† Blessed is our God always, as it is now, was in the beginning, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. ... in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Through the prayers of our holy Ancestors, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us. Amen. Glory to You, our God, glory to You.

O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, You are everywhere and fill all things, Treasury of blessings, and Giver of life: come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every impurity, and save our souls, O Good One.

† Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us (three times).

† Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it is now, was in the beginning, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Discord 3

*Fourth Century*

During the fourth century, much persecution from Roman law was winding down; persecution would flare up from time to time, but in a few respects, the worst years were over: Christianity became a legal entity (313); Constantinople, or New Rome as it was sometimes called, was built (324-330), leaving a power vacuum in Old Rome; Nicaea[[1]](#endnote-1) met (325) to formulate the first official rough draft of the Creed, and bring some semblance of peace and unity to the Church; “the Edict of Thessalonica (380) made Nicene Christianity the state church of the Roman Empire.”[[2]](#endnote-2) If the Church now had room to grow, organize, think, and write; it also had room to dispute, to foment, and to fracture.

For much of the preceding centuries Alexandria was the cultural center of the Roman world, in no small part due to the library there. Christian doctrine and dogma[[3]](#endnote-3) were largely sourced in the Church at Alexandria. As far as culture, and education were concerned, both Rome and Constantinople were upstarts:[[4]](#endnote-4) these cities shaped the inevitable political jealousies that would fuel further discord, disruption, and division in the Church. From this point on, the Church will continue to be poisoned by increasing politicization.[[5]](#endnote-5) Constantinople developed a collection of biblical manuscripts that rivaled Alexandria; consequently, a Byzantine text type emerged that vied with the already well established Alexandrian text type; a less important Western text type also developed at Rome.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Much like the Novatianists before them, the Donatists[[7]](#endnote-7) emerged in the fourth century with an uber-strict stance on Christian dogma: they too excluded Traditors (Lapsi); and further required that clergy must be perfect (without mortal sin) … that the validity of sacraments depended on the purity and piety of officiating clergy.[[8]](#endnote-8)

Other more significant divisions developed.

In the minds of Christians, God was thought of as Father, Almighty, and Creator; yet, He was infinite in all these things: He could not be counted or measured; He could not be located in space or timed; He could not be defined: the idea of apophatic theology would develop because of the immensity of this mystery. This idea is similar to the Greek world of forms; but, this God was not a hypothetical perfection; He was the Trinity of persons whom they had met, who was their friend. The perfection of God had descended to earth, and they had touched Him. The Spirit of God had come upon them, bearing witness of His reality with their human spirits. This God existed only as spirit defining the Eschaton; but, now He enters the Physis (φύσις), the physical, material world, first in the Cloud of His Glorious Presence, then clothed in the body of Perfect-Man: not merely as an imperfect copy of a perfect ideal. The Eschaton was in the Physis; yet, not of it.[[9]](#endnote-9)

The Nicaean fathers struggled to find acceptable words to express this mystery; yet, the words they chose were controversial: sometimes confusing in various cultures and languages; often broken in translation. They settled on ὁμοούσιον as the best title for the indescribable nature of God. This word may be translated as either, one in essence, or one in substance[[10]](#endnote-10); an essence is clearly a spiritual or Eschatological concept, not a physical one… God is a spirit in essence; a substance may have reality in the physical world, though this could not have been intended of God’s indescribable nature. As a subsequence, when theologians speak of transubstantiation, some anticipate a physical, material change, which is not the case: the change takes place in the spiritual Eschaton, not in physical dimensions or appearance… the modern hearer mistakes the meaning of substance as physical, when it is -ούσιον, essence, or mystery.[[11]](#endnote-11) This God entered the space and time of the physical world in His Presence, or Glory, which was most clearly seen in the miracle of Incarnation. The Nicaean fathers, following John in part, gave themselves to summarizing a high Christology. It would take them most of the rest of the century to clarify a biblical summary for the Spirit and for the Church.

Nicaea Ⅰ (325)[[12]](#endnote-12)

As other councils followed, the debate raged on: Council of Ariminum or Rimini (359)[[13]](#endnote-13), Constantinople (360)[[14]](#endnote-14), and Constantinople Ⅰ (381)[[15]](#endnote-15), which was the second Ecumenical council.[[16]](#endnote-16)

Constantinople Ⅰ (381)[[17]](#endnote-17)

[[18]](#endnote-18)

1. Here, we must ask ourselves, how and why did Nicaea fail? The complete answer may not be found until Chalcedon, centuries later. There was violence already at Nicaea; Nicholas was expelled for striking Arius, only to be readmitted the next day: but, let us not miss the fact that violence was frowned upon as unacceptable Christian behavior at Nicaea. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. This structure seems strange to us. Our incessant crowing about the “separation of church and state”, blinds to a reality in which church and state are joined at the hip. None of the emperors saw themselves as meddling in church matters; rather, they were the ordained officers of God, who were charged with maintaining peace in the kingdom: disruption of the peace of the church required their immediate attention just as much as any brawl on the corner, or any war brought by external enemies. None of the bishops saw themselves as meddling in state matters either; rather, they were the ordained officers of God, who were charged with informing all members of the church, including the king, about their moral obligations and the status of biblical orthodoxy. That within such a system a political power struggle would develop with some bishops being as powerful as kings comes as no real surprise. The shock results from the fact that the Bible itself forbids such behavior; obviously, such bullies are self-disqualified in the kingdom of heaven: but, who has the stones to tell them that.

   <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_the_4th_century> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The difference between doctrine and dogma is that doctrine refers to teaching, for which a wide range of opinions are tolerable within the Church; dogma erases that range and declares that only one teaching is correct. That one teaching or dogma must be believed by all Christians: else, they cease to be Christians.

   The one-two punch of Nicaea (325) and Thessalonica (380), creates the first true dogma and makes it public law. Ironically, failure to subscribe to Nicaea is now punishable by the king, not that it was: but, a new entity has been created that will only follow the slippery slope downhill. We are compelled to view this tendency as the cancer of neo-Pharisaism growing within the Church.

   This is not to say that Nicaea was wrong in any way; rather, it is the cloaking of Nicaea in dogma that erases any possibility for honesty, openness, richness and variety in further discussion. That such honesty, openness, richness and variety in further questioning would now lead to the death penalty for some, is absolutely utterly reprehensible.

   No person of any rank has the God given right to coerce the conscience of another, let alone deprive of life without due process of law (Exodus 20:16). Nevertheless, the Church will now stoop to murder, and then to war: and such war as leaves us aghast, with Christian brother taking up arms against Christian brother.

   While we are on the subject of doctrine and dogma, we note that the popular preaching phrase, “the Church has always taught that….”, is a meaningless expression: The Church teaches many things, some of which are seemingly contradictions, or conflicts. Preachers commonly employ such a phrase to get their own selfish way from the pulpit: it’s just so much intellectual bullying, using the Church as an excuse for bad behavior. Now we are confronted with a two-edged sword: making doctrine into dogma resolves the issue at the expense of coercing tender consciences; leaving doctrinal disputes unresolved, in some cases, results in bitter festering wounds: it takes a wise hand to dance down the edge of this sword without being lacerated in the process. We will not be surprised to learn that whole limbs of the Church have been amputated.

   The best Dogmatic is the shortest necessary list possible. Unnecessary dogma just fouls up the works. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Facetiously speaking, Old Rome was a developing rebellious adolescent upstart; New Rome was still in diapers, not yet even in its “terrible twos”. How dare they correct a bastion of truth like Alexandria? Alexandria had culture when Old and New Rome were still cavemen, living in the pre-pottery Neolithic age. The joke was stolen and adapted from *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. I’ll huff, and I’ll puff, till I blow your house down. This is 99.4 % pure hubris and posturing. Contrast this with the humble and modest behavior found in Acts 15. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. This is not to say that the enrichment of culture, education, and knowledge within the churches at Alexandria, Rome, and Constantinople was wrong; valuable discoveries were made; the cause of Christ was advanced: but, these wonderful things came at the expense of growing political jealousy, rivalry, strife, and ultimately war. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donatism> [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. This was obviously heretical and was later overthrown. The validity of sacraments depends on the power of the Spirit alone. The gift of the Father, purchased in the blood of His Dear Son, cannot be overturned by the folly and stupidity of mere men. Wherever the sacraments are willingly received with the simple purity of the recipient’s faith, the Spirit acts, even though the understanding of the recipient is incomplete: all this, in spite of the server’s spiritual condition. The Supreme Chef has prepared the perfect meal; the recipient eats and is nourished in faith: it is simply not necessary that the table waiters be perfected; nor are imperfect table waiters able to defile The Supreme Chef’s perfect meal. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. The biblical Old Testament record is completely different than the Greek philosophical concept. God is in regular communication with various people. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Substance is the inferior word: because, it carries with it, ideas of a physical aspect to God’s nature; delusions that God has some sort of body… a specific definable location… a corpus or corporeality. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. We can’t distinguish any true difference between the RC view as described in CCC and the Lutheran view: both embrace real presence. The confusion, we believe, arises from the ambiguity of the meaning of the word substance. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Council_of_Nicaea> [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_Ariminum> [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_Constantinople_(360)> [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Council_of_Constantinople> [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_the_4th_century> [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Council_of_Constantinople> [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
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