession, or formulas of faith exist verbatim in the New Testament; there is a common body of doctrine that lent itself to the development of a creedal statement for the church as a whole.¹⁵²

Creeds and confessions of faith have their origin in a two-fold Christian imperative: to express beliefs and to confess what one believes.¹⁵³ The need for a creed exists for many reasons. Two reasons include the need for a declaration of faith prior to baptism for catechetical instruction and at baptism to serve as a vow for people seeking admittance to the church.¹⁵⁴ In the struggle to overcome sects who do not conform to a pre-orthodox view of the church, a creed was needed in order to establish accepted lines of belief for church leaders and followers.¹⁵⁵ This response extended from an early form

¹⁵⁰ Kelly, 7-8.

¹⁵¹ Kelly, 13.

¹⁵² Kelly, 23.

¹⁵³ Pelikan, 35.

¹⁵⁴ Kelly, 13.

¹⁵⁵ Kelly, 13.

of heresy where Gnostics denied the physical reality of Jesus Christ and separated him from God, creating two entities.¹⁵⁶ The difference of early sects resulted in a metaphorical line being drawn in the sand, and the opposing factions clashed, each condemning the other for being wrong in its interpretation of the gospels. This tendency towards division did not end, but became an ever-growing problem within the early church as more segregated beliefs formulated from interpretations of the New Testament.

Prior to the beginning of the fourth century, creeds and summaries of faith were local in character. Although local church leaders assumed they encompassed the universal beliefs of the church, all had a local flavor that was distinctive.¹⁵⁷ They reflected the interpretations of the individual leaders and the values they emphasized from the New Testament. The creeds that did have a mainline development were limited to baptism and the catechetical preparation leading up to it.¹⁵⁸ It is possible the development of a more universal baptismal creed developed because of the tenth chapter of the Book of Romans that contains a directive to confess Jesus is Lord.¹⁵⁹ This instruction provided the necessary path for the development of a similar creed throughout the diverse churches.

Statements of faith developed in the early church because there was a need for unity. There was a need to institute a cohesive, unified belief which all followers agreed to, so that differing factions did not confuse followers by contradicting other segments of

¹⁵⁶ Pelikan, 60.

¹⁵⁷ Kelly, 205.

¹⁵⁸ Kelly, 205.

¹⁵⁹ Romans 10:9-10. "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved."

the church. A unified statement was also needed to prohibit vehement disagreements from threatening to break up the church. These early proclamations of faith and creedal affirmations provided the necessary groundwork for the Council of Nicaea to generate the Nicene Creed. After a fundamental split on the authenticity of leaders, a disagreement threatened the stability of Constantine's empire. It forces him to call the bishops of the church together to create a formal statement of faith that would represent the unified church. The development of the Nicene Creed would not have been possible without the work of the early church fathers and their statements of faith.

Chapter IV

The Arian Controversy

Creeds were slowly building throughout the centuries, each one clarifying a little more about Christianity than the last and each one possessing a little bit of local flavor. The purpose of the creeds was not only for baptismal use, but also to clarify beliefs for congregations. Because there were sects that many proto-orthodox churches did not believe in, like the Gnostics, creeds were also developed to weed out these heretical believers. By the time Constantine took power and threw all of his support behind Christianity, controversy within the church threatened to destabilize the new church, and Constantine's empire as well. In 325, Constantine called together all the bishops to meet in Nicaea to negotiate a solution to these theological complications and to develop one unilateral creed the entire church could stand behind. His task was greater than he knew, and the Council of Nicaea set in motion the formation of what we now know as the Roman Catholic Orthodox Church. In 325, though, the purpose of the Council of Nicaea was to eradicate the Arian controversy that was threatening the church and the stability in Constantine's empire. While it was not effaced in 325, the message from the first council clearly stated that rebel doctrines that did not fit within the orthodox view of Jesus were not welcome, nor wanted, in the orthodox church.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ The Council of Nicaea in 325 was the first ecumenical council. It was held to establish acceptable doctrines and practices for the church. After the first ecumenical council in 325, there were six more councils to settle theological debates that threatened the stability of the church. The last ecumenical council was held in Nicaea in 787.

A number of events culminated in the Council of Nicaea in 325.¹⁶¹ The paramount dispute revolved around the status of Jesus: was he the same as God, or subservient to God. The predominant proponent of Jesus as subservient to God was Arius of Alexandria. Arius,¹⁶² a presbyter in Alexandria, was passed over as bishop in approximately 312 when Alexander was selected instead.¹⁶³ Although he was dismayed that he was passed over as bishop of Alexandria, there was no initial quarrel between the two church leaders.¹⁶⁴ Although he was not selected as bishop, he was a respected church leader, and he continued to lead his congregation. Arius' reputation was as an "earnest worker, a strict and ascetic liver, and a powerful preacher who dealt boldly and frankly with principles of faith."¹⁶⁵ He was a powerhouse in Alexandria, and his message divided the church.

While the disturbance Arius kindled in Alexandria in approximately 313 revolved around a theology that contradicted that of Bishop Alexander, it was not radically new. Arius was a student of St. Lucian of Antioch, who had been condemned for teaching that Jesus was only a man.¹⁶⁶ Arius, like his teacher, taught that Jesus was not eternal like God, but rather an "adoptive son"; his promotion to divinity was because of his moral

¹⁶¹ The Council of Nicaea in 325 is the first one in Nicaea. For the purpose of this paper, all references to the Council of Nicaea refer to the first one.

¹⁶² Schaff, Phillip. *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*. "Arius." Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1954. http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/encyc01/Page_284.html (accessed November 24, 2009). Considered one of the great heretics of the church; he was born in approximately 256 and was presbyter in Antioch and later in Alexandria.

¹⁶³ Firth, John B. *Constantine the Great*. (New York: GP Putnams, 1905). 190.

¹⁶⁴ Firth, 190.

¹⁶⁵ Firth, 190.

¹⁶⁶ Raymond, Brother John. "Arianism Versus the Council of Nicaea." Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church (Arian Catholic). http://arian-catholic.org/arian/arianism_v_nicaea.html (accessed November 28, 2009).

growth and obedience to God on Earth.¹⁶⁷ He argued that God's essence could not be shared, for such a sharing in nature would imply a division in the one God.¹⁶⁸ Using the Gospel of John as a source for his argument—Jesus was the Word of God, Arius elaborates that the word of God cannot be fully God, but must be a creature God formed at a point in time; thus, the Word had a beginning and was subject to change.¹⁶⁹ This contradicted the teachings of Bishop Alexander and his successor, Bishop Athanasius.¹⁷⁰ Arius, through his defiant teachings, had his name attached to one of the greatest controversies in the early church. The Arian controversy would require Constantine's intervention and led to the first Council of Nicaea and ultimately, the development of a creed that worked towards eliminating these heretical teachings.

Arius' teachings appealed to followers who needed reason and logic for them to be able to believe in Jesus, something that was solid and stood against all objections.¹⁷¹ Arianism promoted that Jesus was somewhere between God and man. If Jesus was not God by nature and earned his elevation, then it stood to reason that anyone had the potential to be raised to his status by God.¹⁷² Arians could be considered prisoners of Greek logic because they thought in terms of either/or.¹⁷³ Either Jesus was fully God or

¹⁶⁷ Rubenstein, 55.

¹⁶⁸ Firth, 33.

¹⁶⁹ Firth, 33.

¹⁷⁰ Schaff, Phillip. *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, s.v. "Athansius." Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1954. http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/encyc01/Page_343.html (accessed November 24, 2009).

¹⁷¹ Firth, 198.

¹⁷² Rubenstein, 56.

¹⁷³ Rubenstein, 64.

else he was fully man; he could not be a portion of God. This logic, applied to Jesus, makes him a type of demi-God.¹⁷⁴ This ideology appealed to Christians who were still influenced by paganism that existed around them. It worked better for them to believe in God the Son as an intermediary between the omnipotent, unapproachable God the Father and fallen man.¹⁷⁵ Arius' teachings were common sense for many because the logic was easy to follow and it appealed to newly converted pagans who were able to understand Jesus better when he was related to a demi-God.¹⁷⁶

There are church historians that suggest an orthodox understanding of Christianity was in place by 320. They accepted that Jesus was the Son of God and fully divine and part of the Godhead.¹⁷⁷ Arius created such a stir because he challenged this orthodoxy with the claim that Jesus was created as Son. This makes him distinct from the pre-existing God and subordinate to him as a son is to a father.¹⁷⁸ This subordination does not agree with the teachings of the proto-orthodox church. The church taught the equality found in the Trinity: three separate personas in one all equal because they are really one in the same. For Arius and his followers, Christ was a perfect representative of God; he was always in agreement with God, but still not equal to him.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ Rubenstein, 64.

¹⁷⁵ Firth, 198.

¹⁷⁶ Bate, 120.

¹⁷⁷ Freeman, 164.

¹⁷⁸ Freeman, 164.

¹⁷⁹ Rubenstein, 11.

The theology Arius preached to his followers rested on the conviction of absolute transcendence and perfection of the Godhead.¹⁸⁰ For Arius, God the Father was unrendered and uncreated. He was infinity: from everlasting to everlasting, himself without a source or beginning.¹⁸¹ The son, Jesus, must have had a beginning because God was the only one without a beginning; thus, having been created by God, Jesus was subordinate to him.¹⁸² If Jesus was not created by God, then the issue of dualism arises, and God is no longer the only supreme deity. Furthermore, if another being was to share in the divine nature of God, there would be a plurality of divine beings, whereas God, by definition, is unique.¹⁸³ Therefore, all that exists, including the Son of God, *λογος* (logos), must have come into existence by an act of creation by God.¹⁸⁴

Arius further taught that the Son of God was a creature, and the first of all creatures. He was created before all the angels and archangels, making him ineffably superior to all other created beings.¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, because the Son was created, he could have no real knowledge of his father because, being finite, he could not conceive of something infinite.¹⁸⁶ Arius' argument used the Platonic thinking of forms.¹⁸⁷ Plato's highest form was a supreme, unchanging God. The subordinate entity, *λογος* (logos), or

¹⁸⁰ Kelly, 232.

¹⁸¹ Kelly, 232.

¹⁸² Kelly, 233.

¹⁸³ Kelly, 232.

¹⁸⁴ Kelly, 232.

¹⁸⁵ Firth, 193.

¹⁸⁶ Kelly, 233.

¹⁸⁷ Freeman, 165.

the Son of God, provided the link with the lower created world.¹⁸⁸ For God to communicate his essence or substance to another being would imply that he was divisible and subject to change.¹⁸⁹ Because the belief stood that God was unchangeable and unknowable, then it was impossible for him to divide himself with another being and still be one.

Using the Gospel of John as an example, Arius equated Jesus with *λογος* (logos).¹⁹⁰ *λογος* (logos) had to be a separate act of creation by God, created at the beginning of time with the supreme and distinct role of mediator for his Father's glory.¹⁹¹ Arius' view was that if Christ was wisdom in the Word, it had to be backed by Proverbs, which is the centerpiece of his argument.¹⁹² The passage in Proverbs,¹⁹³ if read as if it refers to Jesus, corroborates Arius' argument that Jesus is a creation of God, and therefore, cannot be equal to God. Because all exists as a creation of God, even Jesus, this makes Jesus a subordinate.¹⁹⁴ Using the Bible to further his argument, Arius looks to the description of Jesus' suffering in the Gospel of Mark as proof that he was a lesser divinity.¹⁹⁵ In Arius' view, there was no reason why God would not have created Jesus,

¹⁸⁸ Freeman, 165.

¹⁸⁹ Kelly, 232.

¹⁹⁰ John 1

¹⁹¹ Freeman, 165-166.

¹⁹² Freeman, 165-166.

¹⁹³ Proverbs 8:22-31 NIV: "The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began." The passage continues by recounting how Jesus was created before anything else, the mountains, the earth, and even the heavens.

¹⁹⁴ Kelly, 232.

¹⁹⁵ Mark 15:34.

as Son, to be the savior of man. He had provided scripture that proved Jesus was not of the same essence as God. For Arius, there was no argument; the Bible supported his position.

Not only did Proverbs recount that Jesus was made separate from God, but Arius also applied the Gospels to document that Jesus saw himself as distinct from God.¹⁹⁶ He associated Jesus' self-knowledge as being independent from God with Proverbs 8. In Mark 10:18, Jesus questions why the rich young man calls him good, because only God is good. In Matthew 26:39, Jesus prays to God, showing he is making a distinction between himself and God. This continues in John 17: Jesus prays to God that he should glorify his son, so his son can glorify him. Two more references Arius frequently referred to include the last line of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, 16:27, and Hebrews 5:8.¹⁹⁷ Each of these references convey a sense of discreteness that affirms Arius' argument that Jesus the Son, is separate from God the Father. Arius did not present his argument lightly, but utilized the gospels and early church fathers for support.¹⁹⁸

Arius argued that if the relationship between God and Jesus was to be interpreted the same as a human relationship, and then logically, God had to come before the Son. Therefore, there was a time when the Son did not exist, and the Son was created from an essence or being that was previously nonexistent as the Father is made from an eternal essence.¹⁹⁹ According to Arius, Jesus was morally impeccable and remained immutable,

¹⁹⁶ Freeman, 164.

¹⁹⁷ Freeman, 164.

¹⁹⁸ Freeman, 165. Early church fathers that Arius drew on included Justin the Martyr, Clement and Origen. They too, all treated Jesus as a derivative from the father.

¹⁹⁹ Firth, 194.

but he alludes that this is by his own resolute act of will and not due to his being eternal like God.²⁰⁰ In Arius' eyes, the Word was not authentic, but the adoptive Son of the Father. "He is called Son or Power by grace. He was promoted to that position because the Father saw the meritorious and perfect life he would, by his own free acts of will, lead."²⁰¹ This argument for the Son of God being unequal to the Father caused a great schism in the early church, necessitating Constantine to orchestrate the first Council of Nicaea.

Alexander, appointed Bishop of Alexandria in 312, was the first to detect and condemn Arius for his heretical teachings.²⁰² In approximately 318, disturbances begin in Christian circles of Alexandria, where Arius was exalting his doctrine of the Son of God being unequal and not of the same essence.²⁰³ At first, Alexander does not interfere with Arius, but believes his eccentric teachings will fade over time. Arius' tolerant and open acceptance of religious ideals contradicted the proto-orthodox need for a lucid definition of Christianity that unified the Father and the Son.²⁰⁴ Arius' eccentric doctrine did not fade, and he became rather confident in his rebellious teachings, gathering more followers with his logical teaching of Jesus as subservient to God.²⁰⁵ Alexander was compelled to intervene as the unity in the church began to crumble and followers began

²⁰⁰ Kelly, 234.

²⁰¹ Kelly, 234.

²⁰² Schaff, Phillip. "ANF06. Fathers of the Third Century: Gregory Thaumaturgus, Dionysius the Great, Julius Africanus, Anatolius, and Minor Writers, Methodius, Arn." Welcome to the Christian Classics Ethereal Library. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf06.x.ii.html> (accessed November 29, 2009).

²⁰³ Firth, 191.

²⁰⁴ Rubenstein, 73-74.

²⁰⁵ Firth, 195.

to take sides. He called for Arius to meet privately to discuss his behavior. However, this meeting did not dissuade Arius, but fueled him even more as he intensified his purpose of spreading his message.²⁰⁶

Dismayed at the Arian controversy, Constantine wrote to Alexander, scolding him for allowing this disagreement to create such a serious divide and instructing him to resolve the conflict.²⁰⁷ The fighting in the streets between the separate church parishioners threatened the stability of Constantine's empire. He needed to act quickly to quell the situation. He believed that by instructing Alexander to quash the conflict that he would be able to easily carry out his orders. Constantine, unfamiliar with complexity of this hindrance, made a tactical blunder in downplaying the Arian dispute.²⁰⁸ This was not a simple issue that could be dismissed with a simple order from a bishop. The leaders of the church could not 'agree to disagree' about such a fundamental difference.²⁰⁹ They were not squabbling philosophers interpreting theology differently; the church leaders were identifying the cornerstone of Christianity. Each faction refused to submit to the opposing side because doing so would deny all they taught and believed.

Following the direction of Constantine, Bishop Alexander called a council to Alexandria, which more than one hundred bishops attended. The bishops who attended this council were split in their preferences for doctrine; Arius' teaching that the Son of God was unequal to the Father, or Alexander's teaching of the proto-orthodox church in

²⁰⁶ Firth, 192.

²⁰⁷ Dungan, 109.

²⁰⁸ Dungan, 111.

²⁰⁹ Firth, 209. Constantine called on Bishop Alexander to put an end to the quarreling and to agree on the fundamentals, that was more important than agreeing on all points. Constantine misunderstands the importance of the argument when he directs Alexander to squelch the argument.

the equality of the Trinity.²¹⁰ Alexander and his followers saw the need for a strong God, a strong church, and a strong empire, which would provide the security the church needed to thrive in Constantine's empire.²¹¹ At the council Alexander called, Arius attended with his supporters, standing behind his doctrine. The synod called for all in attendance to sign a "Confession of Orthodoxy"; Arius and his supporters refused and they were excommunicated.²¹² Fleeing Alexandria, Arius sought refuge in Palestine; from there, he sought reconciliation and re-admittance to the church.²¹³ He worked passionately to gain re-admittance and ultimately attended the first Council of Nicaea in order to plead his case and argue his beliefs.

After issuing the Edict of Milan in 313,²¹⁴ Constantine's goal with Christianity was to create unity throughout the empire and restore the tone of the populace.²¹⁵ The fighting that existed throughout the empire jeopardized the stability of Constantine's rule. Rather than continue persecuting the Christians, Constantine determined peace was needed. After issuing the edict, Constantine worked on unifying the church by rebuilding churches that were destroyed and restoring artifacts destroyed during the Great Persecution.²¹⁶ As he worked to unify the church, he was faced with two major schisms

²¹⁰ Rubenstein, 57.

²¹¹ Rubenstein, 74.

²¹² Rubenstein, 57; Firth, 196.

²¹³ Firth, 196.

²¹⁴ Freeman, 102.

²¹⁵ Rubenstein, 50.

²¹⁶ Freeman, 159.

that threaten what he had accomplished in his empire. The first was the Donatism²¹⁷ rift in the West and the second was the Arian scandal in the East. Although Constantine did not understand why these disagreements caused such strife, he knew there was enough support on either side to cause a permanent split, derailing his plan for a unified empire. It was obvious he had to intervene because the church fathers could not reconcile the issue. In an effort to save the church as a whole, and his empire, Constantine invited all the bishops to a council in Nicaea to negotiate a solution to these pressing conflicts.

²¹⁷ Lettinga, Neil. "Western North Africa: Donatism." See the second chapter for more information about the Donatism scandal.

Chapter V

The Council of Nicaea and the Introduction of the Nicene Creed

Scandal and disagreements rocked the development of the Christian church in the fourth century. Fundamental differences on Jesus' status, along with other issues like what date Easter should be yearly, threatened the stability of the church. Constantine needed to act quickly if he wanted a steady church to provide unified support to him. Constantine feared a divided church becoming a menace to the unity of his empire.²¹⁸ He called together a council of all the bishops to create a unified document that would be backed by the state.²¹⁹ While a council of bishops creating doctrine is not a radical idea, the new position of the church, in regards to the state, was a progressive idea.²²⁰ Not only did Constantine fund the council, but he also sponsored the bishops and their entourage for their journey and stay in Nicaea.²²¹ His intention for drawing the bishops together was to consolidate the church with a unified theology and to efface the dissention that existed in order to bring equanimity to his empire.²²²

In the spring or early summer of 325 C.E., Constantine called a council for all the bishops to attend to settle disputes causing distress and tension within the church. The Eastern Church was represented well; however, the representatives from the Western Church were scarce.²²³ Constantine's revolutionary idea anticipated that the whole church

²¹⁸ Bates, 121.

²¹⁹ Freeman, 167.

²²⁰ Kelly, 212.

²²¹ Freeman, 167.

²²² Kelly, 211; Freeman, 171.

²²³ Dungan, 111.

would be represented in order to establish the foundation of the newly adopted state church; however, the unequal division of representation influences the decisions made by the council.²²⁴ No contemporaneous records or proceedings of the council were published and are presumed never to have existed. The information that does exist about the first Council of Nicaea is in fragments of letters and writings remaining from bishops who were in attendance and the Nicene Creed itself.²²⁵ The three surviving sources about the council are a fragment from St. Eustathius of Antioch, some chapters from Athanasius, both written a generation after the council, and Eusebius of Caesarea's letter to his church dictating the proceedings of the council.²²⁶ The surviving evidence of the council tells of three acts that were established by the council: the Nicene Creed, twenty canons, and a degree for the determination of Easter.²²⁷ Independently, these three acts are significant for the developing church; they denote specificity for the proto-orthodox church. The Nicene Creed is of particular importance because, for the first time, a unified creed was created for all church members to recite their orthodox belief and deny any opposition that did not have the same sentiments.

The opening day of the proceedings was ostentatious. Constantine entered the proceedings clad in gold and covered in precious stones, taking his seat in a golden

²²⁴ Bate, 122.

²²⁵ Rubenstein 76.

²²⁶ Kelly, 212. There is not an exact date for the letter Eusebius wrote home to his congregation; however, it is assumed to have been written shortly after the council took place. It addresses the specific language of the creed.

²²⁷ Leclercq, Henri. "First Council of Nicaea." Catholic Encyclopedia. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11044a.htm> (accessed December 1, 2009). See Leclercq's information on the twenty canons and the determination for the selection of Easter. For the purpose of this paper, the Nicene Creed is the only aspect of the council to be discussed as it fulfills the answer to how the Arian controversy was settled.

throne.²²⁸ According to Eusebius, Constantine's opening speech focused on the internal strife present in the church, and he encouraged all the bishops to work together in harmony, remembering forgiveness in their deliberations.²²⁹ Although Constantine called the council together, there is no evidence that he imposed, a desired outcome for the gathered bishops other than reconciliation.²³⁰ As a sign that he was not at the proceedings to dictate their actions, he tossed into the fire, without reading, several letters of complaints against miscellaneous brethren that were given to him in the beginning of the meeting by several bishops.²³¹ The message he sent was clear: he was not there to settle issues, but for the council to arrive at the necessary parameters for a unified church. Since Constantine did not directly guide the council in formulating a creed, the council of bishops assumed leadership after Constantine's opening actions to begin construction on an agreed statement of faith.²³² Constantine's role in the Council of Nicaea was to provide the location, to cover the expenses, and to allot the time necessary for the bishops to work together to find the right language in order to achieve consensus on a canon for the church.²³³ The provision of these three elements provided a conducive environment for opposition to the proto-orthodox church to be ousted. More importantly for Constantine, the destabilizing divisions of the church were eliminated and the threat to stability in his empire eradicated.

²²⁸ Leclercq, "First Council of Nicaea."

²²⁹ Dungan, 111.

²³⁰ Kelly, 212.

²³¹ Dungan, 111.

²³² Kelly, 212.

²³³ Rubenstein, 72.

The Council of Nicaea embarked on its mission by addressing the controversy of Arius and his teaching. His message denied the equality of the Trinity and the beliefs of the proto-orthodox church because Arius taught that Jesus was a creation of God, and thus, subservient to him. His direct opponent was Athanasius, a layman to Bishop Alexander, who defended the divinity of the word because of his conviction that in Christ, it was really God saving humanity.²³⁴ Athanasius firmly believed in the unity of Jesus and God and that they were of the same substance. Although both Arius and Athanasius were not allowed to sit in on the council's discussions because they were not bishops, each had his own representative bishop in the council. Eusebius supported Arius, and Bishop Alexander shared Athanasius' views.²³⁵ The representatives for Arius and Athanasius each presented arguments in order to gain the council's approval.

According to St. Eustathius of Antioch, Eusebius of Nicomedia, for the Arian party, made the first move to get a creed adopted. His attempt was unsuccessful because, according to the bishops, it contained evidence of blasphemy.²³⁶ From the account of St. Eustathius of Antioch, Eusebius of Nicomedia's formulary brought grief and shame to the audience and to the writer on account of its departure from the faith.²³⁷ While some present at the council sympathized with Arius, the majority of the bishops present were anti-Arian. They were determined to produce an article of faith that prohibited a loose interpretation that would allow the Arians to continue the debate over Jesus' status of

²³⁴ Johnson, 33.

²³⁵ Firth, 200.

²³⁶ Kelly, 213.

²³⁷ Lane, Anthony N.S. "The Council of Nicaea: Purposes and Themes." The Debate. http://debate.org.uk/topics/theo/council_nicaea.html (accessed December 3, 2009).

divinity. Athanasius recounted that the intention of the bishops was to draw up their own formulary and that it should express what they believed in true scriptural language. The only hindrance to their goal was that the Arians managed to twist the chosen biblical passages in their favor.²³⁸ After debating the polarizing positions, the majority of the bishops declared themselves to be against the blasphemous doctrines of Arius and realized they had to go outside the vocabulary of the Bible in order to achieve their mission.²³⁹ Arius was frequently called into the council's proceedings to be questioned, and his statements, as well as the opposing arguments, were actively considered.²⁴⁰ His arguments to the council were ultimately used in formulating statements Arius could not twist or misconstrue for the benefit of his ideology.

Eusebius of Caesarea, originally aligned with the Arians, presented a creed to the council to prove his orthodoxy.²⁴¹ The creed survives in a letter Eusebius wrote home to his congregation about the events of the council to quell any rumors that may have arrived prior to his return home that he had signed an article of faith that contradicted the one he professed prior to the council. Eusebius' creed cleverly avoided all issues raised by Arius in stating that Jesus was an ancillary to God.²⁴² Furthermore, while on the surface it was not unorthodox, it allowed for Arian interpretation, unacceptable by the standards of the majority of the council.²⁴³ The significance of the surviving creed in

²³⁸ Kelly, 213.

²³⁹ Leclercq, "First Council of Nicaea."; Kelly, 235

²⁴⁰ Leclercq, "First Council of Nicaea."

²⁴¹ Lane, "The Council of Nicaea: Purposes and Themes."

²⁴² Freeman, 168.

²⁴³ Rubenstein, 78.

Eusebius' letter provides insight into how the final Nicene Creed included several clauses that were specifically anti-Arian, whereas Eusebius' creed did not.²⁴⁴ Eusebius' creed,²⁴⁵ colloquially, explained the separate existence of all three divine persons,²⁴⁶ but did not unify them as one.

The purpose of presenting his statement of faith²⁴⁷ to the council was not to have it adopted as the creed put forth by the council, but to clear any taint of heresy in connection with Arius and to dispel any heretical stigmatism that may be associated with him.²⁴⁸ However, it did not clearly deny Arian interpretation; it only allowed for a more orthodox inference. The survival of his creed through the centuries is important because it provides an example of the individualistic statements of faith that existed within the church. These diverse statements were what the church felt it needed to quash because they provided an opportunity for misleading elucidations of orthodox views. The council needed to put forth a statement of faith that was universal for the church in order to oust any and all heretical factions.

²⁴⁴ Kelly, 218.

²⁴⁵ Hardy, Edward R.. *Christology of the Later Fathers (Library of Christian Classics)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1977. 336-337. Eusebius of Caesarea's creed says: "We believe in one God, Father, Almighty, the maker of all things visible and invisible, And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Word of God, God of God, Light of Light, Life of Life, unique Son, first born of all creation, begotten of the Father before all the ages, through whom all things came to be, who for our salvation, was incarnate and dwelt among men and suffered and rose again on the third day and ascended to the Father and will come again in glory to judge the living and dead. We also believe in one Holy Spirit."

²⁴⁶ Kelly, 214.

²⁴⁷ Kelly, 221. Eusebius' statement of faith to the council is not limited to the creed, but also encompasses his general theological position.

²⁴⁸ Kelly, 226. The exact timing of Eusebius' presentation to the council cannot be determined. According to Kelly, by looking at his letter to his congregation, it suggests that his presentation of the creed came early, prior to the formation of the Nicene Creed. The failure to adopt his creed was not what disappointed him; rather it was the tone of the Nicene Creed that he objected to. This can be seen in the way he scrutinizes the new creed in his letter home to his congregation.

Eusebius of Caesarea wrote home to his congregation about the creed adopted by the council of Nicaea in order to explain to his church why he signed a creed that varied from his normal teaching.²⁴⁹ He felt it was important to tell his church that the teaching had received the full endorsement of the council and that it did not completely contradict his previous theology.²⁵⁰ He presents first his statement of faith, then the council's creed. Finally, he dissects the council's creed to satisfy himself that all the statements are compatible with what he and his constituents regarded as sound theology.²⁵¹ Eusebius' surviving letter provides insight into how the council determined the terminology of the Nicene Creed. His argument not only sustained his congregation, but allows scholars to examine specifically how members of the council avoided future heretical Arian interpretation in the developed creed.

According to the later account of Eusebius,²⁵² Constantine, “confessed moreover that such were his own sentiments, and he advised all present to agree to it, and to subscribe its articles and to assent to them, with the insertion of the single word, One-in-essence, which moreover he interpreted as not in the sense of the affections of bodies, nor as if the Son subsisted from the Father in the way of division, or any severance; for that the immaterial, and intellectual, and incorporeal nature could not be the subject of any corporeal

²⁴⁹ Hardy, 336.

²⁵⁰ Kelly, 224.

²⁵¹ Kelly, 223.

²⁵² Referring to Eusebius' *The History of the Church, from Christ to Constantine*

affection, but that it became us to conceive of such things in a divine and ineffable manner.”²⁵³

This was his response to the council being unable to reject Arianism on the sole basis of scripture.²⁵⁴ Constantine explained *ὁμοουσιος* (homoousios), or consubstantial, was not used in the sense of bodily sense, for the Son did not derive his existence from the Father by means of severance since an immaterial being could not be subject to any physical affliction. The understanding of Father and Son being of the same substance must be understood as bearing a divine and inexpressible significance.²⁵⁵ When the Arians rejected the use of *ὁμοουσιος* (homoousios), Alexander of Alexandria seized the term and used it as fuel to eradicate the Arians.²⁵⁶ The addition of this word to the creed marked the technical and theological character of the creed; this signaled that the creed was going to be used as a tool to test episcopal orthodoxy.²⁵⁷ The development of the Nicene Creed exhibited a new trend in statements of faith because for the first time one was being developed in such a manner that it would be used to seek out heretics.²⁵⁸

The statement of faith, the Nicene Creed, as dictated in the council, and passed down through Eusebius’ letter, states:

²⁵³ Schaff, Phillip. *From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 4*. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1892. Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2804.htm> (accessed November 22, 2009). Of the same substance.

²⁵⁴ Lane, “The Council of Nicaea: Purposes and Themes.”

²⁵⁵ Kelly, 214.

²⁵⁶ Freeman, 168.

²⁵⁷ Turner, 27.

²⁵⁸ Pelikan, 9.

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, becoming man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended to the heavens, will come to judge the living and the dead;

And in the Holy Spirit.

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 is subject to alteration or change – these the Catholic and apostolic Church anathematizes.²⁵⁹

This creed eliminated the possibility of the Arians interpreting it in a favorable manner. There is distinct terminology that prevents heretical readings of it, which applies not only to the Arians, but the Gnostics as well. The bishops carefully chose the words and phrases of the creed so that they could not be misinterpreted. Using the word *ημοουσιος* (homoousios) to explain the Father and Son being one and the same and

²⁵⁹ Kelly, 215-216.

proclaiming that the Son is and always was rejects the possibility of the Gnostics or the Arians faithfully reciting the creed as a symbol of their faith. The opponents of the proto-orthodox creed would not be able to recite this statement of faith because they would not believe in it; thus, heretics would be ejected from the midst of orthodox believers.

The opening line of the creed provides the monotheistic view on which Christianity is founded. It clarifies that God is the sole creator of the heavens and the earth. This is an issue that was not debated; all parties agreed in a single, omnipotent deity. The classification of Jesus in the second line is the beginning of the proto-orthodox bishops' delineation against the opposing factions.

The council of bishops, orthodox in the sense that they wanted to stay within the bounds of the New Testament, may have chosen to say Jesus was "begotten from the Father" based on scripture from the Bible.²⁶⁰ Paul used Psalms, 2:7 from the Old Testament, as a reference point in the New Testament. He applied this verse to the resurrection of Jesus.²⁶¹ Connecting the New Testament to the Old Testament was a tool to demonstrate how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies. It was biblically inspired, but even more, it was paramount because it was anti-Arian. It was possible to beget something of oneself without creating something new; thus, the word could be used to deny Jesus was a separate creation, a key Arian argument.²⁶² Furthermore, establishing Jesus as the "only begotten Son of God" made him an unrivaled, solitary figure. This showed Christ came

²⁶⁰ Johnson, 120.

²⁶¹ Acts 13:33, Hebrew 1:5; 5:5; it is also referenced in the Gospel of John 1:14.

²⁶² Freeman, 168.

from the Father in a way that no human can or will, opposing the Arian view that Jesus was a man who was later elevated to divinity by God.²⁶³

A decisive argument between the proto-orthodox bishops and Arius and his followers revolved around the essence of Jesus. To counter any move by the Arians to interpret the creed in their favor, the bishops included, “Begotten, not made, of one substance with the father.” Adding, “of one substance with the Father,” was intended to add precision in connection with the term “begotten.”²⁶⁴ This is another example of the bishops’ determination to expel heretical interpretations. Proclaiming Jesus was of one substance with the Father was a perilous strike to the Arians who did not invest Jesus with full divinity. For the council, asserting that Jesus was of the same substance as the Father marked him as fully divine.²⁶⁵ This orthodox proclamation also argued that while fathers naturally existed prior to their sons, the council was deferring to Origen’s teaching of the eternal generation of the Son by the Father. The Father had never been without his Word or his wisdom; therefore, the Father had never been without his Son.²⁶⁶ Using the Arians’ terminology to counter their own insistence that as the Word, Jesus was a separate entity, the bishops were able to unify Jesus and the Father favorably for their own cause.

Eusebius conceded the usage of this phrase in his letter to his congregation. He needed to explain why he signed a statement of faith that appeared to contradict his

²⁶³ Johnson, 119-120. This also establishes Jesus as the *only* Son.

²⁶⁴ Kelly, 235.

²⁶⁵ Kelly, 238.

²⁶⁶ Kelly, 238.

fact that Constantine approved of the word.²⁶⁸ His dispassionate response alludes to his displeasure about the creed.

His letter to his congregation further delineated the purpose of excluding particular words and phrases. For example, “out of nothing,” and “once he was not,” are irrelevant since “no divinely inspired Scripture has used the phrases.”²⁶⁹ Yielding the use of these phrases provided justification for the council in their process of eliminating any possibility of an Arian interpretation of the creed they were developing. Step by step, Eusebius affirmed the council’s terminology to his congregation. Aligning himself with the council and accepting the creed as it was permitted Eusebius to continue as a bishop in the church and not to be excommunicated for refusing to sign the declaration. Furthermore, his accession in the creed suggests that he understood Constantine’s mission to unify the church. If he was to remain in favor with Constantine, he would need to be in agreement with the council.

For the Arians, Jesus was not considered God except in name only. For Arius, Jesus was elevated to divinity after modeling a pure life on earth. To counter this ideology, the council inserted, “God from God, light from light, true God from true God.” This statement affirms Jesus’ position as true God.²⁷⁰ The image of God as light provided a metaphor for the divine life; light cannot be touched, but it can be felt.²⁷¹ Jesus cannot

²⁶⁸ Hardy, 339.

²⁶⁹ Hardy, 339.

²⁷⁰ Raymond, Brother John. “Arianism Versus the Council of Nicaea.” Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church (Arian Catholic). http://arian-catholic.org/arian/arianism_v_nicaea.html (accessed November 28, 2009).

²⁷¹ Johnson, 126.

be physically touched; however, the basis of the argument was his presence, or love, could be felt. It lent a metaphorical meaning to God that the Arians rejected.

Solidifying their argument further, the council also included, “Through whom all things were made.” Arius asserted that the Old Testament contained passages that portrayed wisdom as one of God’s creations.²⁷² The Arian argument that Jesus was a creation, was addressed and nullified with the word “begotten.” Once this was established, the Arian argument falls because Jesus, or God, was the one who created all things; thus, he could not be a made thing.²⁷³ The Nicene fathers looked to Psalms 33:6, “by the word of the Lord were the heavens established.” They understood this to correlate to the Gospel of John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The analysis of these verses further established the unity of the Father and the Son in both the Old and New Testament.

Acknowledging Jesus’ mission on Earth, the creed established his descent from the realm of the divine into humanity. The words, “came down and became incarnate,” were meant to be understood literally; rather the use of the words, “came down and became incarnate,” showed the mythical nature of Jesus’ descent into humanity.²⁷⁴ This contradicted the Arian’s belief that Jesus was human and then made divine. Further compounding Jesus’ humanity, the creed emphasized Jesus was a physical part of humanity, even though he was also divine. He suffered a physical, human death in order to save man. The council enunciated Jesus’ suffering and then how he “rose again on the

²⁷² Proverbs 8:22-31; Sirach 24:1-9 New American Bible (NAB).

²⁷³ Johnson, 133.

²⁷⁴ Johnson, 154.

third day” and “ascended into the heavens” to counter the Gnostic heretics, who argued Jesus physically did not rise from the dead. The deliberate diction established the orthodox view of Jesus’ divinity and purpose on Earth based on the New Testament.

The final condemnation of the Arians is in the conclusion of the creed. The bishops’ desire to cleanse their ranks of heretical teachers is clearly noted in the final submission of the creed. The bishops’ use of the word “anathematizes” emanates the intensity of their rejection of Arianism and Gnostic teachings. The council of bishops could not have ended on a clearer note; the written creed states their orthodox beliefs and prevents heretical interpretations.

Aside from ousting Arian interpretation from a statement of faith, the creed written by the Council of Nicaea installed salient points of faith for the developing orthodox faith. Reciting this creed not only confirmed a person’s orthodox beliefs, but also outlined them. Beginning with the statement that Jesus became human for the sake of man, the creed was based on the New Testament.²⁷⁵ Furthermore, the creed enabled a speaker to make a personal investment when they recited that Jesus was made man for “our salvation.”²⁷⁶ This also attributed the problems, or evils of the world, to man.²⁷⁷ Equally, this makes salvation for man a divine act of God, only available through Jesus, which, in turn, makes him fully divine.²⁷⁸ Additionally, this statement provides a neat, codification of God’s plan of salvation for mankind through Jesus.

²⁷⁵ Matthew 1 and 2; Luke 1 and 2: Birth of Jesus.

²⁷⁶ Johnson, 139.

²⁷⁷ Johnson, 139.

²⁷⁸ Johnson, 142.

According to Socrates Scholasticus,²⁷⁹ all the bishops present, except for five, subscribed to the confession of faith. Although more hesitated at first, they did concede in order to avoid excommunication.²⁸⁰ The unyielding bishops did not accept the creed because they objected to the term *ἁπομοουσίου* (homoousios), ‘of the same essence,’ or consubstantial, in explaining the relationship between God and Jesus. The dissenters would not yield that Jesus was not created and of the same substance as God.²⁸¹ The inability of the dissenting bishops to accept the term *ἁπομοουσίου* (homoousios) was because the word was a Greek philosophical term that Eusebius argued was associated with the heresy of Sabellius²⁸² and, more importantly, the term was not used in scripture.²⁸³ These few dissenters could not derail the move towards orthodoxy; the Nicene Creed set in motion a force that would no longer tolerate dissenters viewed to be spreading heresy. With the Council of Nicaea, the Orthodox Catholic Church was born.

The creed put forth by the Council of Nicaea was the first formula to be published by an ecumenical synod. The authority established by these bishops provided a legal

²⁷⁹ Also known as Socrates the Historian. Socrates wrote about the first Council of Nicaea in *Ecclesiastical History* generations after the council was held.

²⁸⁰ Schaff, Phillip. “NPNF2-02. Socrates and Sozomenus Ecclesiastical Histories.” Christian Classics Ethereal Library. http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.ii.iv.viii.html#ii.iv.viii-Page_10 (accessed December 3, 2009). The five bishops who rejected the creed were Eusebius of Nicomedia, Theognis of Nice, Maris of Chalcedon, Theonas of Marmarica, and Secundus of Ptolemais.

²⁸¹ Schaff, “Socrates and Sozomenus Ecclesiastical Histories.”

²⁸² Schaff, Phillip. “Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series 2: Volume 1. Eusebius Pamphilius: Church History, Life of Constantine, Oration in Praise of Constantine | Christian Classics Ethereal Library.” Christian Classics Ethereal Library. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.xii.vii.html> (accessed December 5, 2009). Sabellius argued that the separation of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the trinity exists in name only. God chose to reveal himself in different ways, but it was always the same God.

²⁸³ Rubenstein, 80-81.

authority for the church that did not exist prior to the council.²⁸⁴ Once a formulary was established for all believers, anyone who did not fall in line was excommunicated. With the support of Constantine, these dissenters could also be exiled from the empire with the accusation they were causing turmoil and dissention—the reason Constantine initially called the council together.

The Nicene Creed is innovative in three ways: it brings the church into a position of cooperation, it is a universal creed that trumps any local creeds, and it uses philosophical language within a profession of faith that articulates the Christian faith in the language of scripture.²⁸⁵ Furthermore, the motivation of the council is lucid in the final lines where the bishops affirm their mission by effacing all those who oppose the developed statement.

The problem with the Council of Nicaea goes to the heart of early Christianity. The willingness to silence opposition through excommunication and banishment effectively poisons and eliminates theological debates and tolerance.²⁸⁶ Gone is the flexibility to understand and interpret the scripture and the person of Christ in different ways, yet still remaining under the umbrella of Christianity. Rather than allowing debate to arise and be resolved naturally in the church, future emperors and bishops relied on violence to subdue all opposition.²⁸⁷ The council was beneficial for creating unity in the church and establishing an unprecedented universal statement of faith. However, it is also

²⁸⁴ Kelly, 207.

²⁸⁵ Johnson, 33.

²⁸⁶ Dungan, 123.

²⁸⁷ Dungan, 123.

responsible for setting in motion an uncompromising, intolerant orthodox church that further refined and developed its orthodox statements of faith during the subsequent centuries.

Conclusion

Constantine called the Council of Nicaea to maintain the integrity of his empire. He recognized the potential hidden in Christian communities. They were devoted, and desirous to please God, who they believed came to earth for their salvation. If Constantine could tap into this devotion, he could gain stability in his empire. To achieve his goal, his first step was to end the persecution against the Christians. His second step was to restore sacred relics and buildings to parishes and allow bishops to return to their churches. Although Constantine adopted a policy of tolerance toward all religion, he endowed special favors to the Christians. The favoritism he showered on Christianity gained more than the church leaders' support. Christians looked to Constantine as a blessed emperor, blessed by God for saving them from destruction. His plan was flawless—Christianity was the shield he needed to protect his empire from turmoil.

Constantine mistakenly presumed the church was strong and stable—his shield was actually tense and brittle. Fissures existed along major theological fault lines. Discrepancies existed in how a bishop, or another church leader, should live his life and on the divinity of Jesus. A lack of respect existed among bishops who were viewed as weak when they escaped the clutches of martyrdom or handed over sacred relics to oppressors during the persecution. When bishops who escaped persecution returned to their parishes, some believers denied their authority to resume their duties as bishops. This strained the church's ability to sustain a large empire of faithful followers. If these followers were allowed to split, the shield would splinter, and Constantine could encounter civil war within his empire. Further rigidity existed in the inability to concede

countering theologies. It was becoming evident Christianity could only support one clearly defined belief. When more existed, turmoil threatened to snap the shield's shell.

Recognizing that the shield of Christianity was becoming a liability, Constantine repurposed this tool. It was no longer a defensive tool, but an offensive weapon. By calling all the bishops together to formulate an orthodoxy, the shield transformed into a sword, slicing away at heretical teachings that did not conform to the guidelines established by the council. The Nicene Creed attempted to eradicate Christians who failed to acknowledge the divinity of Jesus and the Trinity. The established creed set forth prescribed words and phrases that prohibited an alternative interpretation. Slashing the opposition, the Nicene Creed instituted a method to determine whether Christians adhered to the accepted conventions of the church. Those who did not were excommunicated and banished from the empire. This action prevented skirmishes from threatening the stability of the Christian church and prevented physical conflict from within Constantine's empire to raze it.

The shield that Constantine intended to create by adopting Christianity as the predominant religion of his empire had to undergo a metamorphosis in order to function properly. Not a passive, defensive emperor, Constantine could not depend on a shield to solely protect his assets. He needed a weapon to strike out at opposition and quash turmoil in his empire. The proclamations and statement of faith that emerged from the first Nicene Council provided Constantine with the sword he needed to annihilate opposition that challenged his empire. The outcome of the council was twofold; it marked the beginning of establishing orthodoxy in the church, and it attacked sects of Christianity that did not conform. While the council did not eradicate the diverse sects that existed in

the empire, it set the precedent for striking out at believers and sects that failed to recognize the accepted doctrine of faith. Constantine's success in calling the Council of Nicaea should not be measured by the doctrine that emerged, but rather by the decline of theological interpretations in Christianity.

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