

Arianism & the Church's Attempts to Control Heresy

Setting of Imperial Christian Church during Constantine's empire:

- ❖ **Power shifts:**
 - ❖ From west (Rome) to East (Constantinople)
 - ❖ From pagans to Christians – new power base
 - ❖ Economic shifts – as recipients of Constantine's benefactions in the form of salaries for clergy, building of churches, sponsoring of councils and canons.
- ❖ **Identity changes:**
 - ❖ From identity as martyrs and pariahs of Roman Empire to new spiritual elite in form of roles as bishops, monks, and virgins.
 - ❖ From local definitions of the orthodox faith to attempts to establish a universal standard of faith and enforce guidelines of heresy.
 - ❖ Imperial worship – the building of basilicas and the formalization of worship (creeds, antiphonal singing, fixed liturgies and church calendars).

Heresy

- Heresy viewed as a threat to the identity of the institutional church.
 - Traditional view of church according to Eusebius of Caesarea (the historian) – true church came 1st, heretics came later to spoil truth.
 - View of scholars – church began as diverse local groups, later became institutionalized and then set boundaries of orthodoxy & heresy.
 - Heresy - comes from word meaning “choice.” Originally, it was a positive word. It later came to mean a wrong choice.
 - Heresy - used in N.T. and by earlier Christian writers to mean erroneous teachings.
 - By 2nd century, heretical teachings are seen as coming from the devil, therefore, heretics are not just a threat to true knowledge, but a spiritual threat.
- By 2nd century, Tertullian and other church fathers develop characteristics of heretics (Source: *Refutation of All Heresies*):
 - Nonapostolic (not consistent with accepted tradition), divert from original truth.
 - Heresy comes from self-will (people seeking their own purposes, rather than God's).
 - Truth is stable, but heresy is unstable, inconsistent.
 - Heretics are viewed as having spiritual & character defects.

Responses to Heresy by the Church

- Before Constantine - heretics and their groups were put out of the church and the error of their teachings were written about.
- During and after Constantine:
 - Ecumenical or regional council of bishops held to discuss and judge the teachings.
 - Creeds developed as a response to correct erroneous teaching
 - Persons viewed as heretical were disfellowshipped, sometimes exiled, lost financial support from emperor, church taken away, their writings were destroyed.
 - Riots among the common people often arose in response to conflicting teachings, later by Middle Ages, heretics were burned by the state. Many of the more violent responses to heresies occurred in Africa (Donatism, Arianism).
- 3 Official responses to heresy: Creeds, Councils, and Canon

The Development of Creeds

- 1. Precedent: Apostles Creed - Addressed issues raised by problems of gnosticism.
- 2. Creed: a statement of faith. The basic elements of orthodox faith.

The Development of Creeds Cont

- 3. Creeds arise in response to historic events and challenges to the faith (Leith, 2).
- 4. Creeds reflect the language and worldview of the particular setting in which they arise (Leith, 3).
- 5. Creeds attempt to make a broad, universally accepted statement about the nature of faith to the believing community in which they are developed.
- 6. Creeds normally grow out of the life and worship of the believing community.
- 7. Creeds often used in liturgy (worship) as part of confession, served as guide for preaching.
- 8. Elements in creeds align with rules of faith, but exact words are flexible.
- 9. Used to instruct new believers in essential elements of faith.
- 10. First creeds were related to baptism – Acts 8:36-38 (Ethiopian eunuch's confession of faith).
- 11. Creeds used in teaching ministry of church - catechism for baptismal candidates.
- 12. Creeds used to provide hermeneutical guidelines. Identified essential points for interpreting scripture and central tenets of faith.
- 13. The rise of heresy created need for creeds (Leith, 9). Establishes the boundaries of authentic Christian faith and identifies beliefs which are outside those boundaries.

Formation of the Canon

- First version developed by 1st ecumenical council in 325 AD. Attempted to address Arianism. Years of conflict afterward. Particularly over homoousios vs. homoiousios. (Suggested Son was of same substance of father, but danger was it led to faulty belief that the Son and the Father were exactly the same - patripassianism, Gonzalez, 166). Final version completed by 2nd ecumenical council in Constantinople in 381 AD.
- Canon - a standard by which the orthodox faith may be measured. Specifically, the accepted books of the Bible deemed to accurately establish the boundaries of orthodox Christian faith.
 - First biblical canon - Marcion's canon (10 epistles - 140-150 AD).
 - Muratorian canon - books accepted in Rome by 200 AD (Ralph Martin, *New Testament Foundations*, 277).
 - Authoritative books were deemed so by being consistent with the traditions of the apostles and those who were seen as direct inheritors of their leadership by intimate association.

Reasons for development of canon:

- a. Expansion of the church throughout Graeco-Roman world (need for standard authoritative texts of faith)
- b. Delay in *parousia* made Christians aware of need to spread gospel throughout world prior to Lord's return.
- c. Death of original eyewitnesses/apostles stressed need to conserve their testimony in a permanent form.
 - Need to stop/correct heretical teachings by establishing authoritative orthodox writings. (Martin, 289).
 - Orthodox canon commissioned by Constantine.

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- Orthodox canon finalized 367 AD - 3 classes of Christian literature:
 - Holy scripture
 - Rejected books
 - Wholesome books valuable for baptismal instruction

Arianism and The Council of Nicea - 325 AD (First Ecumenical Council)

- **Issue: The nature of Christ (Christology)- human, divine, less than or equal to Father, made or begotten.**
- **Source of conflict: Arius, presbyter of Alexandria, argued with Alexander, bishop of Alexandria. Arius said the Word of God (Jesus) was not coeternal with the Father. In other words, there was a time when the Son was not (Gonzalez, 161). The Son was created by God, according to Arius.**
- **Purpose of Nicene council - approximately 300 bishops met, convened by Constantine, to resolve church issues:**
 - Readmission of the lapsed
 - Rules for election of presbyters and bishops
 - Determination of precedence of various episcopacies (Gonzalez, 163)
 - Deal with Arian controversy.

Other issues: Date of Easter (Quatrodeciman controversy), commissioning of formation of canon.