



**WHY DO WE BELIEVE *THAT* ?**  
Introduction to Reformed Theology

**Class 2**

**CHURCH HISTORY:  
FATHERS & MEDIEVAL**

Education Year 2024-2025

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*Why Do We Believe That? - Class 2*

## REVIEW

- LURC Distinctives
- Creeds & Confessions
  - Biblical Support for Creeds
  - Ecumenical Creeds
  - *Three Forms of Unity*
- Resources:
  - *The Creedal Imperative* by Carl Trueman
  - *Crisis of Confidence: Reclaiming the Historic Faith in a Culture Consumed with Individualism and Identity* by Carl Trueman



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# CHURCH HISTORY

- Why study church history?
  - Dr. Godfrey: “Christianity stresses that history is essential to the study of theology. The redemptive story is history. There will be an end to history. We ought to be concerned about history. We are part of one human family and in one single mess of sin. History reminds us of our common predicament and our common hope and redemption.”
- The church goes back further than our own pastor or favorite (modern) theologian.
  - Our foundations go back to the Ancient Church



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# CHURCH HISTORY

- General Periods
  - 30-100 – Apostolic Church
  - 100-325 – Ante-Nicean Church
  - 325-600 – Post-Nicean Church
  - 600-1517 – Medieval Church
  - 1517-1618 – Reformation
  - 1618-Present – Modern Church
- Christian traditions don't really start to divide until 553AD and more severe in 1054AD.



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## APOSTOLIC CHURCH

- As the name implies: The Church in the time of the Apostles.
  - 30AD - Begins at Pentecost
  - 64AD – Burning of Rome
  - 70AD – Fall of Jerusalem
  - 90AD-96AD – Domitian Persecution
  - ~100AD – Death of the Apostle John
- Relations w/ the Roman Empire
  - Initially thought Christianity was simply a sect of Judaism.
  - Nero's persecution: blames Christians for Rome's problems, localized to Rome
  - 88AD – Christians kicked out of synagogues
  - Domitian: Christianity is atheistic
    - Persecution localized in Rome and various places in Asia Minor



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## ANTE-NICENE CHURCH

- As the name implies: The Church before (Latin, “ante”) the Council of Nicaea.
- The church struggled with various philosophies and movements that impacted the church.
  - Gnosticism
    - Knowledge is everything
    - Spirit / matter dualism
  - Marcion
    - Tried to reform the church from what he saw was a perversion of free grace by the Judiazers.
    - God is not perfect: OT God – God of judgment; NT God – God of mercy
    - NT only Luke and 10 epistles of Paul
      - More on the Canon of Scripture later.



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## ANTE-NICENE CHURCH

- The church struggled with various philosophies and movements that impacted the church.
  - Marcion- Montanism
    - One of the first leaders of a sect when the church didn't accept his reforms.
    - He along with two women claimed to be prophets—the Spirit spoke through him.
    - Church overall rejected him although they appreciated his teachings against Gnosticism. Some prominent people did follow, namely Tertullian.
- **Today**
  - Some leaders can be confused on some matters and faithful in others.
  - We need to be concerned with those claiming special revelation from the Spirit.



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## COUNCIL OF NICAEA – 325AD

- Villain – Arius / Arianism
  - Presbyter of Alexandria
  - Denied the divinity of Christ, “There was a time when he [Christ] was not.”
    - Used passages like Matt 28:18; Mark 13:32; Luke 18:19; John 5:19
- Hero – Athanasius
  - Archdeacon of Alexandria
  - Stressed the unity of God “oneness of essence” but three hypostases / subsistences (“an individual instance of a given essence”<sup>1</sup>).



1 - Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 2nd Ed., s.v. "subsistentia."

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## COUNCIL OF NICAEA – 325AD

- Called by Emperor Constantine in 324 to address the Arian Controversy
  - The first council which was fully ecumenical and universally recognized as a council of the Christian Church
  - Constantine didn't have any role in the theological developments of the council.
- The Arians were on board until the phrase “of one substance with the Father” concerning Christ was added
  - Ὁμοουσιον – “of the same substance”
  - Ὁμοιουσιον – “of similar substance”
- The first iteration of the Nicene Creed was produced
  - Not a lot said about the Holy Spirit



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## ARIANS TODAY

- Anybody who denies the divinity of Christ, the eternity of the Son, or his being of the same essence and substance with the Father falls into the Arian controversy.
  - Jehovah's Witnesses
    - Jesus is a created being like the angels
  - Mormons
    - Jesus is a created being, in fact Lucifer's brother
  - *We will answer their objections more when we talk about the Doctrine of Christ.*



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## COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE – 381AD

- Villian – Apollonarius
  - Denied the true humanity of Christ in that Christ didn't have a true human soul. The eternal *Logos* took the place of a human spirit.
    - Was trying to preserve the sinlessness of Christ and the person of Christ.
- Heroes – The Cappadocian Fathers (Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Naziansus, and Basil of Caesarea)
  - “If the Logos did not assume human nature in its integrity, he could not be our perfect Redeemer. Since the whole sinner had to be renewed, Christ had to assume human nature in its entirety, and not simply the least important parts of it.”<sup>1</sup>

1. Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines*, 103.



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## COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE – 381AD

### • *Belgic Confession Article 18*

- And he not only assumed human nature as far as the body is concerned but also a real human soul, in order that he might be a real human being. For since the soul had been lost as well as the body he had to assume them both to save them both together.

### • **Psuedo-Apollanarians Today**

- **Seventh-Day Adventists**
  - Some ambiguity on the issue, but there is teaching that “Christ assumed in addition to his divine, sinless nature a human nature which was sinful.”<sup>1</sup>
- **Christian Scientists**
  - If Jesus did live it was merely the invisible Christ becoming perceptible in the visible Jesus.
  - There is no human Christ right now.<sup>2</sup>

1. Anthony Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults*, 114.  
2. *Ibid.*, 201-202.



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## COUNCIL OF EPHESUS – 431AD

### • Villain – Nestorius

- The two natures of Christ are completely distinct. They didn't deny the two natures, but they were not conceived in one single person.

### • Hero – Cyril of Alexandria

- The two natures are inseparable
- The Unity

### • Orthodox position – θεοτοκος, Mary was the “mother of God”

- Nestorius wanted χριστοκος, Mary was the “mother of Christ.”



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## COUNCIL OF EPHESUS – 431AD

- *Belgic Confession* Article 19
  - "...two natures united in a single person, with each nature retaining its own distinct properties."
  - More on this article later with Christology
- **Today?**
  - Not really sure



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## COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON – 451AD

- Villain – Eutyches
  - The two natures of Christ are completely fused together. In fact after the incarnation there was a union of the natures, so that there was only one (a.k.a. *Monophysitism*).<sup>1</sup>
  - His humanity became deified, so much so that it was unlike our human nature.
- Hero – The Church & Pope Leo
  - "The two natures are united together without change, and without division, and without confusion in Christ."<sup>2</sup>
- Definition of Chalcedon
  - Not a new creed, but an elaboration on the previous three council's decisions.<sup>3</sup>

1. Justin S. Holcomb, *Know the Creeds and Councils*, 54.  
 2. Pope Leo, "Tome", quoted in *ibid.*, 55.  
 3. Holcomb, *Creeds and Councils*, 55.



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## COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON – 451AD

- The *communitatio idiomatum* (communication of properties)
  - Reformed: What can be said of the nature can be said of the Person.
  - Lutheran: What can be said of the Person can be said of the nature.
    - “...each of Christ’s natures permeates the other, and that his humanity participates in the attributes of his divinity.”<sup>1</sup>
    - Because Christ’s Person is omnipresent (because of his divine nature) so too his human nature is omnipresent. This is necessary for the Lutheran view of the Supper. We will consider this again when we talk about the Ascension of Christ and the Lord’s Supper.

1. Quoted by Berkhof, *History*, 115



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## COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE II – 553AD

- Uprising of struggles between Nestorians and Monophysites
- Council reaffirmed Chalcedon and the theology of Cyril.
- Fractures appeared in the church as some communions rejected Chalcedon.<sup>1</sup>
  - Syriac Orthodox Churches
  - Armenian Orthodox Churches
  - Coptic Orthodox Churches

1. Holcomb, *Creeds and Councils*, 80.



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## COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE III – 681/682AD

*Why Do We Believe That? - Class 2*

- Trying to resolve the controversy between the Person of Christ and his two natures the idea of Monothelism emerged, that is, Christ only had one will.
  - His divine will was dominate and his human will was passive.
- The Dyothelite position (two wills) won the day.
  - The Monothelite position essentially made “Christ’s life end up bring a sort of sham, where he takes on human experiences as though he was playing a part in a play.”<sup>1</sup>
- **Today**
  - No major group maintains the Monothelite position today.<sup>2</sup>

1. Holcomb, *Creeds and Councils*, 82.  
2. Ibid.



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## COUNCIL OF NICAEA II – 787AD

*Why Do We Believe That? - Class 2*

- An ecumenical council that Protestants don’t really count.
- Iconoclast controversy – what to do with images?
  - Those against icons in the church in any form and function lost.
  - Images can be venerated, but not worshipped.
- **Today**
  - Both the Eastern Orthodox church and the Roman church allow images. Lutherans to an extent, good Reformed do not.
    - HC Q&A 96-98



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## OTHER COUNCILS, CHARACTERS, AND HERESIES

- Adoptionism – Jesus was divine for a time because the Spirit was on him for a time.
  - Later: natural birth in Bethlehem, spiritual birth in baptism, and consummated in his resurrection.
- Docetism – Christ only appeared to be human, but was only really God.
- Modalism – One person of the godhead who took on different roles.
  - **Today**
    - Oneness Pentecostals



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## OTHER COUNCILS, CHARACTERS, AND HERESIES

- Pelagius
  - Man is born innocent (same condition as Adam), but sins because he imitates sinners around him.
  - God's grace is not needed for man to will the good. Man has a completely free will.
    - God wouldn't command it if man couldn't do it, right?
    - Augustine – "Give what thou commandest, and command what thou wilt."
  - Both the *Belgic Confession* and the *Canons of Dort* continue to condemn Pelagius.
- Semi-Pelagianism
  - Man can come to God on their own.
  - **Today**
    - Rome to some extent and Arminians.



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## OTHER COUNCILS, CHARACTERS, AND HERESIES

- Donatism – A baptism’s validity depends on the spiritual status of the administrator.
- Synod of Toledo (Spain) – 589AD
  - Added the *Filioque* clause to the Nicene Creed, claiming the Spirit proceeds from the Father “and the Son” without involvement from the Eastern Church.
- Fourth Lateran Council – 1215AD
  - Roman doctrine of transubstantiation codified.



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## THE GREAT SCHISM – 1054AD

- The Eastern Church (HQ: Constantinople) split from the Western Church (HQ: Rome).
  - Popes in Rome claiming authority over the Bishop of Constantinople. Both excommunicated each other.
  - Addition of the *filioque* clause (almost 500 years earlier)



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# MEDIEVAL TIMES

- Not as dark as sometimes thought.
  - Thomas Aquinas – *Summa theologia*
    - Some good things, some distortions
  - Anselm – *Cur Deus Homo*, “The God Man”
  - Some were opposed to transubstantiation



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# RESOURCES

- Many books on Church History
- *The History of Christian Doctrines* by Louis Berkhof
- *Know the Creeds and Councils* by Justin S. Holcomb



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# NEXT TIME

- Pre-Reformation
- Reformation
- Modern Church, esp. Formation of the URCNA

