

The Council and Creed of Constantinople

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In our last lecture we began analyzing the complex set of events between 325 and 381. Let's move ahead chronologically two years to the Council of Serdica, which was held in the year 343. This council was called at the initiative of the Western bishops. They wanted to have a general council, like the Council of Nicea, for some time because the Roman Council of 341, which I mentioned earlier—either late 340 or 341—had placed Athanasius back as an orthodox bishop. The Eastern bishops had failed to come to that council, and the Western bishops were concerned that unless a general council were called, the rift between the two halves of the church would become too great, and the emperor Constans, who is the brother of Constantius, agreed. He was very concerned about the rift, the separation that was occurring between the Eastern part of the empire and its church and the Western part of the empire and its church.

The question as to what should be done with Athanasius had to be resolved. The council was a failure from the beginning because the East would send only seventy-six pastors or bishops. That might like a large number, but they could have sent a number of one hundred, and they would not permit Athanasius and other bishops to have seats in the council since they had been deposed by the Eastern church. You can see it now and vision in your mind a church council as pastors come together, but the Eastern pastors refused to participate because this heretic Athanasius was not recognized by them as a Christian. So shortly after the beginning of the council, the seventy-six Eastern delegates chose to leave.

But before they left, they founded a rival assembly. This is very strange; they formed in a sense their own Eastern assembly within the Western group, and they composed a very short letter with a group of anathemas, those famous anathemas attached to the end, a group which included Marcellus.

The West then continued their assembly; they composed a creed, and they too included the inevitable anathemas against those Eastern bishops who left, all of those bishops being accused of being Arian.

This is not a good day, and it's only about to get darker. Both theologically and historically, I need to introduce another event of great importance. We're up to 343; let's jump ahead another ten years. In August of 353, the emperor Constantius defeated his rival, Magnentius, and Constantius becomes the sole emperor of both the East and the Western church from the year 353 to the year 361, the year of his death. After the time of Constantine, the great Roman Empire, as you know, had been divided among his sons. We've mentioned Constans and the different sons. In 353 once again there is one sole and alone emperor, and this is the emperor Constantius. Now what is going to happen? We can imagine what's going to happen. Constantius was an Easterner, and he was fully involved in the Eastern churches and anathematizing Athanasius. And so with him ascending to the sole emperorship, there will be also an ascendancy of the anti-Athanasian party or the anti-Western part of Christianity.

With the rise of Constantius, we see the development of an anti-Nicene party. Remember, the Eastern bishops who were influenced by Origen and influenced more by Arius were unhappy with many of the articulations of the faith of Nicea. With an emperor who was sympathetic to those goals, finally the festering dissatisfaction which I mentioned in the last lecture can come to be articulated. And so as the Nicene faith comes under attack, as I also mentioned before, the pendulum of theology begins to swing in the opposite direction. So a group of radicals, even more radical than Arius himself, begins to develop in the Eastern church.

The leaders of this extremist party were Aetius and Eunomius (A E T I U S), who had died in 336 but had trained a number of followers and Eunomius (E U N O M I U S), who dies in 394, and they become known as the Anomenmeans—please write that word down Anomenmeans in English (A N O M E N M E A N S)—they become the leaders of the Anomenmean party. They taught that the Son was unlike the Father, *anomeous* in Greek. What did Arius say? He said that He was like the Father in some ways; Athanasius maintained that Jesus was like the Father, but this radical group says, No, to be consistent with the subordinationism that we've been taught by Origen and others, we can't really say that Jesus was like the Father. He's greatly subordinate to the Father. He's

under the Father. And especially as you think about Arius's Christology, that Jesus is created by the Father out of nothing, that's not being like the Father. It's very much like saying that a pot is like the potter. It's not really like the potter. It's more unlike than like. So given that way of understanding the relationship between the Father and the Son, you can see why this extreme party would say that in fact Jesus was unlike the Father.

At this point theologically we are in bad shape. The people are proclaiming that, publicly proclaiming that Jesus is unlike the Father. This movement of radicalization was used mightily in the providence of God. Another counterreaction begins to develop. Those who had previously been suspicious of the word *homoousios* became quite uncomfortable with the more radical *anomeous*, and Athanasius and his thought then was reexamined by the Eastern church. The brothers in the Eastern church, seeing the fruits of radical subordinationism, begin to question whether that's the path in which they should be going theologically. If the end result of the teachings of Origen and the teachings of Arius produce an anomeanism, is Athanasius such a bad guy after all? This movement of the Anomean party then was used in the providence of God to make the Eastern church leaders reflect more deeply on the relationship between the Son and the Father.

Meanwhile back at the ranch, a confession was drawn up at the Synod of Sirmium, which is in present-day Yugoslavia, in the year 357. Here Athanasius fared terribly. He had, as you already know, been violently thrown out of his episcopal chair. When Athanasius was deposed, it wasn't like you got a certified letter from the emperor or the bishop saying you are no longer bishop of this church. He was rather accosted by the police and literally thrown out of the gates of the city onto his back, and generally by 356, 357 the Western bishops who had come to the aid of poor old Athanasius began to become less influential, especially with the rise of the emperor Constantius in 353.

Here is Athanasius: he'd been thrown out of the city, thrown out of his church, abandoned by his Western brothers, and was left alone to be an outcast, a refugee not only from his city, from his family, but even from his church. And the confession of the synod (synod, remember, is more local), the Synod of Sirmium, something happens that marks another dark day. In this creed both the word *homoousios* and *homoiousios* are forbidden to be used. *Homoousios*, of the same substance of the Father; *homoiousios*, of like substance of the Father. Here the church

in this local synod is saying that these important words which express most clearly the relationship between the Son and the Father are forbidden, they are illegal, they are not to be used any more, and furthermore in that synod there are a number of statements which appear suspiciously subordinationistic as well. The creed could be summarized by saying that without directly teaching Arianism, the formula was an edict of toleration in favor of Arianism, while the Nicene party found itself excluded from toleration. This is a dark day. And the history which follows is also very complicated, and it would take a number of lectures to list all the various historical events. That goes beyond our purposes.

But for those of you who are especially interested, I would suggest a book originally written in German and in English translation by Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Church Councils*, volume 2, studying the years 326 to 429, and there you'll find a short account of what happens between this edict or this synod in 381—there's 340 pages discussing it all.

Summarizing, we find that after 359, when Constantius forced all bishops in the whole church to sign a Homoian Creed, the church was now officially Homoian. And to put the icing on the cake, so to speak, he had a symbol, a church creed drawn up in January of 360, [in] Constantinople, which repudiated all previous creeds. Perhaps you just noticed that I just used the word *homoian*, that's the English transliteration of the Greek word. This is not the same as *homoousios*; it's not the same as **homoiousios**, which we would understand as the same in substance or alike in substance, but *homoian* means "like." Jesus is like the Father who begat Him. That creed says the Son was like in all respects, but all technical terms are avoided.

This term *homoian* could supposedly be interpreted by both sides, the Western church and the Eastern church or those parts of the Eastern church that were dissatisfied, especially with the Council of Nicea. *Homoian* could be used as term that would bring the two sides together. They could both be seen as valid descriptions. None of us would disagree that Jesus was like the Father, but the Arians could also agree that Jesus was like the Father. And furthermore the generation of the Son as explained in this way could include Arius's understanding of the generation of the Son. So the Arians are happy that the words *ousia* and *homoousion* are excluded, and they were happy that the Son was not described as being of the same substance. They were happy with being like in substance. And to make a very long and complex story short, this

compromised term was used to the fullest advantage.

So we have some very, very dark days, and we are chronologically up to the year 360. Between 325 and 360 a number of events occur of extreme importance, and because it's complex it's not easy to understand, but because it's so important it's imperative that we understand. Can you vision in your minds with me the pendulum of the church moving theologically? The middle is the proper relationship between the Father and the Son. That's the way things should be understood, but the church had gone way far out with the teaching of Arius, and that the Son and the Father are extremely subordinationists, Athanasius brings that pendulum back toward the middle as he says, No, the Father and the Son are much more similar than what Arius wants. He wants to say that they are similar in substance. The proper teaching which was pounded out in Nicea is that they are the same in substance, but those that follow Arius and Origen are so unsatisfied with saying that they're the same in substance, that we have the development of the Anomean party, which says that they are unlike in substance. That movement makes the whole church reflect upon what's happening, and so we have a great rift theologically in the church. The emperor is very upset about that because a divided church can mean a divided empire; a divided empire is inherently a weak empire. They come upon the compromised term "like," *homoian*, that Jesus is like the Father, acceptable to all parties. But *homoousios*, *homoiousios* become excluded terms. You're not allowed to say that Jesus is the same substance as the Father—but wait a minute, in 325, that's precisely what the whole church agreed to. Now in 360 the emperor is pushing this Homoian Creed that excludes, in a sense, the Nicene Creed. So the church has moved on the pendulum from orthodoxy toward Homoian Christology. It's a bad move. It's a dark time.

We see the important role of the emperor as he has Athanasius excluded from the empire. We see the role of the emperor, and we'll analyze this in a later lecture, extremely important during this time period. But we also see a problem between the Eastern and Western church that is going to manifest itself in the Middle Age period, in the medieval period in 1054 in the split or the schism between the Eastern and the Western church. The roots of the difference between the Eastern church and the Western church must be seen in the events of 325 to 381. The Eastern and the Western church will eventually be united in 381, and we look forward to analyzing the time period between 360 and 381, but the struggles which we've been underlining and outlining will

continue until 1054, when the bishop of Rome and the bishop of Constantinople excommunicate each other. And that's the foundation, the legal foundation, for the difference between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. So the events which in almost six hundred years are going to produce the mutual excommunication of these halves of Christendom are seen theologically now. Part of the reason is linguistic, as we've mentioned the difficulty of communicating in two different languages, but the roots of that schism, which will be analyzed later in 1054, are to be seen presently.

Finally we move to a brighter and a more happy history, a more happy part of our history as the terrible events of 360 become resolved. And so a new part in our lecture outline, The Council and Creed of Constantinople, there's a new heading for this time period. The creed itself, which is produced in 381, is technically called the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, as I've mentioned in an earlier lecture. Of all the creeds of the church, it is the only one for which true ecumenicity can be claimed. We think that of the Apostles' Creed, the one that many of our church pronounce to be the most ecumenical creed, but actually it's the Nicene Creed which is the most widely accepted creed of all of Christianity. The Apostles' Creed is said only in the Western church by the Roman Catholic and the Protestant churches. It's seen as authoritative in the West, but the Nicene Creed is, at least from the time of 451 onwards, confessed by both the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Protestant church and all the churches from that time forth. So the Nicene Creed is a very important creed.

Let's understand the events between 360 and the development of the concluding acts in this important and dark history. Here's a general outline: In the year 361 the infamous emperor Julian the Apostate takes the reigns of command of the empire. He, who is no Christian at all, tolerated the rival factions within Christianity hoping that the Christians would destroy themselves. I mentioned Julian in an earlier lecture. He, therefore, called all the exiled bishops back to their cities. As I also mentioned earlier, this was of great advantage to the Nicene faith, as you can well imagine. Athanasius was continuously active during this time period between 360 and 381 fighting for orthodoxy. Now the Lord brought Athanasius home to Himself in the year 373, so Athanasius is no longer on the field of battle, and Athanasius was not able to see the final victory of the orthodox faith, which is going to come nearly ten years after his death, but some new players come into

the field of battle with the death of Athanasius. And frankly as I think about the life of Athanasius, and I personally am encouraged by his life of great courage and great stamina, a man who suffered for Christ as I've mentioned the five times of banishment, the twenty years that he spent separated from his family, his friends, thrown into the wilderness, literally outside of the Roman Empire as he stood valiant for truth. I'm also encouraged to see that in the events of the years 373 to 381 the church no longer needed Athanasius, and that God in His sovereignty will always cause leaders to rise up to stand for the truth.

And so a fellow by the name of Gregory comes to the fore at the death of Athanasius, Gregory of (and here's a strange kind of last name) Nazianzen. That's not his last name; that's the city for which he was famous. Gregory takes up the fight for orthodoxy in the city of Constantinople. We've seen the importance of the coming of Julian the Apostate in 364; his successor's name is Valens, and he is emperor from 364 to 378. Valens is in a sense better than Julian in that he's a professing Christian, but he is in many ways worse than Julian because Valens is an Arian. Valens isn't just your run-of-the-mill Arian; Valens was a rabid Arian. Valens was an ardent Arian. He thought that Arius was right. Remember, Constantine, in calling the Council of Nicea, determined that Arius was a heretic. A new emperor comes to the throne who holds the faith of Arius; therefore, Arianism in a sense becomes the real party of Christianity. This meant trouble for the whole Christian church, and this trouble is going to help the church because it's going to solidify the Athanasian party. Remember, Athanasius is dead; well, he's dead in 373. It's going to solidify the Athanasian party and what we would call the moderate party. God is going to bring peace, at least politically, in raising Theodosius I or Theodosius the Great, depending on your textbook, to the throne. He's the emperor from 379 to 395, and Theodosius had been educated in the Nicene faith.

In the year 380 he issued that famous and celebrated edict that all of his subjects were to confess the orthodox faith, the faith of the Creed of Nicea, so as one emperor requires the ending of confessing homoousian, so another requires acceptance of Nicea. It's this Theodosius the Great who raises Gregory Nazianzen into the bishop of Constantinople and literally all the Arians are driven out of the city. And to give all these measures the force and the strength necessary, he calls for a general meeting of the church to come to the city of Constantinople in 381.

And so, before going into a brief analysis of what happened at Constantinople, it would be very well if we were to evaluate the time period 325 to 381 once more very briefly. In 325 almost all of the bishops in the Christian world signed the Nicene Creed. Yet there were serious internal objections felt by the *homoiousios* party, not *homoousios*, that Jesus was of like substance, and this party could be called the moderate party, the semi-Arian party. If you have a textbook maybe from your father or you pick up at a used bookstore *A History of Doctrine*, you'll see that party always called the semi-Arian party. That's not really the best term, and so I would remind you for those of you have those kinds of books that what they're talking about when they talk about the semi-Arian party is really the *homoiousios* party. This semi-Arian or *homoiousios* or moderate party had been unsatisfied with the term *homoousios*, but this moderate, middle group, which in many ways held to numerical majority, is because of the changes politically and theologically be going to become more comfortable with the faith of Nicea.

Remember Aetius and Eunomius, the leaders of the Anomian party? With the ascendancy of those theologians and the ascendancy of pro-Arian emperors, especially Constantius, Julian, and Valens, and the resulting persecuting of the orthodox, remember now, as you've got an emperor who holds to one faith, those who don't agree with him weren't necessarily persecuted, the church didn't question that; that had been all of history up until this time. With the resulting persecution and continued faithfulness of the orthodox party, the theological challenge of the Anomian party, this great moderate *homoiousios* party rethinks their faith, and this chain of events causes this moderate party to begin to see that they have two options. They can either go with *homoousios* or they must learn to live with the Anomians.

This *homoiousios* party saw Jesus as subordinate to the Father, but of like essence with the Father, co-eternal with the Father. They certainly did not maintain that Christ was a creature, as the Arians had done. They agreed with the Nicenes in affirming the eternal generation of the Son, yet their big problem was in affirming the identity of essence with the Father. Also through the continued work of Athanasius, who told them that it was not appropriate to speak of like essences, for essences must either be identical or different, you can speak of like attributes and relations. It's not right, Athanasius said, and Athanasius was right, to say that in terms of an essence of someone they are like. And so the *homoiousios* party admitted finally that the Son was of the

essence of the Father, and if He was of the essence of the Father, we can't just say that he was like of the essence of the Father. He must be of the same essence.

And so, dear listener, with these historical, political, and theological pressures exerted upon them, when it came time to subscribe to the Creed of Constantinople, there was much more unity, true unity in the church, than had been the case in 325. That's our last recapitulation of the events between 325 and 381. Have you seen with me the flow of history? How God in His marvelous providence uses all the events of history to build an important theological consensus within the church about an issue, a matter of supreme importance?. Who is this Jesus? What is His relationship to His Father? Athanasius pounded home for decade after decade the importance of maintaining the absolute similarity of the Father to the Son and that you can't just talk about a like essence; you're either of the same essence or you're of a different essence. And so Aetius and Eunomius said, Yes, they are unlike in their essence, and that movement of the pendulum to the far extreme with the Anomians helped that moderate party to make up their mind. And so the church comes in 381 finally in the beauty of unity. Much blood had been shed as the orthodox party was persecuted as they weren't killed, but as they were physically abused, as they were thrown out of their cities, as they spent years in exile. It wasn't just Athanasius. So there was much struggle, but finally peace, true peace was able to be had. That's where we are 381.

Let's talk about the events of that council itself. The council was not very large. There were only about 150 bishops present. None of the Western bishops were able to make the long and arduous trip. But Gregory of Nazianzen was the one who presided, and the emperor was there as well. What I'd like to do is briefly talk about a controversial area concerning the Council of Constantinople, and that's the text of the creed itself. Remember, we've talked about this Nicene Creed, and we've talked about whether that creed we say in church is actually the Nicene Creed. There are a number of ways of understanding the text of the Nicene Creed, which again is not the Nicene Creed; the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed actually is the Constantinopolitan Creed that we have in the church, and I don't want to go into great detail concerning the evolution of the creed. In J. N. D. Kelly's book *Early Christian Creeds*, on pages 296 to 331, you can have an exact account of the details of that creed.

It seems that the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, in the opinion of Kelly, and I think he's right, is not based on the actual text of the Nicene Creed but rather is a reworking and a new creed itself. It probably was not written right at the meeting of the bishops in 381 but had some type of an earlier form, maybe in a church liturgy, which was polished up and then approved in 381. What's important for us, unless we want to go into a full course on the development of creeds, is that the two creeds, the creeds of Nicea and Constantinople, are of the same theology.

That ends our brief look at the events between 325 and 381. We've seen some important players on the field of battle—Sibellius, Marcellus, Eunomeius, the Anomian party. We've introduced technical theological terms—*homoousios*, *homoiousios*, *homoian*—and hopefully the details have not been lost, and now at the end of our analysis you can see the broad sweep. Later on we will be talking more about the political events between 325 and 381 and the importance of the emperor as he influences church and state relations. We've seen the beautiful life of Athanasius, one who struggled all of his life for the crown rights of King Jesus. We've seen the rise and ascendancy of Gregory of Nazianzen as he becomes the head theologian at the Council of Constantinople. Finally there will be peace from this time on in terms of the relationship between the Father and the Son, at least this time for another about seventy years until we head into the middle of the next century.

What we will do in the next part of our lecture is introduce some of the lives and theology of what we call the Cappadocian fathers. So in your lecture outline, take a look with me at the theology of the Cappadocian fathers. Who are the Cappadocian fathers? There are three fathers that come under this general heading—Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the name we've already seen, Gregory of Nazianzen. They're not the only theologians at this time period, but these three play the most important role in the theological discussion of the post-Nicene era.

The Cappadocian fathers, to a very limited extent certainly, are grounded in the theology of Athanasius. The Cappadocians are grounded in the theology of Athanasius, and yet the Cappadocian fathers extended his thought as well as clarified key theological terms. Beginning with their conception of the Godhead, we should observe that for them, and I'll be talking about their theology as a school at this point and then I'll analyze the three theologians individually, so you should listen to the broad paint

strokes that I'm trying to give to you now as to the nature of Cappadocian theology. And let me mention as a parenthesis, that it is the Cappadocian theology which provides the floorboards, the underpinning for the theology of the Greek Orthodox Church. The Greek Orthodox Church does not play a huge role in America. It is not as large, say, as the Protestant churches or the Roman Catholic Church, and yet the Greek Orthodox Church is present throughout all of the portions of the United States, and it would be helpful for us to understand that church and to understand that church theologically. If we understand the theology of the Cappadocian fathers, we understand the Greek Orthodox Church.

That church makes its boast today in saying that their theology has not changed from the time of the Cappadocians, and that boast is not an empty one, but is a true one. For example, if you were to have the opportunity to go into a Greek Orthodox church and go into any Greek Orthodox church, you would see their hymnbook and their book of prayers, their book of liturgy, which would be oftentimes exclusively in English, but you'll find the Greek on the facing page or in footnotes, you'll see what they say in church, their liturgy, and what they teach is direct quotations from the Cappadocian fathers. So for those of you who are encountering Greek Orthodox Christians, this is especially beneficial for you to understand the theology of the Cappadocians.

So beginning with their concept of the Godhead, we should observe that for them the *ousia* of the Godhead, which is a Greek word, which we understand by the word *essence* or *substance*, the existence of the Godhead, the essence of the Godhead is not some abstract reality, but is a concrete reality. They see the essence, the existence of the Godhead in concrete terms. They believe that there was a unity of the divine essence while always maintaining that there are three persons. Capsulizing their thought, Kelly, our textbook, tells us on page 264 that "the essence of their doctrine is that the one Godhead exists simultaneously in three modes of being or hypostasis."

Throughout the forthcoming lectures, we'll be examining the important definition of the word *hypostasis* or what we could translate at this point "modes of being." The Godhead for the Cappadocians are one essence or one substance that has three modes of being, and the source of this Godhead is the Father; that is, He is the source or the cause of the other two persons of the Godhead. And so even though they recognize the Father as the source of the Godhead, the one essential point of departure from

Athanasius is that they make the three hypostases, not the one divine essence, their point of commencement as they analyze the nature of the Godhead itself. In other words, within the Godhead as the triad is worshiped, so the monad is also worshiped. As the Father is the source of the other two persons, still the distinction of the hypostasis does not remove the oneness of the nature of the Godhead. Is that complex?

As we begin our analysis with our next lecture, we'll see that the Cappadocian fathers are not really so complex, but rather they will teach that which is familiar to us. But once again the church is going to engage in struggle as it attempts to understand the biblical material concerning the relationship between God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Those things which we take for granted. Those things which we were even perhaps taught at our grandfather or grandmother's knee are going to be worked out in great detail by the Cappadocian fathers, another gift given by God to the beautiful ornament the church.