

## The Trinity Class 14: The Nicene Creed vs Arianism, Part 2

Truro Anglican Church Sunday School November 24, 2024

In 325, the Emperor Constantine called for a general council of the church to meet at Nicea to debate Arianism, as well as several other ongoing issues, and to come to some resolution as to the teaching of the church regarding the Nature of God, the Nature of Jesus, and to achieve a measure of unity in the church so that the church would be a unifying factor in the life of the Empire.

As with any council composed of human beings, there was a fair bit of animosity and disagreement among the attendees, complete with various factions represented. Each side in the Arianism debate carefully counted up each sides strength in the voting and strove to convince the undecided of the superiority of its arguments and views.

In attendance at the Council were several members of note.

First was the young man Athanasius of Alexandria in Egypt. He was in his mid-20's at the time and ordained as a deacon in the church. He accompanied his bishop to the Council. He had already written a brilliant defense of the Trinity and of Jesus as the full Son of God, equal to the Father. His book is titled "On the Incarnation." C.S. Lewis wrote the foreword for the best English translation of the work. Athanasius is eventually elected Bishop of Alexandria and is a tireless defender of the orthodox faith. He is sent into exile numerous times by future emperors who were sympathetic to Arius' views.

Also there was the bishop of Myra, which is located in the southwest corner of Asia Minor, modern day Turkey. His name was Nicholas. While famous for giving gifts of gold to destitute girls so that they could get married with a suitable dowery, he is also remembered a defender of the orthodox, Trinitarian faith of the church. One story told has him slapping Arius across the face when they met at the Council and urging him to repent of his heresy. Arius declined to do so.

The Council struggled to articulate the teaching of the Trinity that didn't fall off into other forms of heresy.

The debates came down to the difference between two words in Greek:

Homoousios and homoiusios. Note there is only one letter different between them, but that one letter has vast implications for how we understand the Trinity and Jesus.

Arius argued that Jesus was not a member of the godhead, but was a lesser, created being, still divine, but not fully God like God the Father is fully God. Thus he argued that Jesus is homoiusios with the Father- of a similar substance, but not identical.

Athanasius and Nicholas and others argued that Jesus is homoousios with the Father- of identical substance. Thus, Jesus is God in the same way the Father is God. Both are fully God in the one Godhead.

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As we discussed two weeks ago, this has profound implications.

If Jesus is a created being, even the great created being that Arius claimed, then he is not at one with the Father- he cannot be. He does not share the same essence or nature with the Father. He is something other than God. Thus, Jesus does not have an essential oneness with God as God.

And if, as Arius claimed, Jesus is not fully God, then Jesus cannot reconcile everything to God, meaning he cannot satisfy all the demands of God's justice against sin because he is not fully God.

One element to remember is that God does get angry at sin and what it does to His creation. We are told that Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath while hanging on the Cross. (See Matthew 26:39, 42, where Jesus prays for "this cup" to pass from him- this is the cup of God's wrath against sin.)

If Jesus was only a created being, then He could not completely empty that cup of wrath against sin. Only God can drain that cup of God's anger dry. We know Jesus finished doing so because before He died, He said "It is finished." He completed the work God the Father sent Him to accomplish. He paid the full penalty for the sins of the world and drank dry the cup of God's wrath against sin and evil. Only God the Son could do this.

So, if someone ever tries to trick you into deciding if Jesus was homoousios or homoiusios with the Father, remember that Jesus was and is homoousios- of the same substance and essence and nature- with God the Father because they are both fully God as members of the Trinity.