

Entrust Constantine, the Christianization of Rome, & the Trinity 3/17/22

1. Constantine & the Christianization of Rome

Constantine (272–337)

- The Diocletian persecution is often considered the most severe persecution of Christians during the Roman Empire. Prisons filled up with Christians to the point that other criminals had to be released due to the Empire's underdeveloped prison structure
- Diocletian's reign ended in 305, after which a power struggle ensued for control of the Roman Empire
- Some of the Empire's leadership may have assumed that Christianity was dying out:

Churches had been destroyed, many church leaders had been imprisoned, the civil service and military had been largely purged of Christians. Church historian Eusebius also recorded that there were many apostates from the faith.



- It would be five years before Constantine I (the Great) gained control of the Western Empire by defeating Maximian at Gaul in 310 and then, two years later, by defeating Maximian's son Maxentius at Milvian in 312
- The Edict of Toleration by Galerius had been issued by the emperor Galerius from Serdica and was posted at Nicomedia on April 30, 311. Christians who had "followed such a caprice and had fallen into such a folly that they would not obey the institutes of antiquity", were granted a pardon as follows:

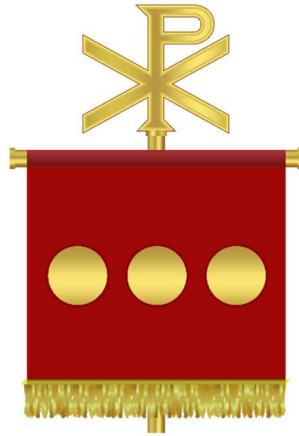
"Wherefore, for this our indulgence, they ought to pray to their God for our safety, for that of the republic, and for their own, that the commonwealth may continue uninjured on every side, and that they may be able to live securely in their homes."

- The event which reportedly ended persecution and legalized Christianity is controversial. Details are given by the 4th century church historian, Eusebius, who was a contemporary of Constantine:
 - Constantine was contemplating the downfall of previous, pagan Roman emperors.

- “He considered, therefore, on what God he might rely for protection and assistance. While engaged in this enquiry, the thought occurred to him, that, of the many emperors who had preceded him, those who had rested their hopes in a multitude of gods, and served them with sacrifices and offerings, had in the first place been deceived by flattering predictions, and oracles which promised them all prosperity, and at last had met with an unhappy end, while not one of their gods had stood by to warn them of the impending wrath of heaven; while one alone who had pursued an entirely opposite course, who had condemned their error, and honored the one Supreme God during his whole life, had found him to be the Saviour and Protector of his empire, and the Giver of every good thing...reviewing, I say, all these considerations, he judged it to be folly indeed to join in the idle worship of those who were no gods, and, after such convincing evidence, to err from the truth; and therefore felt it incumbent on him to honor his father's God alone.” (*The Life of Constantine*, 1.27).
- On the evening of October 27, 312, with his army preparing for the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, Constantine reportedly saw a vision of a cross in the sky and was told to conquer in the name of Christianity:

“Accordingly he called on Him with earnest prayer and supplications that He would reveal to him who He was, and stretch forth His right hand to help him in his present difficulties. And while he was thus praying with fervent entreaty, a most marvelous sign appeared to him from heaven, the account of which it might have been hard to believe had it been related by any other person. But since the victorious emperor himself long afterwards declared it to the writer of this history, when he was honored with his acquaintance and society, and confirmed his statement by an oath, who could hesitate to accredit the relation, especially since the testimony of after-time has established its truth? He said that about noon, when the day was already beginning to decline, he saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, and bearing the inscription, Conquer by this. At this sight he himself was struck with amazement, and his whole army also, which followed him on this expedition, and witnessed the miracle” (*The Life of Constantine*, 1.28).
- Constantine reportedly won the battle under unlikely odds against Maxentius, a rival Emperor, on October 28, 312.

- Eusebius reports that Constantine then had the symbol used by his military:



- Eusebius writes that Constantine sent for advisors to teach him about this God, since he did not know. “Moreover, he made the priests of God his counselors, and deemed it incumbent on him to honor the God who had appeared to him with all devotion” (*The Life of Constantine*, 1.32).
- In 313, Constantine issued the *Edict of Milan* which changed the climate from one of hostile tolerance toward Christianity to one of friendliness and even protection.
- It wasn’t until 324 that Constantine defeated Licinius in the East and became the sole ruler of the entire Roman Empire
- The next year, in 325, the first general church council (since the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15) convened in Nicea
- Later, under Theodosius the Great (379–395), the inevitable occurred when Christianity was made the *exclusive* religion while others were rejected.

Christianity under Constantine after 324

- Constantine attributed his victory at the Milvian Bridge to the Christian God. As a result, he sought to give toleration and imperial favor to Christianity.
- He abolished all Roman opposition against Christianity.
- He gave large donations to the Church.
- Christian clergy were exempted from military service.
- Military personnel were strongly encouraged to be baptized.

- Constantine was not baptized until 337 on his death bed by Eusebius of Nicomedia. The reason given for delaying baptism was that he wanted to be baptized in the Jordan River (*The Life of Constantine*, 4.62).
- However, historians believe that he delayed in order to maintain a sinful lifestyle. Nate Busenitz: “In all likelihood, he wanted his sinful life and then to be baptized at the end.”
- This, along with the reported killing of family members (Fausta and Crispus), causes one to doubt the authenticity of his Christian profession.
- We should note, however, that the details of the executions of Fausta and Crispus are disputed. Some argue that their executions were just due to allegations of perverse sexual scandal (Greece & Rome, Vol. xlv, No. 1, April 1998, “On The Death Of The Empress Fausta,” By David Woods).
- He gave his sons a Christian education.
- Constantine’s mother, Saint Helena, built churches on holy sites in Palestine.
- He called the Synod of Arles 314 to address the Donatist question.
- He called the Council of Nicea in 325 to have agreement among the churches.

A Manual of Church History: “He exempted the Christian clergy from military and municipal duties and their property from taxation (313); abolished various pagan customs and ordinances offensive to Christians (315); facilitated the emancipation of Christian slaves (315); legalized bequests to Christian churches, a very important measure (321); enjoined the civil observance of Sunday, though only as the day of the Sun, and in connection with an ordinance requiring the consultation of the soothsayer (321); contributed largely toward the building of Christian houses of worship; and gave his sons a Christian education” (p. 306).

Stephen Tomkins: “But what kind of Christian was Constantine? He ruled with all the bloody brutality of pagan emperors – or Old Testament kings for that matter – killing even his firstborn son to protect his throne. But as well as legalizing Christianity, he Christianized the law: he outlawed crucifixion, the killing of unwanted children, the abuse of slaves and peasants, gladiatorial games and facial branding (because ‘man is made in God’s image’), and he decreed that all prisoners should see the sun every day. Whether a

genuine vision lies behind the Milvian Bridge story or simply inspired PR, there is no doubting the sincerity of Constantine's Christian conversion. Just how Christian it was can be doubted, though" (*A Short History of Christianity* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 46).

Results of Constantine's Rule

- On the positive side, persecution against the church ceased; the church was able to organize church-wide councils which proved useful in discerning doctrine

Henry Chadwick: "The pagan contemporaries of Constantine were not wrong in saying that he had carried through a huge religious and social revolution. To change the religion of the Roman Empire was to change the world" (*The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity* [Oxford University Press, 1990], p. 61).

- On the negative side, the connection between church and state soon became inseparable; and nominal Christianity grew as religious freedom (for non-Christians) became non-existent

S. M. Houghton: "The greatest danger threatening Christianity was realized when the emperor decided that he himself would rule the Church. The Lord Jesus Christ is the King in his Church, and no earthly power should ever be allowed to use its influence, much less its authority, in that spiritual dominion where Christ reigns supreme. But Constantine called meetings of bishops and other Church dignitaries, and such meetings were then presided over in his name" (*Sketches from Church History* [Carlisle, Penn.: Banner of Truth, 1980] p. 21)

Julian the Apostate

- Flavius Claudius Julianus (reigned from 361–63) was the last pagan Roman emperor. He tried to restore traditional Roman paganism to a position of prominence within the Empire.
- He was the Nephew of Constantine I
- He was called "The Apostate" by Christians because he rejected Christianity and instead embraced Theurgy, a form of Neoplatonism
- Julian himself claimed that he had been forced to become a Christian as a child, and that his acceptance of paganism came of his own volition after reading the poems of Homer

- As emperor, Julian attempted to change the state of Rome’s religious landscape; he thought that by restoring the old Roman faith, he would bring strength back to the empire
- Part of his efforts included an edict to guarantee freedom of religion (issued in 362); it reverted the edicts made by Constantius II (issued in 353 and 356) which made Christianity the primary religion of Rome

Theodosius the Great

- Flavius Theodosius (347–395) reigned from 379 until his death in 395
- He made Christianity the official state religion of the Roman Empire
- He also established Nicene (Trinitarian) Christianity as the official religion (as opposed to Arianism). He worked hard to uproot paganism
- He called the Council of Constantinople in 381 to deal a final blow to Arianism
- He was the last emperor of the united empire; after his death the Roman empire was permanently split between East and West (though the church would not split between East and West until the 11th century)
- On February 27, 380, he declared that “Catholic Christianity” was the only legitimate imperial religion, ending any state support for the traditional Roman religion.



2. Did Constantine Invent the Trinity?

Introduction

- The doctrine of the Trinity is founded on two fundamental truths: (1) There is one true God. (2) The one God has eternally existed as three distinct persons, each of whom is equally and fully God.¹
- The word *Trinity* captures those two truths in a single, theological term. As Wayne Grudem explains, “The word *trinity* is never found in the Bible, though the idea represented by the word is taught in many places. The word *trinity*

¹ John Ankerberg and John Weldon: “The threeness and oneness of God constitute a paradox or an antinomy – merely an apparent contradiction, not a genuine one. . . . God’s oneness refers to the divine essence; His threeness to the plurality of persons.” (John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Knowing the Truth about the Trinity*, Kindle Edition).

means ‘tri-unity’ or ‘three-in-oneness.’ It is used to summarize the teaching of Scripture that God is three persons yet one God.”²

- Thus, the term expresses the truth that the one God exists as a Tri-Unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three divine members are ontologically equal to one another (in essence, substance, character, and being) even though they are distinct persons with functional differences.
- Because the word *Trinity* does not appear in Scripture, opponents of this doctrine claim it was the invention of church history. Most often, these opponents point to historical developments in the fourth century – contending that belief in the Trinity began under Emperor Constantine at the Council of Nicaea.

Dennis A. Beard: “The Doctrine of the Trinity did not exist until 325 A.D.”³

Dan Brown, in *The Da Vinci Code* uses one of his characters (Sir Leigh Teabing) to allege: “Jesus’ establishment as ‘the Son of God’ was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicaea. . . . [It was] a relatively close vote at that.”

P. R. Lackey, speaking of the Council of Nicaea, asserts that at that time: “a whole new theology was formally canonized into the Church.”⁴

Robert Spears, a Unitarian, writes: “It is an unquestionable historical fact that the doctrine of the Trinity is a false doctrine foisted into the Church during the third and fourth centuries; which finally triumphed by the aid of persecuting emperors.”⁵

Watchtower Magazine: “The testimony of the Bible and of history makes clear that the Trinity was unknown throughout Biblical times and for several centuries thereafter.”⁶

² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 226.

³ David A. Beard, *The Errors of the Trinity* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2003) 28.

⁴ P. R. Lackey, *The Tyranny of the Trinity* (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2011), 261.

⁵ Robert Spears, *The Unitarian Handbook of Scriptural Illustrations & Expositions* (London: British and Foreign Unitarian Association, 1883), 96.

⁶ “Should You Believe in the Trinity?” *Watchtower Magazine*, 1989.

Watchtower Magazine: “For many years, there had been much opposition on Biblical grounds to the developing idea that Jesus was God. To try to solve the dispute, Roman emperor Constantine summoned all bishops to Nicaea. . . . Constantine’s role was crucial. After two months of furious religious debate, this pagan politician intervened and decided in favor of those who said that Jesus was God. . . . After Nicaea, debates on the subject continued for decades. Those who believed that Jesus was not equal to God even came back into favor for a time. But later Emperor Theodosius decided against them. He established the creed of the Council of Nicaea as the standard for his realm and convened the Council of Constantinople in 381 C.E. to clarify the formula. That council agreed to place the holy spirit on the same level as God and Christ. For the first time, Christendom's Trinity began to come into focus.”

Rob Bell: “This three-in-oneness understanding of God emerged in the several hundred years after Jesus' resurrection. People began to call this concept the Trinity. . . . It is a spring, and people jumped for thousands of years without it. It was added later. We can take it out and examine it. Discuss it, probe it, question it. It flexes, and it stretches.”⁷

Rob Bell: “As [Jesus’] movement gathered steam, this Jewish man came to be talked about more and more as God, fully divine as well as fully human. As his followers talked about him and did what he said and told and retold his stories, the significance of his life began to take on all sorts of cosmic dimensions.”⁸

- Many antagonists – from Muslims to Jehovah’s Witnesses to Christadelphians to Mormons to Unitarians to popular skeptics – deny the doctrine of the Trinity, along with its corollary affirmation of the deity of Jesus Christ. Without fail, their arguments hinge largely on the claim that *Trinitarianism* was an invention of church history.
- To answer that question, we will consider the following three areas: biblical authority, patristic affirmation, and creedal articulation.

1) BIBLICAL AUTHORITY:

The truth of any doctrine (including the Trinity) is established and grounded in the Scriptures – not in church history. Thus, the authoritative basis for what we

⁷ Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 22.

⁸ Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 124.

believe is the Bible. As those who affirm the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*, we look to the Scripture alone for our doctrine. We embrace the doctrine of the Trinity then, because we see it taught on the pages of Scripture.

The doctrine of the Trinity is built on two fundamental realities, both of which are established in Scriptures.

Reality 1: There is one true God.

- Isaiah 46:9 – “Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me.”
- Cf. Deut. 4:35; 6:4; Isa. 43:10–11; 45:5, 18, 21–22; Joel 2:27; Zech. 14:9; Mal. 2:10; Mark 12:29; James 2:19; 1 Tim. 2:5.

Reality 2: God exists as three distinct Persons, each of whom is equally and fully God.

- **The Father is God.**
 - 2 Corinthians 1:3 – “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.”
 - Cf. Matt. 6:9, 14; John 17:1–3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Php. 2:11; Col. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:2; *et. al.*
- **The Son is God.**
 - Titus 2:13 – “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus”
 - Cf. Isaiah 9:6; Matt. 1:23; John 1:1, 14, 18; 20:28; Acts 20:28; Rom. 9:5; 1 Cor. 1:24; 2 Cor. 4:4; Php. 2:6; Col. 1:15–16; 2:9; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:3, 8; 2 Pet. 1:1; 1 John 5:20.
- **The Son is not the Father.**
 - John 1:1–2 – “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”

- Cf. Matt. 11:27; John 3:35; 4:34; 5:30-32, 37; 6:38; 10:36; 12:49; 14:8-11; 17:20-24; Gal. 4:41 John 2:1; Heb. 7:25.
- **The Holy Spirit is God.**
 - Acts 5:3-4—“But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to **lie to the Holy Spirit** and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? **You have not lied to men but to God.**”
 - The Spirit possesses all of the attributes of deity (Gen. 1:2; 6:3; Job 33:4; Psalm 139:7-8; John 3:3-8; 14:23; 1 Cor. 2:10-11; 6:16,19; 2 Cor. 3:18; Heb. 9:14; 10:15-16; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:10-11; 2 Pet. 1:21).
 - Moreover, He is a Person, possessing the attributes of personhood (Mark 3:29; John 14:26; 16:8; Acts 8:29; 13:2; 16:6; Rom. 8:26; 15:30; 1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 4:30; 1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 10:29; Rev. 2:7).
- **The Spirit is not the Father nor the Son.**
 - John 14:16-17—“ I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.
 - Cf. Isaiah 48:16; Matt. 28:19; Luke 3:21; John 14:26; 16:13-14; Rom. 8:27; Heb. 9:8.
- **On this basis, the Bible often refers to God in ways that emphasize all three Members of the Trinity.**
 - 2 Cor. 13:14—“The grace of the **Lord Jesus Christ**, and the love of **God**, and the fellowship of the **Holy Spirit**, be with you all.”
 - Cf. Matt. 28:19; Rom. 14:17-18; 15:13-17; 15:30; 1 Cor. 6:11, 17-19; 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 3:4-6; Gal. 2:21-3:2; Eph. 2:18; 21-22; 3:11-17; 4:4-6; 5:18-20; Php. 2:1, 6; Col. 1:6-8; 1 Thess. 1:1-5; 4:2, 8; 5:18-19; 2 Thess. 2:13, 14; 3:5; Titus 3:4-6; Heb. 9:14; 1 John 3:23-24; Jude 20-21.

- The actual word “Trinity” may not be found in Scripture; but the concept is inherently biblical.
- The doctrine is revealed *implicitly* in the Old Testament and *explicitly* in the New Testament.

2) PATRISTIC AFFIRMATION:

Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology*: The early church was faced with both belief in monotheism and belief in the deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – what would later be called Trinitarianism. And the early church affirmed both.⁹

Reality 1: There is one true God.

- **Clement of Rome** (d. c. 99): “Undoubtedly [Moses] knew; but he acted thus, that there might be no sedition in Israel, and that the name of the true and only God might be glorified; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”¹⁰
- **Theophilus of Antioch** (d. c. 185): “ And I pray for favor from the only God, that I may accurately speak the whole truth according to His will, that you and everyone who reads this work may be guided by His truth and favor.”¹¹

(NOTE: Theophilus was the first to use the term “Trinity;” though Tertullian later popularized its usage.)¹²

- **Athenagorus of Athens** (d. c. 190) [in response to charges that Christians were atheists because they were monotheists]: “Our doctrine acknowledges one God, the Maker of this universe, who is Himself uncreated (for that which is does not come to be, but that which is not) but has made all things by the Logos which is from Him.”¹³
- **Origen** (185–254) [in response to the attacks of the skeptical Celsus]: “We Christians, however, who are devoted to the worship of the only God,

⁹ Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 232.

¹⁰ Clement, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 43.

¹¹ Theophilus, *Epistle to Autolyucus*, 3.23.

¹² Theophilus, *Epistle to Autolyucus*, 2.15.

¹³ Athenagorus, *A Plea for the Christians*, 4.

who created these things, feel grateful for them to Him who made them.”¹⁴

Reality 2: God exists as three distinct Persons, each of whom is equally and fully God.

○ **The Father is God.**

- Hundreds of examples could be given in this regard, demonstrating that early believers often referred to God using the title “Father.”
- **Irenaeus** (d. c. 202): “The preaching of the apostles, the authoritative teaching of the Lord, the announcements of the prophets, the dictated utterances of the apostles, and the ministration of the law - all of which praise one and the same Being, the God and Father of all.”¹⁵

○ **The Son is God.**

- Around 106, the Roman governor Pliny the Younger wrote a letter in which he explained that the Christians in his region sang hymns “to Christ as to a god.”¹⁶
- That commitment to the deity of Christ is affirmed repeatedly throughout Ante-Nicene literature:
- **Ignatius of Antioch** (c. 50–117): For **our God, Jesus Christ**, was, according to the appointment of God, conceived in the womb by Mary, of the seed of David, but by the Holy Ghost.¹⁷
- **Polycarp of Smyrna** (69–155): Now may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the eternal High Priest himself, the Son of God Jesus Christ, build you up in faith and truth . . . , and to us with you, and to all those under heaven who will yet believe in **our Lord and God Jesus Christ** and in his Father who raised him from the dead.¹⁸

¹⁴ Origen, *Against Celsus*, 4.75.

¹⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresis*, 2.35.4.

¹⁶ Pliny, *Letters*, 10.96 – 97. Letter to the Emperor Trajan.

¹⁷ Ignatius, *Epistles to the Ephesians*, Shorter, 18).

¹⁸ Polycarp. *Philippians 12:2*.

- **Justin Martyr (100–165):** And that **Christ being Lord, and God** the Son of God, and appearing formerly in power as Man, and Angel, and in the glory of fire as at the bush, so also was manifested at the judgment executed on Sodom, has been demonstrated fully by what has been said.¹⁹
- **Tatian (110–172):** We do not act as fools, O Greeks, nor utter idle tales when we announce that **God was born in the form of man.** (fn 125)
- **Melito of Sardis** (d. c. 180): “He that hung up the earth in space was Himself hanged up; He that fixed the heavens was fixed with nails; He that bore up the earth was born up on a tree; the Lord of all was subjected to ignominy in a naked body - God put to death! . . . [I]n order that He might not be seen, the luminaries turned away, and the day became darkened – because they slew God, who hung naked on the tree. . . . This is He who made the heaven and the earth, and in the beginning, together with the Father, fashioned man; who was announced by means of the law and the prophets; who put on a bodily form in the Virgin; who was hanged upon the tree; who was buried in the earth; who rose from the place of the dead, and ascended to the height of heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father.”²⁰
- **Irenaeus of Lyons** (120–202): “For I have shown from the Scriptures, that no one of the sons of Adam is as to everything, and absolutely, called God, or named Lord. But that He is Himself in His own right, beyond all men who ever lived, God, and Lord, and King Eternal, and the Incarnate Word, proclaimed by all the prophets, the apostles, and by the Spirit Himself, may be seen by all who have attained to even a small portion of the truth. Now, the Scriptures would not have testified these things of Him, if, like others, He had been a mere man. . . . He is the holy Lord, the Wonderful, the Counselor, the Beautiful in appearance, and the Mighty God, coming on the clouds as the Judge of all men; – all these things did the Scriptures prophesy of Him.”²¹
- **Tertullian** (c. 160–225): “Christ is also God” because “that which has come forth from God [in the virgin birth] is at once God and the

¹⁹ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 128

²⁰ Melito, *The Philosopher*, 5.

²¹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.19.2.

Son of God, and the two are one. . . . In His birth, God and man united.”²²

- **Hippolytus** (170–235): “The Logos alone of this God is from God himself; wherefore also the Logos is God, being the substance of God.”²³
 - **Caius** (180–217) [in response to those who would question the deity of Christ] “Perhaps what they allege might be credible, did not the Holy Scriptures, in the first place, contradict them. And then, besides, there are writings of certain brethren older than the times of Victor, which they wrote against the heathen in defense of the truth, and against the heresies of their time: I mean Justin and Miltiades, and Tatian and Clement, and many others, in all which divinity is ascribed to Christ. For who is ignorant of the books of Irenaeus and Melito, and the rest, which declare Christ to be God and man? All the psalms, too, and hymns of brethren, which have been written from the beginning by the faithful, celebrate Christ the Word of God, ascribing divinity to Him.”²⁴
 - **Origen** (c. 185–254): “If anyone would say that the Word of God or the Wisdom of God had a beginning, let him beware lest he direct his impiety rather against the unbegotten Father, since he denies that He was always Father, and that He has always begotten the Word, and that He always had wisdom in all previous times or ages or whatever can be imagined in priority... There can be no more ancient title of almighty God than that of Father, and it is through the Son that he is Father.”²⁵
 - **Novatian of Rome** (210–280) “Scripture has as much described Jesus Christ to be man, as moreover it has also described Christ the Lord to be God. . . . This same Jesus is called also God and the Son of God.”²⁶
- **The Son is not the Father.**
 - This point could be repeatedly demonstrated in the way that the church fathers distinguish the Son from the Father.

²² Tertullian, Ankerberg, FN 128

²³ Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, 10.29.

²⁴ Caius, *Against the Heresy of Artemon*, 2.1.

²⁵ Origen, *De Princ.* 1.2.; PG 11.132

²⁶ Novation, *On the Trinity*, Ankerberg, FN 133

- **Irenaeus** (d. c. 202): Therefore neither would the Lord, nor the Holy Spirit, nor the apostles, have ever named as God, definitely and absolutely, him who was not God, unless he were truly God; nor would they have named any one in his own person Lord, except God the Father ruling over all, and His Son who has received dominion from His Father over all creation, as this passage has it: “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at my right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool.” Here the [Scripture] represents to us the Father addressing the Son; He who gave Him the inheritance of the heathen, and subjected to Him all His enemies. Since, therefore, the Father is truly Lord, and the Son truly Lord, the Holy Spirit has fitly designated them by the title of Lord.²⁷

- As early church leaders began to consider these dual truths – namely that the Son is fully God and yet He is also distinct from the Father – they began to speak of *essential unity* and *numeric or economic distinction*.
 - **Justin Martyr** (100–165): Then I replied, “Reverting to the Scriptures, I shall endeavor to persuade you, that He who is said to have appeared to Abraham, and to Jacob, and to Moses, and who is called God, is distinct from Him who made all things, – numerically, I mean, not in will. For I affirm that He has never at any time done anything which He who made the world – above whom there is no other God – has not wished Him both to do and to engage Himself with.”²⁸

 - **Irenaeus** (d. c. 202) articulated the different roles within the Trinity in this way: “the Father planning everything well and giving His commands, the Son carrying these into execution and performing the work of creating, and the Spirit nourishing and increasing [what is made].”²⁹

 - Elsewhere **Irenaeus** explained the Triune way in which “was God revealed; for God the Father is shown forth through all

²⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.6.1.

²⁸ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 56.

²⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.38.3.

these [operations], the Spirit indeed working, and the Son ministering, while the Father was approving, and man's salvation was being accomplished."³⁰

- **Athenagoras** (d. c. 190): The Son of God is the Logos of the Father, in idea and in operation; for after the pattern of Him and by Him were all things made, the Father and the Son being one. And, the Son being in the Father and the Father in the Son, in oneness and power of spirit, the understanding and reason (νοῦς καὶ λόγος) of the Father is the Son of God. But if, in your surpassing intelligence, it occurs to you to inquire what is meant by the Son, I will state briefly that He is the first product of the Father, not as having been brought into existence (for from the beginning, God, who is the eternal mind [νοῦς], had the Logos in Himself, being from eternity instinct with Logos [λογικός]; but inasmuch as He came forth to be the idea and energizing power of all material things.³¹
- **Tertullian** (c. 160–225): “We, however, as we indeed always have done and more especially since we have been better instructed by the Paraclete, who leads men indeed into all truth), believe that there is one only God, but under the following dispensation, or οἰκονομία [economy], as it is called, that this one only God has also a Son, His Word, who proceeded from Himself, by whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made. Him we believe to have been sent by the Father into the Virgin, and to have been born of her - being both Man and God, the Son of Man and the Son of God, and to have been called by the name of Jesus Christ; we believe Him to have suffered, died, and been buried, according to the Scriptures, and, after He had been raised again by the Father and taken back to heaven, to be sitting at the right hand of the Father, and that He will come to judge the quick and the dead; who sent also from heaven from the Father, according to His own promise, the Holy Ghost, the Paraclete, the sanctifier of the faith of those who believe in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy

³⁰ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.20.6.

³¹ Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*, 10.

Ghost. That this rule of faith has come down to us from the beginning of the gospel.”³²

- It is in this context that the word Trinity began to be applied to these dual realities.
 - **Tertullian** (c. 160–225): The Father is God, and the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, and each is God; . . . when Christ should come He might be both acknowledged as God and designated as Lord, being the Son of Him who is both God and Lord. . . . As soon, however, as Christ came, and was recognized by us as the very Being who had from the beginning caused plurality (in the Divine Economy), being the second from the Father, and with the Spirit the third, and Himself declaring and manifesting the Father more fully (than He had ever been before), the title of Him who is God and Lord was at once restored to the Unity (of the Divine Nature).³³
- It is also in this context that the heresy of modalism (or Sabellianism) developed; which denies that God simultaneously exists as three distinct Persons – arguing instead that the one God sometimes manifests Himself as Father, sometimes as Son, and sometimes as Spirit.
- Biblically, that view is untenable, for reasons we have already discussed regarding the distinction of each Member of the Trinity.
- Modalists accused Trinitarians of belief in two gods. But orthodox church leaders responded by condemning Sabellianism as a heresy.
 - **Tertullian** (c. 160–225): “We have, moreover, in that other Gospel a clear revelation, i.e. of the Son’s distinction from the Father, “My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” and again, (in the third Gospel,) “Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.” But even if (we had not these passages, we meet with satisfactory evidence) after His resurrection and glorious victory over death. Now that all the restraint of His humiliation is taken away, He might, if possible, have shown Himself as the Father to so faithful a woman (as Mary

³² Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 2.

³³ Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 13:

Magdalene) when she approached to touch Him, out of love, not from curiosity, nor with Thomas' incredulity. But not so; Jesus saith unto her, "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren" (and even in this He proves Himself to be the Son; for if He had been the Father, He would have called them His children, (instead of His brethren), "and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." Now, does this mean, I ascend as the Father to the Father, and as God to God? Or as the Son to the Father, and as the Word to God? Wherefore also does this Gospel, at its very termination, intimate that these things were ever written, if it be not, to use its own words, "that ye might believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?" Whenever, therefore, you take any of the statements of this Gospel, and apply them to demonstrate the identity of the Father and the Son, supposing that they serve your views therein, you are contending against the definite purpose of the Gospel. For these things certainly are not written that you may believe that Jesus Christ is the Father, but the Son."³⁴

- **Hippolytus** (170–235): If, then, the Word was with G/od, and was also God, what follows? Would one say that he speaks of two Gods? I shall not indeed speak of two Gods, but of one; of two persons, however, and of a third economy, viz., the grace of the Holy Spirit. For the Father indeed is one, but there are two persons, because there is also the Son; and then there is the third, the Holy Spirit. The Father decrees, the Word executes, and the Son is manifested, through whom the Father is believed on. The economy of harmony is led back to one God; for God is one. It is the Father who commands, and the Son who obeys, and the Holy Spirit who gives understanding: The Father who is *above all*, and the Son who is through all, and the Holy Spirit who is in all.³⁵
- **Novatian** (210–280) [in response to the Sabellian heretics who accused Trinitarians teaching multiple gods] "Let us therefore believe this, since it is most faithful that Jesus Christ the Son of God is our Lord and God; because "in the

³⁴ Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 25.

³⁵ Hippolytus, *Against the Heresy of One Noetus*, 14.

beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and God was the Word. The same was in the beginning with God." And, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt in us." And, "My Lord and my God." And, "Whose are the fathers, and of whom according to the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for evermore." What, then, shall we say? Does Scripture set before us two Gods? How, then, does it say that "God is one?" Or is not Christ God also? How, then, is it said to Christ, "My Lord and my God?" Unless, therefore, we hold all this with fitting veneration and lawful argument, we shall reasonably be thought to have furnished a scandal to the heretics, not assuredly by the fault of the heavenly Scriptures, which never deceive; but by the presumption of human error, whereby they have chosen to be heretics."³⁶

- **Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology*:** "The early church rejected both dynamic monarchianism and modalism as being far removed from its traditional understanding of the oneness of God and the threenesses of the Father, Son (who is fully divine), and Spirit. Dynamic monarchianism considered Jesus Christ to be a mere man, while modalistic monarchianism emphasized the oneness of the Godhead to such an extent that the three were lost in the one. The church found neither of these views acceptable."³⁷
- Thus, early Christians affirmed both the reality that there is only one God (in contrast to pagan polytheism); while also affirming a distinction between the Father and the Son – each of whom is fully God.
- **The Holy Spirit is God.**
 - **John Ankerberg and John Weldon:** "Although the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was theologically less refined in the early Church than the doctrine of Jesus Christ, there was still recognition that the Holy Spirit was both personal and God."³⁸
 - **Origen** [Refuting the notion that the Holy Spirit is not the eternal Third Member of the Trinity] "For if this were the case, the Holy

³⁶ Novatian, *A Treatise on the Trinity*, 30

³⁷ Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 236.

³⁸ John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Knowing the Truth about the Trinity* (Kindle edition), chapter 6.

Spirit would never be reckoned in the Unity of the Trinity, i.e., along with the unchangeable Father and His Son, unless He had always been the Holy Spirit.”³⁹

○ **The Holy Spirit is not the Father nor the Son.**

- **Clement of Rome** (d. c. 99): “Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Scepter of the majesty of God, did not come in the pomp of pride or arrogance, although He might have done so, but in a lowly condition, as the Holy Spirit had declared regarding Him.”⁴⁰
- **The Martyrdom of Polycarp** (2nd century): “We wish you, brethren, all happiness, while you walk according to the doctrine of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; with whom be glory to God the Father and the Holy Spirit, for the salvation of His holy elect, after whose example the blessed Polycarp suffered, following in whose steps may we too be found in the kingdom of Jesus Christ!”⁴¹
- **Tertullian** (c. 160–225): “Thus the connection of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Paraclete, produces three coherent Persons, who are yet distinct One from Another. These Three are one essence, not one Person, as it is said, ‘I and my Father are One,’ in respect of unity of substance not singularity of number.”⁴²
- **Origen** (185–254): “As, then, after those first discussions which, according to the requirements of the case, we held at the beginning regarding the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, it seemed right that we should retrace our steps, and show that the same God was the creator and founder of the world, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, i.e., that the God of the law and of the prophets and of the Gospel was one and the same; and that, in the next place, it ought to be shown, with respect to Christ, in what manner He who had formerly been demonstrated to be the Word and Wisdom of God became man; it remains that we now return with all possible brevity to the subject of the Holy Spirit.
It is time, then, that we say a few words to the best of our ability regarding the Holy Spirit, whom our Lord and Savior in the Gospel according to John has named the Paraclete. For as it is the same God Himself, and the same Christ, so also is it the same Holy Spirit

³⁹ Origen, *De Principiis*, 1.3.4.

⁴⁰ Clement, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 16.

⁴¹ *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 22.

⁴² Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 25.

who was in the prophets and apostles, i.e., either in those who believed in God before the advent of Christ, or in those who by means of Christ have sought refuge in God.”⁴³

- **On this basis, the Ante-Nicene Fathers often refers to God in ways that emphasize all three Members of the Trinity.**
 - **Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology*:** “An early description of the relationship between the three referred to the Son as the Word of the Father and to the Spirit as the Wisdom of the Father; these two were the two “hands” of the Father as he created. In an interesting reference to the creation of the sun and moon on the fourth day of creation, Theophilus noted: “The three days which were before the lights are types of the Trinity – of God, his Word, and his Wisdom” [*To Autolytus*, 2.15]. Appealing to Proverbs 3:19 – 20 and 8:22 – 31, Irenaeus ‘demonstrated that the Word, namely the Son, was always with the Father; and that Wisdom also, which is the Spirit, was present with him, anterior [prior] to all creation.... There is therefore one God, who by the Word and Wisdom created and arranged all things [Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.20.3–4].”⁴⁴
 - **Clement of Rome (c. 30–95):** “Why are there strifes, and tumults, and divisions, and schisms, and wars among you? Have we not one God and one Christ? Is there not one Spirit of grace poured out upon us?”⁴⁵
 - **Ignatius (d. c. 117):** “[You are] stones of the temple of the Father, prepared for the building of God the Father, and drawn up on high by the instrument of Jesus Christ, which is the cross, making use of the Holy Spirit as a rope, while your faith was the means by which you ascended, and your love the way which led up to God.”⁴⁶
 - ***Martyrdom of Polycarp* (second century):** “I have collected these things, when they had almost faded away through the lapse of time, that the Lord Jesus Christ may also gather me along with His elect into His heavenly kingdom to whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory forever and ever. Amen.”⁴⁷

⁴³ Origen, *De Principiis*, 2.7.1

⁴⁴ Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology*, 233.

⁴⁵ Clement of Rome, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 46.

⁴⁶ Ignatius, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, Shorter, 9

⁴⁷ *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 22

- **Justin Martyr** (c. 100–165) “For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water.”⁴⁸
- **Irenaeus**: “When the Lord told his disciples to go and teach all nations and to baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, he conferred on them the power of giving men new life in God. He had promised through the prophets that in these last days he would pour out his Spirit on his servants and handmaids, and that they would prophesy. So when the Son of God became the Son of Man, the Spirit also descended upon him, becoming accustomed in this way to dwelling with the human race, to living in men and to inhabiting God’s creation. The Spirit accomplished the Father’s will in men who had grown old in sin, and gave them new life in Christ.”⁴⁹
- **Tertullian** (c. 160–225): “We define that there are two, the Father and the Son, and three with the Holy Spirit, and this number is made by the pattern of salvation... [which] **brings about unity in trinity**, interrelating the three, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are three, not in dignity, but in degree, not in substance but in form, not in power but in kind. They are of one substance and power, because there is one God from whom these degrees, forms and kinds devolve in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”⁵⁰
- **Hippolytus** (170–235): [It is] the Father who is above all, the Son who is through all, and the Holy Spirit who is in all. And we cannot otherwise think of one God, but by believing in truth in Father and Son and Holy Spirit. . . . For it is through this Trinity that the Father is glorified. . . . The whole Scriptures, then, proclaim this truth.”⁵¹
- **Origen** (185–254): “Moreover, nothing in the Trinity can be called greater or less, since the fountain of divinity alone contains all things by His word and reason, and by the Spirit of His mouth sanctifies all things which are worthy of sanctification.”⁵²
- **Gregory Thaumaturgus of Neo-Caesarea** (205–270) “All [the persons] are one nature, one essence, one will, and are called the Holy Trinity; and

⁴⁸ Justin, *First Apology*, 61.

⁴⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* by Saint Irenaeus, bishop (Lib. 3, 17. 1-3)

⁵⁰ Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 23; PL 2.156-7.

⁵¹ Hippolytus, Ankerberg, FN 129.

⁵² Origen, Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 4, p. 255, de Principiis, I. iii. 7

these also are names subsistent, one nature in three persons, and one genus [kind].”⁵³

3) CREEDAL ARTICULATION:

- All of the patristic evidence we have considered so far has been from before the fourth century of church history. It thus becomes obvious that the councils and creeds of the fourth century did not invent anything new, they simply affirmed and articulated what is established in Scripture.
- With the ushering in of peace for Christians within the Roman empire, Christian theologians now had greater time to focus their attention on discussions related to the Trinity.
 - **James White:** While we can find a deep witness to a belief in one God and in the deity of Christ, from the beginning, the specific relationship of the Father, Son, and Spirit was not the first priority for those writers [during the centuries of persecution before Constantine] who put quill and ink to paper. . . . The end of persecution brought an almost immediate refocusing of the church’s attention upon the issues of the Trinity and the deity of Christ. Indeed, the first major council of the church, called by Emperor Constantine in Nicaea in A. D. 325, addressed the issue of the nature of Christ a scant dozen years after the persecutions ended.⁵⁴
- The Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325)
 - Nicaea (also spelled Nicaea) was also known as New Constantinople
 - This was the first ecumenical since the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 (in A.D. 49)
 - The primary controversy surrounded the nature of Christ – was He equal with God in the essence of His deity, or was He a created being who was not equal with God?

Franklin H. Littell: “Arianism taught that Christ was not eternal but made by the Father to do His creative work. Some taught he was elevated to the position of Son of God because of his great virtue. The teaching appealed to both strict monotheists and to tribesmen who knew all about great men who were elected to be gods. The chief theological champion of what finally

⁵³ Ankerberg, FN 131.

⁵⁴ James R. White, *The Forgotten Trinity* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1998), 178.

became official was Athanasius (c 296–373), exiled five times as the tides of political influence and controversy in church synods ebbed away or flowed toward his defense of the true deity of God the Son” (*Illustrated History of Christianity* [New York: Continuum, 2003], p. 44)

- Constantine convened the council to bring unity to the Christian church. He was attempting to put an end to the doctrinal controversies caused by the different viewpoints.

The New Catholic Encyclopedia: “Captivated by Christianity, Constantine wanted to give it the protection of the state; for, in line with the old Roman idea, he regarded himself as Pontifex Maximus of Christianity, ‘bishop in matters external’ (Vita Const. 4.24). As such, he thought it his task to settle a controversy that was upsetting the politico religious unity of his Christian empire. . . . When another synod in Antioch late in 324 failed to effect the desired unity, the Emperor decided to settle the controversy by a general synod of the more important bishops of the world” (vol. 10, p. 432)

- Three different positions on the **deity of Christ** were put forward at Nicea:
 - **Hetero-ousious** (“of a different substance”) – This was the view of Arius (256-336)
 - Logos (Christ) is not co-eternal, co-essential with, or co-equal with the Father. He was a son born, such that there was a moment before the creation of the world when the Son was begotten or created. A “logical” position; “If the Father begat the Son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence: and from this it is evident, that there was a time when the Son was not. It therefore necessarily follows that he had his subsistence from nothing.”
 - **Homo-ousious** (“of the same substance”) – This was the view of Alexander of Alexandria as well as Athanasius (who was a deacon at the time of the Council).
 - Logos (Christ) is co-eternal with the Father, never to change.
 - **Homoi-ousios** (“of a similar substance”) – This view was an attempt to mediate between the other two views. It taught that the Son was divine but not deity in the sense of being of the same nature as the Father. Eusebius of Caesarea, for example, was one who held this view but then

(upon fully understanding the Arian position) was convinced of the orthodox position.

- The Council
 - The disputing first led to a council called by Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria. 100 bishops of Egypt attended who excommunicated Arius and his followers (including Eusebius of Nicomedia.)

Everett Ferguson: “Arius was a Libyan by birth but received his religious education from Lucian of Antioch (a martyr in 312). He was already a popular preacher in Alexandria when he challenged his bishop Alexander’s teaching that the Father and the Son possess equal eternity.

Arius affirmed, “There was (once) when Christ was not.” Understanding “begetting” as equivalent to “creating,” Arius taught that Jesus Christ was not derived from the substance of the Father, but, as the first and highest of God’s creations, became the instrument of all the rest of creation.

Bishop Alexander secured a condemnation of Arius’s teaching at a synod in Alexandria (317 or 318) that sent a letter to other bishops concerning the exclusion of Arius from fellowship. Arius put his views in writing and appealed to his friends, notably Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia, for support. Both sides circulated conflicting correspondence” (*Church History*, 193).

Mark Noll: “When in 318 [Arius] communicated his views to his bishop, Alexander, he so stressed the unified, eternal character of God the Father that the Son was reduced to a lower status. Arius, who called Alexander a Sabellian for stressing the unity of the Father and the Son, for his part thoroughly subordinated the Son to the Father. In response, many in the church wondered how such a subordinated Christ – who was more than human, yet less than fully God – could impart salvation to humanity. To Arius, however, the transcendence of the Father and the need to pursue logically the meaning of divine unity mattered more than anything else” (*Turning Points* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997], 49).

- More disputing occurred causing the Emperor Constantine to call a major council in Nicea. **318 bishops attended** along with presbyters and deacons – totaled 2,000 church leaders in all. The event lasted 41 days.

Mark Noll: “On May 20, 325, the Christian church entered a new era. On that day about 320 bishops gathered at Nicaea, then a major city in Bithynia (now small-town Iznik in Turkey). The occasion marked the first “ecumenical,” or worldwide, council of the church. Its business – to adjudicate the meaning of Jesus’ divinity – dealt with the very heart of the Christian faith. What made the council such an extraordinarily important turning point was not just the doctrinal question at stake but the way in which political and social forces combined with the critical theological issue. The idea for the council did not come from the bishops. Rather, they had been summoned by the great Roman emperor himself, Constantine. After such a summons and after dealing with such an issue, the church would never be the same” (p. 49).

- The position of Arius was immediately rejected by the council.

Robert Baker and John Landers: “After preliminary matters had been addressed, a confession of faith by Arius was presented. It defined the nature of Christ as being different from that of God and viewed Christ as a created being, greater than humans and worthy of worship but less than God...Athanasius, a young deacon from the church in Alexandria and the champion of the orthodox view, presented the [Nicene] creed to the council” (*A Summary of Christian History* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005], p. 62)

- The emperor wavered back and forth (motivated primarily by political ends) as the two major positions were debated – he leaned toward the third position of Eusebius of Caesarea. It became obvious that this compromise position would not pass as Homo-ousios supporters insisted on the inclusion of this word. Eventually, Constantine approved of the Nicene Creed.

Robert Baker and John Landers: “With Constantine’s approval the creed was adopted and a decree of banishment was issued against Arius and those who followed his view. Christians who had been victims of imperial power a few years before used imperial power to persecute one another. Constantine later changed his mind and recalled Arius, banishing Athanasius. This complete doctrinal reversal meant nothing to his political mind. Constantine probably had little grasp of Christian doctrine. His deferred baptism, moral and ethical standards, and retention of the pagan office that guaranteed his place as a Roman god after death were evidence of his spiritual character” (p. 63)

- The Results of the Council
 - The council thus adopted the *Nicene Creed* with its short but direct statement of deity but which lacked precision. It did not speak to the question of the deity of the Holy Spirit (primarily because that was not the issue being debated at the time) giving rise to future controversy about the Trinity.
 - From a political standpoint, Constantine's purpose was unity – not purity.
 - The position of Arius was rejected with only two bishops (Theognis of Nicaea and Eusebius of Nicomedia) and Arius not signing the creed. These were banished to Illyria. Arius' books were burned.

- **The Nicene Creed**

"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 of his Father, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance [*homoousios consubstantialem*] with the Father. By whom all things were made, both which be in heaven and in earth. Who for us men and for our salvation came down [from heaven] and was incarnate and was made man. He suffered and the third day he rose again, and ascended into heaven. And he shall come again to judge both the quick and the dead. And [we believe] in the Holy Ghost. And whosoever shall say that there was a time when the Son of God was not, or that before he was begotten he was not, or that he was made of things that were not, or that he is of a different substance or essence (from the Father) or that he is a creature, or subject to change or conversion – all that so say, the Catholic [Universal] and Apostolic Church anathematizes them."

- The Significance of the Nicene Creed

Everett Ferguson: "Nicaea marked a crucial development in doctrinal history. By adopting a creed backed up by anathemas, it made creeds into something more than confessions of faith. Instead of being summaries of catechetical instruction to be confessed at baptism, as they had been, creeds in the fourth century became formulations of councils. At Nicaea it was not catechumens who needed a creed, but bishops. . . . Instead of being only a confession of faith, the creed of Nicaea became a test of fellowship" (*Church History* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005], 1.197).

- The Council of Nicaea and the Celebration of Easter

Robert H. Brumback: “The council of Nicea also fixed the date for the observance of Easter. The name “Easter” comes from Ostra, goddess of the morning light or of the return of the sun in the spring. The eastern church and the western church differed upon the observance of the date of this festival. Many of the churches observed it on the Sunday after that day. The Council of Nicea settled the matter by fixing the day to be observed as the first Sunday after the first full moon which appears next after March 21” (*History of the Church through the Ages*, [Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1957], 43).

- In a letter to those not present at the Council (from Eusebius, *The Life of Constantine*, 3.18-20), Constantine explained the decision regarding Easter:

“When the question relative to the sacred festival of Easter arose, it was universally thought that it would be convenient that all should keep the feast on one day; for what could be more beautiful and more desirable, than to see this festival, through which we receive the hope of immortality, celebrated by all with one accord, and in the same manner? It was declared to be particularly unworthy for this, the holiest of all festivals, to follow the custom (the calculation) of the Jews, who have soiled their hands with the most fearful of crimes, and whose minds were blinded. . . . We ought not, therefore, to have anything in common with the Jews, for the Savior has shown us another way; our worship follows a more legitimate and more convenient course; and consequently, in unanimously adopting this mode, we desire, dearest brethren, to separate ourselves from the detestable company of the Jews, for it is truly shameful for us to hear them boast that without their direction we could not keep this feast. How can they be in the right, they who, after the death of the Saviour, have no longer been led by reason but by wild violence, as their delusion may urge them? . . . [It is] your duty not to tarnish your soul by communications with such wicked people. Our Saviour has left us only one festival day of our redemption. . . . Think then how unseemly it is that on the same day some should be fasting whilst others are seated at a banquet; and that after Easter, some should be rejoicing at feasts, whilst others are still observing a strict fast. For this reason, Divine Providence wills that this custom should be rectified and regulated in a uniform way; and everyone, I hope, will agree upon this point. As, on the one hand, it is our duty not to have anything in common with the murderers of our Lord; and as, on the other, the custom now followed by the Churches of the West, of the South and of the North, and by some of those of the East, is the most acceptable. . . . You should consider not only that the number of

churches in these provinces makes a majority, but also that it is right we should have nothing in common with the Jews. To sum up in few words: By the unanimous judgment of all, it has been decided that the most holy festival of Easter should be everywhere celebrated on one and the same day, and it is not seemly that in so holy a thing there should be any division. As this is the state of the case, accept joyfully the divine favour, and this truly divine command; for all which takes place in assemblies of the bishops ought to be regarded as proceeding from the will of God.”

- The affirmation of Christ’s deity was overwhelmingly recognized by those who participated in the Council of Nicaea. Of the 318 bishops who attended, 316 signed the Nicene Creed. The two who didn’t were diehard supporters of Arius.
- In addition to emphasizing the deity of Christ (the doctrine that had been the focus of Nicaea), they also emphasized the deity and personhood of the Holy Spirit.
- Later creeds, such as the Athanasian Creed and the Apostles’ Creed exhibited this same Trinitarian emphasis.

Conclusion:

- 1) The Trinity is a doctrine that is established on the authority of Scripture. It was affirmed by Christian leaders in the centuries following the apostles. And it was articulated in creedal form during the fourth century at the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople.
- 2) An objective and responsible consideration of Scripture and early church history demonstrates without a doubt that the doctrine of the Trinity was not *invented* in the fourth century – it was not the result of Roman paganism influencing Christianity; nor was it the product of Constantine’s conversion.

Roger E. Olson: “A few groups flatly deny the doctrine of the Trinity as false and perhaps an invention of certain church fathers unduly influenced by the Roman emperor Constantine. But church history proves these groups wrong. The very earliest church fathers believed in the Trinity, and the Trinity is strongly implied in Scripture. In fact, there's no way to make sense of Scripture without it!”⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Roger E. Olson, 144–145, *Finding God in the Shack*, IVP, 2009 Downers Grove, IL

Fred von Kamecke: Was the Trinity invented? No...The word "Trinity" never appears, but the reality to which the term points is everywhere evident. Since it is a concept so deeply imbedded in the Scriptures, it is God himself who is responsible for it. This is the eternal, unchanging nature of this incredible God.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Fred von Kamecke, *Busted: Exposing Popular Myths about Christianity*, page number needed: