

The Story of the Formation of the Creed

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Introduction:

The Incarnate Son of God is the fullness of divine Revelation. He is the Word, final and definitive. What Jesus said and did contains the totality of what God wants us to know. Yet, it is clear that our articulation of that message is more detailed and explicit than would appear from the reading of the Scriptures, yet does not add or subtract anything contained implicitly or explicitly in them. Our creeds and catechisms, dogmatic pronouncements of Popes and/or Councils, Tradition and traditions¹ are an explication of and rendering explicit what was implicit in the sayings and actions of Jesus during His public ministry. The development of doctrine is not a matter of adding new revelation to complete what was not fully revealed in Christ; but an historical and cultural discovery of what was present from the beginning but not clearly understood until the experience of faith, and questions arising from attempts to explain the faith would bring it into clear focus. Concepts like Incarnation, Transubstantiation, Trinity, Real Presence, Immaculate Conception, Theotokos (Mother of God), Original Sin, Beatific Vision and many others, do not add doctrine to the “Deposit of Faith”,² but they do add language that captures and codifies insights that arose in the course of history when appropriate questions were raised as a result of attempts at explaining the Mystery of Christ. These at times fell short of expressing the Church’s belief accurately. The mind is by nature inquisitive, and when confronted by teaching that clearly reaches into the most important facts about our origins, destiny, relation with the Sublime and path to attaining the end for which we were brought into existence the mind cannot help by search for the most meaningful and complete explanation. That search never stops because the flow of history always raises new questions, seeks clearer expression and seeks to sharpen its focus and grasp on the truth about God, God and us, and how to deepen our relationship with God and one another.

There are many avenues of approach to the development of doctrine, but the paradigm that may yield the greatest fruit is the path of heresy. Hilaire Belloc defines heresy as “the dislocation of some complete and self-supporting scheme by the introduction of a novel denial of some essential part therein.”³ The word comes from the Greek *haireo*, meaning “grasp”, “seize”, and later “to take away”. It is an exaggeration of one element of a doctrine that pulls it out of the whole and makes the doctrine unbalanced and therefore wrong. It has a subtle influence in that the remaining true elements carry the now erroneous teaching to acceptance by the unwary and gives it a future. “It is the essence of heresy that it leaves standing a great part of the structure it attacks. On this account it can appeal to believers and continues to affect their lives through deflecting them from their original characters. Wherefore it is said of heresies that ‘they survive by the truths they retain.’”⁴ The existence of heresies and the need for a community to deal with them rests on the fact that every society carries on its life based on a creed or set of beliefs and principles. When these are disrupted the whole society is affected, its unity is

disrupted and its identity is marred. That is why a society, and here our sole interest is the religious society we know to be the Catholic Church, must address errors in belief and label them as outside the tolerable limits of acceptability because they diminish the integrity of the society's self-image and urge it to become something other than what it is supposed to be.

We do not intend to judge the motivations of the heresiarchs involved nor their relationship with God. That is not our business. But we do intend to support the right of the Church to declare their doctrine wrong and to excommunicate the persistent heresiarch both to highlight the unacceptability of doctrine espoused and to be clear about the orthodox teaching that defines its faith. This is how the Creeds were born and why they are important as foundational statements of the basics of faith that one must affirm if one is to be a member of the Church. It should be noted that not only the individual has a stake in authentic doctrine, but the community of faith also has a stake. Heresy is not only a thing of the past and an historical curiosity, but a persistent threat throughout all of historical time. One can hold firmly to most of the doctrines of a religion and err on only one, but that one influences the whole of belief.

Suppose, for instance, one were to deny the immortality of the soul. One could believe that God exists, that God is Trinity of Persons, that the Son of God became incarnate by means a virginal conception, that bread and wine are transubstantiated into the body and blood of the Son of God; one could pray many Christian prayers, etc., but he/she will be a very different person from the one who believes in the immortality of the soul. The 'Deposit of Faith' is not open for picking and choosing. It is an integral body of doctrine each piece of which reciprocally exists in the other. There is a danger of thinking heresies are obsolete and mention of them an excursion into some form of intellectual archeology. But that would be to be blind to the fact that heresies are very much alive. The real problem is that they are not labeled heresies and hide under the cloak of culturally or legally accepted actions. Abortion is a good example. Envisioned here, of course, is the recalcitrance of someone who would hold as acceptable in theory that abortion is acceptable moral behavior. God's law is clear that the killing of innocent human life is seriously, mortally wrong. One who might claim full acceptance of Catholic doctrine, except for abortion, is embracing a position against clear Catholic doctrine. The trouble is that no structure of heresy has seemed to have arisen with a specific name like Arianism or Monophysitism. Perhaps that has changed with Cardinal Ratzinger. In his sermon at the Mass that began the conclave that elected him Pope Benedict XVI. At that time he spoke of the "dictatorship of *Relativism*". Relativism is the denial of absolute truth; its position is that one's own personal truth is as valid as anyone else's. *Pluralist* theologians are a good example of this heresy. They hold that Jesus is one among many savior figures. For Christians, Jesus may be the only Savior, but for Buddhists and others of differing religions, He is irrelevant. Their savior is whomever their religion presents as such; and salvation is not eternal life but *Nirvana* or some form of reincarnation, or whatever. These are not dead issues in our world. But, if the Revelation of Catholic Christianity is

correct, as we believe it to be, these are heresies. And, within the Christian framework, a theology named pluralism is not new but the resurgence of the old Christological heresies as we will see.

From the Christian Beginnings to Nicea in 325 A.D.

While many religions emphasize authentic practice (orthopraxi) as an instrument of identification, Christianity emphasizes doctrine, a system of belief (orthodoxy) from which practice derives as something directed by belief and an articulation of belief. That body of doctrine, the “deposit of faith,” has, over two thousand years been codified in theological works, official ecclesial pronouncements, and the teaching of twenty-one Councils. These many documents in description of the faith have been summarized in handy reference materials like the recently published Catechism of the Catholic Church, a volume of over 900 pages in English translation; and more succinctly in Creeds. In these papers, we will be concentrating on the Creed we recite at Mass, that of the Council of Nicea (325) and Constantinople (381). There were credal formulas before this one, e.g. that of Ignatius of Antioch (cā 115 A.D.) in his letter to the Trallians, and the Apostles’ Creed, its earliest form given by Hippolytus in his *Apostolic Traditions* around 215 A.D., and after the long period of time, received its final form in Rome in the 7th Century, becoming the Creed we recite today. In our own time we have the good fortune of the *Creed of the People of God* given us by Pope Paul VI on July 30, 1968; and the *Profession of Faith* from Pope John Paul II issued on January 9, 1989. All of these descriptions of the content of the faith are derived out of the mystery of Jesus, the definitive Word of God, and are measured for authenticity by the Apostolic witness codified in the New Testament. The Gospels are the first century distillation of the message of Jesus and normative for all expression of the Christian faith that follows.

Christianity did not appear suddenly on the historical scene. It was prepared for and benefited from the vocation of the Jews whose history is described in their Scriptures that we call the Old Testament. Central to the Jewish story is its own credal statement in Deuteronomy 6: 4 the *Shema Yisrael*: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is Lord alone. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul, and all your strength.” It is both a personal and communal commitment to the one and only God; a commitment that defines the believer as recipient of God’s love and obligated to reciprocate with a similar unconditional self-dedication. It is completed by and completes the first Commandment (Exodus 20:2) “I am the lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no gods except Me.” These two statements are critical in understanding the story of Israel as it unfolds. In the unfolding, with greater experience of their personal God and His universal rule, the practical monotheism of recognizing no other gods will, through the Psalms and Prophets, become a doctrinal or absolute Monotheism that affirms simply that there are and can be no other gods. A plurality of gods is a contradiction in terms. The *Shema* remains basic to the Christian Creed and is affirmed by Jesus as the greatest and

first of the Commandments (Mk. 12: 29-30). The Christian experience, centered on Jesus, will reveal a deeper meaning to the *Shema* as Jesus unveils the divine plan of salvation history for which Judaism was preparation. When Peter affirmed of Jesus: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God” (Mt. 16: 16), he linked the Messianic hope of the Jews with the Incarnate Reality to whom he was responding. This is the foundation of the Church’s faith, the Rock-base of the Church’s Creed.

Doctrinal integrity had been a concern of the Church from its very beginning, as reflected in the New Testament. In John 6, Jesus, having just promised His flesh and blood as food and drink for eternal life did not attempt to explain away the literalness of His meaning when His followers walked away. Rather, He turned to His disciples and asked them: “What about you, do you want to go away too” (vs. 67)? In 1 Cor. 5: 1-5, Paul ‘excommunicates a man for incest (restoring him as repentant in 2 Cor. 1:5). In the Apocalypse (Revelations) letters to the Churches God’s message is given approvingly to the bishop of Ephesus for opposing and disapprovingly to the bishop of Pergamum for inaction regarding the Nicolaitans, (see 2:6, 15). We do not know their teaching apart from Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* saying “they lived lives of unrestrained indulgence,” and Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* telling us their history was short lived. The point being made here, however, is that from the beginning the Church was aware of non-negotiable truths in Christianity that had to be accepted and lived.

Beyond the conflicts reflected in the New Testament, new ones began to arise on the post-Apostolic period. First, a word in general about ‘heresiarchs.’ It is tempting to vilify them. Some of the early apologists who defended authentic doctrine gave into this temptation and cast aspersions of the character and intentions of the founder-leaders of heretical movements. It is not unlike what happens in our own experience when engaged in heated debate with people of another persuasion than ours. I propose not to demonize these founders of heretical movements but to expose their errors, their impact on orthodox Christian doctrine, and to note that their questioning had the positive effect of forcing official Christian teachers to make some truths of the faith explicit where they had, from the beginning, been implicit; and to sharpen language to enable the clear codification of Christian doctrine in Creeds and in more elaborate expositions of belief.

Since Christianity began in Jewish circles and later spread to the Gentile world, we have to expect the earliest heresies to arise out of a Jewish background. Judaism’s strict Monotheism made the acceptance of divine claims about Jesus problematic for some Jewish-Christians. The principal Jewish-Christian sect voicing this problem was named the *Ebionites*. Scholars argue about the origin of this sect, some deriving the name from the Hebrew *’ebjon* (poor), and Christian commentators like Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* remind us of the contempt in which the sect was held by the orthodox believer in associating this name with poor in knowledge, or having a poor opinion of Christ, or asserting their intellectual poverty in holding on to a now obsolete Law. Our main concern, here, will be their Christological teaching. They advanced the position that God created two opposed

principles, one of *good*, the other *evil*. The Ebionites assign the good principle to Jesus, but deny that he is the natural Son of God. They deny the Virgin Birth and claim Jesus of Nazareth had a normal birth from human parents. They further assert that he became the Christ at his baptism by John the Baptist and was then invested with divine power because of his exemplary living out of God's will. His example and teaching made him merely the third, final and greatest of three Prophets: Adam, Moses and Jesus. His death is not salvific and the Christ with which he was invested leaves him before Calvary. The Ebionite position mere *adoptionist* i.e., Jesus is not the incarnate Son of God but a man adopted in grace as God's son. Closely related to this sect is another called the *Elchasaites*. Their teaching was as Christologically reductive but depended on fanciful ideas not unlike that of the Gnostics: e.g., they held that salvation depended on the possession of some secret mystical formula which Jesus revealed. A final sect that can hardly be called Christian at all was the *Mandaeans*. For them, Jesus was a false prophet opposed by John the Baptist whom they said unmasked Jesus' deception. Baptism and some other liturgical practices gave them the veneer of Christianity that attracted followers, thus making them something of a threat to authentic Christian teaching.

These 2nd to 3rd Century Jewish-Christian movements died out as Christianity became dominated by Christians of Gentile origin. But the Christological problem that would lead to the early Ecumenical Councils continued, dressed in the language and thought of Greek philosophy. Christianity entered the Hellenic world when the spirit of syncretism was at its height. In that climate, *Christian Gnosticism* arose to become a serious threat to Christian orthodoxy. "It was part of the late classical religious syncretism which, based on oriental dualism, united Jewish religious ideas with certain elements of Christian revelation, albeit in a distorted form."⁵ It had great attraction for the Hellenic mind: challenging it to make a personal decision (as Christianity did); offered a copious literary output often of considerable stylistic appeal; and was proselytized by teacher-founders of noted philosophical schools. In its time it was the Church's boldest and most attractive competition. The recent finding (1945-6) of numerous Gnostic documents in Egypt at Nag Hammadi gives us a more detailed knowledge of this movement than we had previously from fragmentary documents and quotations by Christian authors who were attacking the movement.

Gnosticism is not a school, it is more like an umbrella term that gathers under it many disparate groups who nevertheless have a number of ideas in common: man longing for union with an unknown God; who by some peculiar destiny is banished to this imperfect world; a world which is the creation not of the supreme God but a lesser created being called the *demiurge* who governs it with the assistance of evil forces; man seeks to escape this imperfect world and can do so only with the possession of a secret knowledge (*gnosis*) that will enable him to gain the higher world and be with the Supreme God. Gnostic Christology is, obviously, reductionist with regard to the figure and meaning of Jesus in the scheme of salvation.

One of the most gifted and dangerous proponents of Christian Gnostic teaching was the Egyptian *Valentinus* (cā 120-160) who taught at Alexandria around 135 A.D. His teaching on creation is pantheistic – all created things are emanations from an invisible “Father”. The world is the creation of the highest of these emanations, the *Demiurge*, whose work was imperfect. In creating man, the Demiurge breathed into matter the natural endowments of humanity; but without the knowledge of the Demiurge, man also received a ‘spiritual element’ which, awakened by the true knowledge (*gnosis*) brought to earth by the Redeemer, would, at the end of the world, bring man to salvation. The Christ force descended on Jesus at the time of his baptism by John. Jesus, then, is just a man, a teacher of *gnosis*.

A transitional figure, not a Gnostic since he rejected their bizarre speculations and cosmogony; yet one who did accept enough of their thought that he has to be linked with Gnosticism was *Marcion* (cā 140). He was a significant threat since he copied the structure of the Church with governing bishops and presbyters and followed closely the Church’s liturgy. Many Christians became attached to his organization (another difference between Marcion and the Gnostics who had no formal organization) without appreciating what they were joining.

Doctrinally, Marcion accepted Gnostic dualism as is evident in his rejection of the Old Testament God whom he claimed to be the Creator Demiurge responsible for this world, a God of binding Law and therefore completely different from the Christian God of the New Testament, a God of love as preached by Paul and Luke (once even their writings had been purified of Apostolic distortions based on Jewish influences). Marcion’s teaching about Jesus was clearly *Docetism*, i.e., the position that the New Testament God would never have sent the Redeemer Christ into impure human flesh. A real human birth was impossible since it would make Jesus subject to the rejected God of the Old Testament, the deficient Creator of this imperfect world. Marcion’s Christ came to liberate man from the tyranny of the Old Testament God. Jesus, then, only appeared to be a human being. Marcion seems to have been unaware that in his scheme of apparent humanity Jesus could not have redeemed humanity by his death on the cross. Christian writers saw these critical doctrinal errors and wrote against them. “[L]ike no other figure in the Gnostic world, Marcion compelled the Church to consider and reconsider her own attitude to Scripture and criteria of faith, to overhaul her organization and to deploy her whole inner strength in face of such a menace.”⁶ The very center of Christianity is the figure of Christ. If Jesus is not all that is claimed about Him: eternal Son of God become incarnate, true God and true man, then Christianity fails. No other religion stands or falls on the truth about its Founder as does Christianity.

Summary of this part: These Jewish-Christian and Gnostic forces, along with transitional Marcianism have raised the significant issues of Trinity, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology (at least implicitly at this stage) and Mariology (Mary as

truly Mother of God). These are the issues further pinpointed by the heresies to follow, those to be addressed at Nicea and subsequent Councils.

The Path to Nicea

“Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, of His boundless love, became what we are that he might make us what he himself is” (Irenaeus, in *Against Heresies*). The Fathers and theologians of the early Church maintained the orthodox doctrine that only God could save us from the power of evil and give us salvation. The death and resurrection of Jesus is our salvation. To accomplish this, the Son of God took upon Himself a full and complete human nature, human body and soul, a human intellect and will but never ceased to be God. The constant teaching of these fathers and theologians is that what was not assumed by the Son is not saved; and therefore there is nothing proper to human nature that God’s Son did not assume in the mystery of the Incarnation. For the human family to attain salvation, two fundamental conditions must be simultaneously present: Jesus must be truly human and⁷ truly divine. This had been the central issue in what we have examined above and will be the fundamental contribution of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325, A.D. It is from this truth of Christology that we learn how to express our faith in the Trinity, Soteriology, Mariology, and at least implicitly at this stage, in Ecclesiology. The pre-philosophical language of the Scriptures had to be translated into philosophical terms and concepts to make it more meaningful and understandable to the Hellenic mind. The unicity of the Godhead, so deeply ingrained in Jewish thought, led to the problems already seen; but it also led to problems of expression for the Hellenist whose polytheism had not problem with a multiplicity of gods but balked at the doctrine that the one and only God is also tripersonal. *Adoptionism* (the Father adopting Jesus as Son at the moment of his baptism) and *Docetism* (that Jesus only appeared to be human) as seen above was supplemented by a theory called *Modalist Monarchianism* (or *Patricianism* meaning the Father suffered) which accepted the one God and argued that Father, Son and Spirit were names of the same God acting in the different modalities of creating, saving and sanctifying. The philosopher *Origen* (185?-254?) would reason from a Platonic stance that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were: “distinct substances, one subordinated to the other, yet in harmony and concord of intellect and will.”⁸ All of these issues had to be answered, but the most serious problem to which they led and contributed was *Arianism*, the brainchild of the Alexandrian priest Arius (256-336). His position was that the Son, Jesus, was only a creature; that there was a time when he was not; that he was created by the Father before the beginning of time, endowed with the highest of all qualities, made the intermediary in the creation of the world and therefore he exceeds all of the rest of creation in honor and dignity but shares their creaturehood, hence he is not God. This is the position that necessitated Nicea.

To understand Arius we must know something about the two most prominent schools of theology at his time: Alexandria and Antioch. The writings of the Fathers and apologists of the first two centuries of Christian history, the ages of

persecution, were mostly defensive, countering Jewish and/or pagan attacks on Christian belief and trying to explain Christianity to potential converts. But as the third century wore on to its end and spilled into the fourth, Christianity penetrated more deeply into the pagan Gentile world and it became necessary to produce a literature that would explain the tenets of Christianity in a more orderly, exact and comprehensive way, thus giving rise to centers where sacred science was born and flourished. The first of these was *Alexandria* (a city founded by Alexander the great in 331 B.C.). By the time Christianity arrived, it was already a center of learning and well established as the literary center of the ancient world with the best and most extensive library. Oriental, Egyptian, Greek and Jewish cultures commingled freely and congenially there. It was at Alexandria the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures) came to be. Christianity entered the city at the end of the first Christian century and there it established “the oldest center of sacred science in the history of Christianity. The environment in which it developed gave it its distinctive characteristics, predominant interest in the metaphysical investigation of the content of the faith, a leaning to the philosophy of Plato, and the allegorical interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures.”⁹ The allegorical method had a long pre-Christian history in this city, even among the Jews. Philo (13 B.C.-50 A.D?), often called the Jewish Plato is an example as he employed allegory in interpreting the Old Testament whose literal sense he saw as mere “shadow to the body” of the text. Through allegory, Philo sought the deeper meaning of the text where rested the true reality of the written word. Origen, too, used this method as a vehicle for making the Christian message more available to the Greek philosophical mind. It was a method for which Christian thinkers found precedent in St. Paul’s letters to the Galatians 4: 24 and in 1 Corinthians 9: 9. But in many Christian writers, where the method tended to neglect the literal sense of the text, it opened the door to possible error.

Another major school developed later at *Antioch*, founded by Lucian of Samosata (240-312) in direct response to the perceived excesses he saw in the allegorical method (especially as he knew them from Origen). Lucian was a Hebrew scholar and one of his greatest contributions was to correct errors in the Greek translation of the Septuagint (making him a hero to St. Jerome). The Antiochene School took the literal text seriously and demanded that the Scriptures be read with careful attention to history and grammar. Antioch searched for the obvious meaning of the text; Alexandria for the symbolic and for the figurative interpretation of Scripture. Antioch accused Alexandria of overlooking the primary meaning of the text and therefore “destroying the value of the Bible as a record of the past.”¹⁰ The opposition between these Schools was that of emphasis while they were generally in agreement on the overall interpretation of the Scriptures. But the excessive literalism of Antioch did lay the foundation for the heresy of Arianism.

Lucian (know also as ‘of Antioch’) for all of his contribution to the interpretation of the Scriptures had heterodox ideas which fueled further development by his student Arius, thus establishing him as the ‘father of Arianism.’ For all that, he died a martyr for the faith under the Emperor Maximinus Daia on

January 7, 312 and is recognized as a Saint. He offered a Christology that sought to position itself between Modalism (one God appearing in different modalities of activity in creating, saving and sanctifying) and Subordinationism (Son and Spirit subordinate to the Father). He taught that the Word was creator of all subsequent beings having himself been created, but endowed so as to be superior to all other creatures as a creator is to its creation.

Arius (256-336) studied under Lucian and later brought his teaching to Alexandria where having been ordained a priest of that city he served under its Bishop, Alexander. Arius rejected personal distinctions within the Trinity. He taught that the Godhead is the Father; the Son (Logos) is a power or quality coming from the Father. Before *time* (as we know it) began, says Arius, the Father created the Son to be His agent in creation. The Son, then, is ‘divine’ only derivatively. There was once a ‘time’ when the Son did not exist and therefore he is not eternal but is subordinated to the Father as any creature though he is the highest and most dignified of all creatures. Such teaching obviously places the Son outside the Godhead and thereby destroys the Trinity. Belloc puts Arius’ teaching well: “[it] was willing to grant Our Lord every kind of honor and majesty short of the full nature of the Godhead. He was created (or, if people did not like the word ‘created’ them He ‘came forth’) from the Godhead before all other effects thereof. Through Him the world is created. He was granted, one might say, (paradoxically), all the divine attributes – except divinity.”¹¹

Arius’ views spread quickly among the Alexandrian clergy, and elsewhere, forcing Bishop Alexander of Alexandria to call a local Synod of the bishops of Egypt and Libya to examine Arius’ teachings. They condemned Arius’ teachings and declared the Son to be of one substance (*homoousios* -- a term that would be controverted for decades thereafter) with the Father. Arius was exiled and fled to Palestine to supporters in the persons of Eusebius of Caesarea, Eusebius of Nicomedia and other bishops. These, in turn, called their own Synod and condemned Alexander and his use of the term ‘homoousios’ interpreting it as Sebellian (i.e., as identifying the Father and the Son).

Constantine became sole Emperor, uniting the East and West, in 325. That same year he called the Council of Nicea into session. Initially he thought the controversy an unimportant squabble; but was persuaded of its seriousness and potential for dangerous division within the empire, by his theological advisor Hosius (Ossius) of Cordova. In calling the Council, he appointed Hosius to preside thus giving Pope Sylvester I (314-335) a representative presence along with an additional two Roman priests appointed by the Pope. The Council issued its Creed which stated:

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, the only-begotten generated from the Father, that is, from the being (ousia) of the Father, of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in being

(homoousios) with the Father, through whom all things were made, those in heaven and those on earth. For us human beings and for our salvation he came down, and became flesh, was made man, suffered, and rose again on the third day. He ascended to the heavens and shall come again to judge the living and the dead. And in the Holy Spirit.

The Council added to the Creed certain anathemas or condemnations:

As for those who say: “There was a time when he was not” and “Before being begotten he was not”, and who declare that he was made from nothing (ex ouk ontôn), or that the Son of God is from a different substance (hypostasis) or being (ousia), that is, created (ktistos) or subject to change or alteration, – [such persons] the Catholic Church condemns.¹²

An exegesis of the Creed and Anathemas must note:

Arius interpreted the phrase “begotten by the Father” to mean that the Son was created from nothing. To counter that, the Council’s Creed said: “begotten, not made”, totally ruling out that the Son had a beginning.

Again, Arius held that the Son was God by grace and in name only. The Creed affirmed “True God from true God” teaching that the Son is God, equal to the Father.

The most important affirmation is that the Son is of the same being as the Father and, therefore, truly and fully divine. Hear the Creed “of one substance (homoousios) with the Father, totally nullifying the Arian teaching that the Son was only God’s intermediary in creation.¹³

The anathemas make these points again in order to be clear in its teaching about the Son.

Heresies do not cease simply because of a declaration by a Council or any authority figure. Arianism continued to draw people to itself and confuse for decades. It seems valid to say that it, or its spirit, is still operating today. Here I have in mind a present day movement called *Pluralism* that would reduce Jesus to being only one among many savior figures and not the Savior. If that thinking were correct, Jesus would not be the Son of God equal to the Father (*homoousios*), of one substance with the Father, God from God, true God from true God as the Creed affirmed. It is the continuing discussion and the attempts of the Arians and their later followers the semi-Arians that will lead the Church to the First Council of Constantinople in 381.

Addendum: From the Glossary of the Catechism of the Catholic Church

ANALOGY OF FAITH: The coherence of the truths of the faith among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation (114).

DEFINITION, DOGMATIC: A solemn declaration by an ecumenical council or by the Pope that a doctrine is revealed by God and must be believed by the universal Church; such definitions are called infallible, and must be adhered to with the obedience of faith (891).

DEPOSIT OF FAITH: The heritage of faith contained in Sacred Scripture and Tradition, handed on in the Church from the time of the Apostles, from which the Magisterium draws all that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed (84; cf. 1202).

DEVELOPMENT, DOCTRINAL: Growth in the understanding of God's revelation, which continues through the contemplation and study of believers, theological research, and the preaching of the Magisterium (94).

DOCTRINE/DOGMA: The revealed teachings of Christ which are proclaimed by the fullest extent of the exercise of the authority of the Church's Magisterium. The faithful are obliged to believe the truths or dogmas contained in divine Revelation and defined by the Magisterium (88).

EASTERN CHURCHES: Churches of the East in union with Rome (the Western Church), but not of Roman rite, with their own liturgical, theological, and administrative traditions, such as those of the Byzantine, Alexandrian or Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Maronite, and Chaldean rites. The variety of particular churches with distinctive traditions witnesses to the catholicity of the one Church of Christ, which takes root in distinct cultures (1202-1203; cf. 835).

ECONOMY OF SALVATION (DIVINE ECONOMY): From a Greek word (*oikonomia*, literally "management of a household" or "stewardship") which refers to God's revelation and communication of himself to the world in time for the sake of the salvation of all humanity; hence, the economy of salvation (258, 1066). The Fathers of the Church distinguished *oikonomia* from *theologia*; the latter term refers to the mystery of the internal life of the Trinity (236). The economy of salvation, on the other hand, refers to God's activity in creating and governing the world, particularly with regard to his plan for the salvation of the world in the person and work of Jesus Christ, a plan which is being accomplished through his Body the Church, in its life and sacraments; hence, the "sacramental economy" (1076, 1093).

HERESY: The obstinate denial after Baptism of a truth which must be believed with divine and Catholic faith (2089; cf. 465).

HIERARCHY OF TRUTHS: The order (hierarchy) of the truths in Catholic doctrine, insofar as they vary in their relation to the central mystery and foundation of Christian faith, the mystery of the Holy Trinity (90, 234).

MAGISTERIUM: The living, teaching office of the Church, whose task it is to give as authentic interpretation of the word of God, whether in its written form (Sacred

Scripture), or in the form of Tradition. The Magisterium ensures the Church's fidelity to the teaching of the Apostles in matters of faith and morals (85, 890, 2033).

PERSON, DIVINE: *Hypostasis* in Greek; the term used to describe the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in their real relation to and distinction from one another within the unity of the Blessed Trinity. Each of the three divine Persons is God (252). *See* Trinity.

SEPTUAGINT: A pre-Christian Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures made by Jewish scholars, and later adopted by Greek-speaking Christians (213).

SON OF GOD: A title frequently applied to Jesus in the Gospel, signifying his unique relationship to the Father. The second Person of the Blessed Trinity is called Son of God in reference to the Eternal Father. The revelation of his divine sonship is the principal dramatic development of the story of Jesus of Nazareth (441-445).

SYNOD: A meeting of bishops of an ecclesiastical province or patriarchate (or even from the whole world, e.g., Synod of Bishops) to discuss the doctrinal and pastoral needs of the church. A *diocesan* synod is an assembly of priests and other members of Christ's faithful who assist the bishop by offering advice about the needs of the diocese and by proposing legislation for him to enact (887, 911). The words "synod" and "council" are sometimes used interchangeably.

TRADITION: The living transmission of the message of the Gospel in the Church. The oral preaching of the Apostles, and the written message of salvation under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Bible), are conserved and handed on as the deposit of faith through the apostolic succession in the Church. Both the living Tradition and the written Scriptures have their common source in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ (75-82). The theological, liturgical, disciplinary, and devotional traditions of the local churches both contain and can be distinguished from this apostolic Tradition (83).

TRINITY: The mystery of one God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The revealed truth of the Holy Trinity is at the very root of the Church's living faith as expressed in the Creed. The mystery of the Trinity in itself is inaccessible to the human mind and is the object of faith only because it was revealed by Jesus Christ, the divine Son of the eternal Father (232, 237, 249, 253-256). *See* Person, Divine.

Questions for discussion:

- 1) What do we mean by saying that Jesus is the fullness of Revelation and that all public Revelation has been given in Him?
- 2) Distinguish Tradition and traditions!
- 3) What role does heresy play in the development of doctrine? What dangers does it offer? Why is it important to identify and defeat heresy?
- 4) "Every society carries on its life as a creed or asset of beliefs and principles", Agree? Or Disagree?
- 5) Why are Creeds important?

- 6) How does the “Shema Yisrael” (Deut. 6:4) and the First Commandment (Ex. 20:2) express Israel’s and our faith?
- 7) What do we mean by “non-negotiable” truths in Christianity?
- 8) The earliest Christians were of Jewish background. What difficulty did this raise for Christianity?
- 9) What was the threat of the Gnostics to Christian doctrine?
- 10) What were the main concerns of the Schools of Alexandria and Antioch? What were their principal deficiencies?
- 11) What is the heart of Arius’ teaching?
- 12) How did Nicea respond?

¹ See *The Catechism of the Catholic Church (from this point on CCC)*, 2nd edition, Glossary, pg. 901.

² CCC, pg. 874.

³ Hilaire Belloc, *The Great Heresies*, reprinted by Tan Books and Publishers, 1991 (originally published by Sheed and Ward, 1938), pg.2

⁴ Idem. Pg. 4.

⁵ *History of the Church*, ed. by Herbert Jadin, Crossroad Pub., 1965, Vol. I, pg. 181.

⁶ Idem. Pg. 192.

⁷ See the excellent development in Gerald O’Collins, S.J., *Christology: A Biblical, Historical and Systematic Study of Jesus*, Oxford University Press, 1995, pg. 155ff.

⁸ See Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787: Their History and Theology)*, Liturgical Press, 1990, pg. 50.

⁹ Johannes Quasten, *Petrology, Vol. II The Anti-Nicene Literature After Irenaeus*, Newman/Spectrum, 1949, pg. 2ff.

¹⁰ Quasten, op. cit., pg. 122.

¹¹ Belloc, op. cit., pg. 17.

¹² Translations from J. Neuner, S.J. – J. Dupuis, S.J., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, Alba House, N.Y., 2001, pgs. 6-7.

¹³ Robert M. Grant, *Augustus to Constantine: The Emergence of Christianity in the Roman World*, Harper-Collins Pub. and Barnes & Noble Books, 1996, pg. 241 credits Constantine with the addition of the word *Homoousios*, explaining that it would indicate that the Son is *consubstantialis* (consubstantial) with the Father, that it “implied no corporeal substance” or any division or separation in being of the Son from the Father.