

## 18. The Ecumenical Councils of the Early Church

LOGATION	DATE	EMPEROR	KEY PARTICIPANTS	MAJOR OUTCOMES
NICEA	325	Constantine	Arius Alexander Eusebius of Nicomedia Eusebius of Caesarea Hosius Athanasius	Declared Son <i>homoousios</i> (coequal, consubstantial, and coeternal) with Father. Condemned Arius. Drafted original form of Nicene Creed.
CONSTANTINOPLE	381	Theodosius	Meletius Gregory of Nazianzus Gregory of Nyssa	Confirmed results of Council of Nicea. Produced revised Nicene Creed. Ended Trinitarian Controversy. Affirmed deity of the Holy Spirit. Condemned Apollinarianism.
EPHESUS	431	Theodosius II	Cyril Nestorius	Declared Nestorianism heretical. Accepted by implication Alexandrian Christology. Condemned Pelagius.
CHALCEDON	451	Marcian	Leo I Dioscurus Eutyches	Declared Christ's two natures unmixed, unchanged, undivided, inseparable. Condemned Eutychianism.
CONSTANTINOPLE	553	Justinian	Eutychius	Condemned "Three Chapters" to gain support of Monophysites. Affirmed Cyrillian interpretation of Chalcedon.
CONSTANTINOPLE	680–681	Constantine IV		Rejected Monothelitism. Condemned Pope Honorius (d. 638) as heretical.
NICEA	787	Constantine VI		Declared veneration of icons and statues legitimate.

### NOTHING NEW

#### PREFACE TO THE BOOK OF CONCORD

<sup>3</sup> Subsequently many churches and schools committed themselves to **this confession** as the **contemporary symbol of their faith** in the chief articles in controversy over against both the papacy and all sorts of factions. They referred and appealed to it without either controversy or doubt in a Christian and unanimous interpretation thereof. They have held fast and loyally to the doctrine that is contained in it, that is based solidly on the divine Scriptures, and that is also briefly summarized in the approved ancient symbols, **recognizing the doctrine as the ancient consensus which the universal and orthodox church of Christ has believed, fought for against many heresies and errors, and repeatedly affirmed.**

<sup>8</sup> ...This we did that we might testify and declare to our most gracious lord, His Roman Imperial Majesty, and to everyone else that **it was in no way our disposition and intention to adopt, to defend, or to spread a different or a new doctrine.** Rather, with divine assistance, it was our intention to remain and abide loyally by the truth once recognized and confessed at Augsburg in the year 1530, in the confidence and hope that thereby the adversaries of pure evangelical doctrine would be constrained to desist from their fabricated slanders and defamation of us and that other good-hearted people would have been reminded and stimulated by this our reiterated and repeated confession the more seriously to investigate the truth of the divine Word that alone gives salvation, to commit themselves to it, and for the salvation of their souls and their eternal welfare to abide by it and persist in it in a Christian way without any further disputation and dissension.

## ARIUS AND THE COUNCILS

### AUGSBURG CONFESSION, ART. I. GOD

<sup>1</sup> We unanimously hold and teach, in accordance with the decree of the **Council of Nicaea**,<sup>2</sup> that there is one divine essence, which is called and which is truly God, and that there are three persons in this one divine essence, equal in power and alike eternal: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. <sup>3</sup> All three are one divine essence, eternal, without division....

<sup>5</sup> Therefore **all the heresies** which are contrary to this article are rejected. Among these are the heresy of the Manichaeans,<sup>5</sup> who assert that there are two gods, one good and one evil; also that of the Valentinians,<sup>6</sup> **Arians**,<sup>7</sup> Eunomians,<sup>8</sup> Mohammedans,<sup>9</sup> and others like them; <sup>6</sup> also that of the Samosatenes,<sup>1</sup> old and new, who hold that there is only one person and sophistically assert that the other two, the Word and the Holy Spirit, are not necessarily distinct persons but that the Word signifies a physical word or voice and that the Holy Spirit is a movement induced in creatures.

FC,EP VIII, <sup>22</sup> **3.** That Christ is not true, natural, and eternal God, **as Arius held.**

### APOLOGY, ARTICLE III. CHRIST

<sup>1</sup> The opponents approve<sup>7</sup> our third article, in which we confess that there are two natures in Christ, namely, that the Word assumed the human nature into the unity of his person; that this same Christ suffered and died to reconcile the Father to us; and that he was raised to rule, justify, and sanctify the believers, etc., according to **the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.**

### FC SD XII. ERRONEOUS ARTICLES OF THE NEW ANTI-TRINITARIANS

<sup>37</sup> **1.** Some Anti-Trinitarians reject and condemn the old, approved symbols, **the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds**, both as to content and terminology, and instead teach that there is not one eternal, divine essence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but that, as there are three distinct persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so also each person has a distinct essence separate from the other two. Some teach that all three persons in the Trinity, like any three distinct and essentially separate human persons, have the same power, wisdom, majesty, and glory, while others teach that the three persons in the Trinity are unequal in their essence and properties.

*NOTE in TAPPERT: A greater variety of creedal formulations appeared in the East than in the West. When the **Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325)** rejected the teaching of Arius, it expressed its position by adopting one of the current Eastern symbols and inserting into it some anti-Arian phrases. At the **Council of Constantinople (381)** some minor changes were made in this Nicene Creed, as we still call it, and it was reaffirmed at the **Council of Chalcedon (451)**. In the ninth century the filioque ("and the Son," in the third article) was first inserted in the West, and it became a bone of contention between East and West especially in the eleventh century.*

## SCRIPTURE, COUNCILS AND OTHER WRITINGS

### FC SOLID DECLARATION, ANTITHESES:

<sup>17</sup> **1.** In the first place, we reject and condemn all heresies and errors which **the primitive, ancient, orthodox church** rejected and condemned **on the certain and solid basis of the holy and divine Scriptures.**

<sup>18</sup> **2.** In the second place, we reject and condemn all the sects and heresies that are rejected in the aforementioned documents.

FC EPITOME, RULE AND NORM:

<sup>1</sup> **1. We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments** are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged, as it is written in Ps. 119:105, “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” And St. Paul says in Gal. 1:8, “Even if an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed.”

1. The Scriptures
2. Other Writings
3. Symbols, Creeds, Confessions of faith

<sup>2</sup> **Other writings of ancient and modern teachers**, whatever their names, should not be put on a par with Holy Scripture. Every single one of them should be subordinated to the Scriptures and should be received in no other way and no further than as witnesses to the fashion in which the doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved in post-apostolic times.

<sup>3</sup> **2. Immediately after the time of the apostles — in fact, already during their lifetime— false teachers and heretics invaded the church. Against these the ancient church formulated symbols (that is, brief and explicit confessions) which were accepted as the unanimous, catholic, Christian faith and confessions of the orthodox and true church, namely, the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. We pledge ourselves to these, and we hereby reject all heresies and teachings which have been introduced into the church of God contrary to them.**

FC SD VIII

Likewise, John 6:48–58 says that Christ’s flesh is a life-giving food, and according to the **Council of Ephesus** decreed that the flesh of Christ has the power to give life. Many other noble testimonies of the ancient orthodox church<sup>7</sup> concerning this article are recorded elsewhere.

<sup>60</sup> **According to the Scriptures** we should and must believe that Christ received all this according to his human nature and that it was all given and communicated to the assumed human nature in Christ. ... <sup>61</sup> **In this matter we have not developed a new doctrine of our own, but we accept and repeat the statements which the ancient orthodox church made herein on the basis of sound passages of the Holy Scriptures**, namely, that such divine power, life, might, majesty, and glory were not given to Christ’s assumed human nature in the same way in which the Father communicated his own essence and all the divine properties from eternity to the Son according to the divine nature so that he is of one essence with the Father and equal with God. ...

**Council of Nicaea – 13 times**  
**Council of Constantinople -- SA IV**  
1 refers to ancient councils, Ap IV 32 not by name  
**Council of Ephesus – FC SD VIII, 76**  
(cites canon 11) and 59  
**Council of Chalcedon – FC SD VIII, 18, 46** maybe not from Chalcedon, 73 quoted but not by name; **SA IV 19**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Council of Constantinople –**  
maybe FC SD VIII 62, not by name  
**Ancient councils -- SA IV 1** refers to ancient councils

**These and similar erroneous doctrines have been justly rejected and condemned in the ancient approved councils on the basis of the Scriptures.**<sup>8</sup> For in no way should any conversion, blending, or equalization of the natures in Christ or of their essential properties be taught or conceded.

## NON-DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS FROM THE COUNCILS

### AUGSBURG CONFESSION, ART. XXIV. THE MASS

<sup>34</sup> Inasmuch, then, as the Mass is not a sacrifice to remove the sins of others, whether living or dead, but should be a Communion in which the priest and others receive the sacrament for themselves, it is observed among us in the following manner: On holy days, and at other times when communicants are present, Mass is held and those who desire it are communicated. <sup>35</sup> Thus the Mass is preserved among us in its proper use, the use which was formerly observed in the church and which can be proved by St. Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 11:20ff. and by many statements of the Fathers. <sup>36</sup> For **Chrysostom** reports how the priest stood every day, inviting some to Communion and forbidding others to approach. <sup>37</sup> **The ancient canons** also indicate that one man officiated and communicated the other priests and deacons, <sup>38</sup> for the words of the **Nicene canon** read, "After the priests the deacons shall receive the sacrament in order from the bishop or priest."

### AUGSBURG CONFESSION, ART. XXVIII

<sup>65</sup> The apostles directed that one should abstain from blood and from what is strangled. Who observes this prohibition now? Those who do not observe it commit no sin, for the apostles did not wish to burden consciences with such bondage but forbade such eating for a time to avoid offense. <sup>66</sup> One must pay attention to **the chief article of Christian doctrine**, and this is not abrogated by the decree.

<sup>67</sup> Scarcely any of **the ancient canons** are observed according to the letter, and many of the regulations fall into disuse from day to day even among those who observe such ordinance most jealously. <sup>68</sup> It is impossible to give counsel or help to consciences unless this mitigation is practiced, that one recognizes that such rules are not to be deemed necessary and that disregard of them does not injure consciences.

### APOLOGY TO THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION, ART. XI, CONFESSION

<sup>4</sup> The openly wicked and the despisers of the sacraments are excommunicated. We do this according to both the Gospel<sup>2</sup> and **the ancient canons**. <sup>5</sup> But we do not prescribe a set time because not everyone is ready in the same way at the same time. In fact, if everyone rushed in at the same time, the people could not be heard and instructed properly. **The ancient canons** and the Fathers do not appoint a set time. **The canon says only this: "If any enter the church of God and are found never to commune, let them be admonished. If they still do not commune, let them come to penitence. If they commune, let them not be permanently expelled. If they do not commune, let them be expelled."**<sup>3</sup> Christ says (1 Cor. 11:29) that those who receive in an unworthy manner receive judgment upon themselves. Therefore our pastors do not force those who are not ready to use the sacraments.

### APOLOGY TO THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION, ART. XIV. ECCLESIASTICAL ORDER

<sup>1</sup> With the proviso that we employ **canonical ordination**, they accept Article XIV, where we say that no one should be allowed to administer the Word and the sacraments in the church unless he is duly called.<sup>3</sup> On this matter we have given frequent testimony in the assembly to our deep desire to maintain the church polity and various ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, although they were created by human authority. We know that the Fathers had good and useful reasons for instituting ecclesiastical discipline in the manner described **by the ancient canons**. <sup>2</sup> But the bishops either force our priests to forsake and condemn the sort of doctrine we have confessed, or else, in their unheard

of cruelty, they kill the unfortunate and innocent men. This keeps our priests from acknowledging such bishops. Thus the cruelty of the bishops is the reason for **the abolition of canonical government in some places**, despite our earnest desire to keep it. Let them see to it how they will answer to God for disrupting the church.

<sup>3</sup> In this issue our consciences are clear and we dare not approve the cruelty of those who persecute this teaching, for we know that our confession is true, godly, and catholic. <sup>4</sup> **We know that the church is present among those who rightly teach the Word of God and rightly administer the sacraments.** It is not present among those who seek to destroy the Word of God with their edicts, who even butcher anyone who teaches what is right and true, though the canons themselves are gentler with those who violate them. <sup>5</sup> **Furthermore, we want at this point to declare our willingness to keep the ecclesiastical and canonical polity, provided that the bishops stop raging against our churches.** This willingness will be our defense, both before God and among all nations, present and future, against the charge that we have undermined the authority of the bishops. Thus men may read that, despite our protest against the unjust cruelty of the bishops, we could not obtain justice.

#### APOLOGY TO THE AUGSBURG CONF., ART. XV. HUMAN TRADITIONS IN THE CHURCH

<sup>50</sup> ... Here Paul is our constant champion; everywhere he insists that these observances neither justify nor are necessary over and above the righteousness of faith. <sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, liberty in these matters should be used moderately, lest the weak be offended and become more hostile to the true teaching of the Gospel because of an abuse of liberty. **Nothing should be changed in the accustomed rites without good reason, and to foster harmony those ancient customs should be kept which can be kept without sin or without great disadvantage.** <sup>52</sup> This is what we teach. In this very assembly we have shown ample evidence of our willingness to observe adiaphora with others, even where this involved some disadvantage to us. We believed that the greatest possible public harmony, without offense to consciences, should be preferred to all other advantages, but we shall have more to say about this whole issue when we discuss vows and ecclesiastical authority.

#### APOLOGY TO THE AUGSBURG CONFESSIOIN, ART. XXII, BOTH KINDS IN THE SACRAMENT

<sup>3</sup> In order that no one might question these words and interpret them as if they apply only to priests, Paul shows in 1 Cor. 11:20ff. that the whole assembly of the congregation in Corinth received both kinds. <sup>4</sup> This usage continued in the church for a long time, as can be demonstrated from history and from writings of the Fathers. <sup>65</sup> In several places Cyprian mentions that the cup was given to laymen in his time. <sup>7</sup> <sup>6</sup> St. Jerome also states that the priests who administered the sacrament distributed the blood of Christ to the people. <sup>8</sup> <sup>7</sup> Pope Gelasius himself ordered that the sacrament was not to be divided. <sup>98</sup> **Not a single canon can be found which requires the reception of only one kind.** Nobody knows when or through whom this custom of receiving only one kind was introduced, although Cardinal Cusanus mentions when the use was approved. <sup>1</sup> <sup>10</sup> **It is evident that such a custom, introduced contrary to God's command and also contrary to the ancient canons, is unjust.** <sup>11</sup> Accordingly it is not proper to burden the consciences of those who desire to observe the sacrament according to Christ's institution or to compel them to act contrary to the arrangement of our Lord Christ. <sup>12</sup> Because the division of the sacrament is contrary to the institution of Christ, the customary carrying about of the sacrament in processions is also omitted by us. *{Tappert Footnote 1: Nicholas of Cusa, (1401–1464), Epistle III to the Bohemians, refers the authorization for the withdrawal of the cup to the Fourth Lateran Council, 1215.}*

## APOLOGY TO THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION, ART. XXIII, THE MARRIAGE OF PRIESTS

<sup>23</sup> *Fourth*, the pontifical regulation also disagrees with **the canons of the councils**. The ancient canons do not forbid marriage, nor dissolve marriages that have been contracted, though they remove those from the public ministry who married while in office. In those times such a dismissal was an act of kindness. These new canons do not represent the decision of the synods but the private judgment of the popes. They forbid the contracting of marriages and dissolve them once they have been contracted, and all this in open defiance of Christ's command (Matt. 19:6), "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder."<sup>24</sup> In the Confutation our opponents shriek that the councils have commanded celibacy. We do not object to the councils, for they do allow marriage under certain circumstances; but **we do object to the regulations which the Roman pontiffs have set up since the ancient synods and contrary to their authority. The pontiffs show contempt for the authority of the synods** while they want others to accept it as sacrosanct.<sup>25</sup> Thus the regulation about perpetual celibacy is peculiar to this new pontifical tyranny, and with good reason: Daniel says that it is characteristic of Antichrist's kingdom to despise women (11:37).

## SMALCALD ARTICLES, 3 III,

<sup>22</sup> Here, too, there was nothing but anguish and misery. Some thought that they would never get out of purgatory because, according to **the ancient canons**, seven years of penance were required for a single mortal sin.<sup>3</sup> <sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, confidence was placed in man's own works of satisfaction. If the satisfaction could have been perfect, full confidence would have been placed in it, and neither faith nor Christ would have been of any value. But such confidence was impossible. Even if one had done penance in this way for a hundred years, one would still not have know whether this was enough. This is a case of always doing penance but never coming to repentance.

## PPP: TESTIMONY FROM HISTORY

<sup>12</sup> **5. The Council of Nicaea** decided that the bishop of Alexandria should administer the churches in the East and the bishop of Rome should administer the suburban churches, that is, those that were in the Roman provinces in the West.<sup>5</sup> Originally, therefore, the authority of the Roman bishop grew out of a decision of **a council** and is of human right, for if the bishop of Rome had his superiority by divine right, it would not have been lawful for **the council** to withdraw any right from him and transfer it to the bishop of Alexandria. In fact, all the Eastern bishops should forever have sought ordination and confirmation from the Roman bishop.

<sup>13</sup> **6. Again, the Council of Nicaea** decided that bishops should be elected by their own churches in the presence of one or more neighboring bishops.<sup>6</sup> <sup>14</sup> This was also observed in the West and in the Latin churches, as Cyprian and Augustine testify.

### Answers to Quiz #4

1. The Christ is the anointed One, promised in the Old Testament. He is the appointed Savior from sin. It tells us His work.
2. Lord means that He is the Son of God or God Himself. It tells us who He is.
3. He denied the definition of the Christ as One who suffers and dies.
4. The eunuch already believed the Old Testament. He only needed to be told Who the Christ was.
5. "...baptized into the Lord Jesus" is descriptive of what we receive when baptized. We received a Lord, who saves us from sin. The other is prescriptive of the words used when baptizing.
6. Is Jesus the Christ? Did the Christ come in Jesus' human flesh?