

Lesson 7: Christianity in the Fourth Century: The Trinitarian (Arian) Controversy - Study Materials

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To learn more about the Nicaea and Constantinople Councils visit The Catholic Encyclopedia website:
<http://www.newadvent.org/index.html>.

Right: Eastern Orthodox icon depicting the First Council of Nicaea (325 AD) (Source: Wikipedia) ([click on image to enlarge](#))

Slide 2: The Persecution of Diocletian

The Persecution of Christians by the Roman Emperor Diocletian (303-305 AD) included:

- Destruction of churches
- Arrests of heads of churches – they would be released if they consented to libations and sacrifices (a test to detect Christians)

Persecution continued until 312 AD, even after Diocletian was no longer emperor.

Right: Etching from the *Martyrs Mirror*, Persecution by emperors Diocletian and Maximus, 301 AD (Source: Copyright © 2008, Bethel College, KS)



Slide 3: Licinius and Maxentius

Licinius, in full Valerius Licinianus Licinius (died 325), was Roman emperor from 308 to 324. He was elevated to the rank of augustus (in 308) by his friend Galerius, who had become emperor. Galerius hoped to have him rule the west, but since Italy, Africa, and Spain were held by the usurper Maxentius, while Constantine reigned in Gaul and Britain, Licinius had to content himself with ruling Pannonia. When Galerius died in 311, Licinius took over Galerius' European dominions. He married Constantine's half sister Constantia (313). Licinius added the entire eastern half of the empire to his dominion.

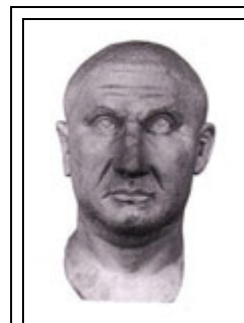
After a brief accord between the two augusti, Constantine forced Licinius to surrender the provinces of Pannonia and Moesia. There followed 10 years of uneasy peace in which Licinius built up his army and accumulated a huge reserve of treasure. In 324, Constantine defeated him at Adrianople and again at Chrysopolis. Licinius surrendered, was exiled to Thessalonica, and was executed the next year on a charge of attempted rebellion.

While agreed upon in February 313, the Edict of Milan was officially proclaimed and implemented starting on June 5, 313, granting toleration to the Christians and restoring church property.

Maxentius, Latin in full Marcus Aurelius Valerius Maxentius (died 312), Roman emperor from 306 to 312. In 307 he took the title augustus. Maxentius at first controlled Italy and Africa but not Spain, which was controlled by Constantine. Maxentius was killed by Constantine at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312.

Because the sources from this period reflect the propaganda of Constantine, they represent Maxentius as a brutal tyrant, although in actuality he stopped the persecution of the Christians. He built a huge basilica, which Constantine renamed after himself, and a temple to his son Romulus in the Roman Forum.

(Source for both images: Wikimedia)



Bust of Roman Emperor Licinius, Vatican Museums



Emperor Maxentius. Plaster cast in Pushkin Museum

Slide 4: Constantine (306-338 AD)

312 AD

The Battle of the Milvian Bridge:

- Maxentius (Roman Emperor) is killed
- Constantine has vision of the cross – “In this sign you will conquer”

313 AD

Edict of Milan (Constantine and Licinius):

- tolerance toward Christians
- Christian symbols appear on the coinage
- sentences passed by episcopal tribunals recognized as valid by the state
- churches are given the right to inherit property (a measure allowing them to increase their heritage)
- places of worship multiply
- Christians rise to the highest posts in administration
- the first restrictive measures against pagan practices
- the cult of the emperor as in some way “equal of the Apostles”

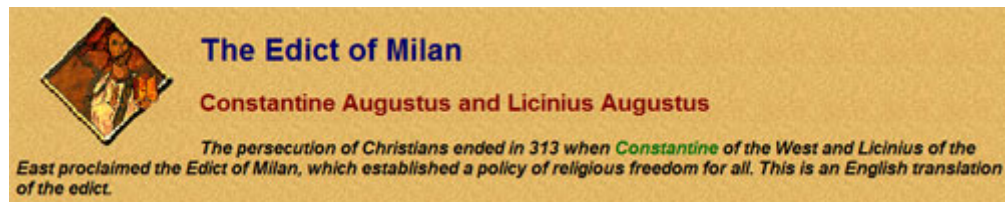


Raphael fresco of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, Vatican Rooms, Vatican City, Rome (Source: Wikipedia)

Slide 5: The Edict of Milan

To learn more about "The Edict of Milan: Constantine Augustus and Licinius Augustus," read this article from The Women's Division General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church.

Click on the image below to access this article.



(Source: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/edict-milan.asp>)

Slide 6: The Trinitarian Controversy

Phase I - Council of Nicaea/First Ecumenical (325 AD)

Listen to your professor discuss the first phase of the

Main Actors

<%@ Register TagPrefix="ec"
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- Arius (256-336 AD)
- Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 293-373 AD)

The Controversy

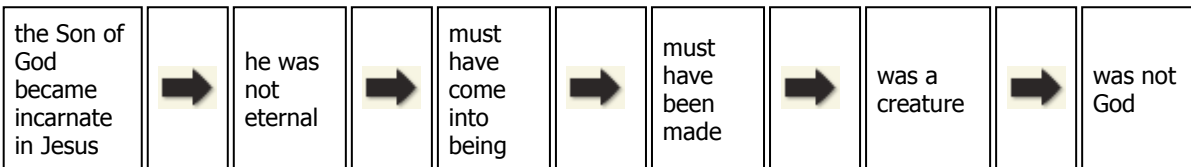
- Arius attacks his bishop Alexander of Alexandria in c. 320 for his formulas, such as "always God, always the Son" (Father-Son relationship)
- Alexander attacks Arius for his interpretation of certain biblical passages, e.g. Proverbs 8.22: "The Lord created me at the beginning of his ways"

Slide 7: The Trinitarian Controversy (cont'd)

Phase I - Council of Nicaea/First Ecumenical (cont'd)

Was Jesus made (created) or begotten (generated eternally)?

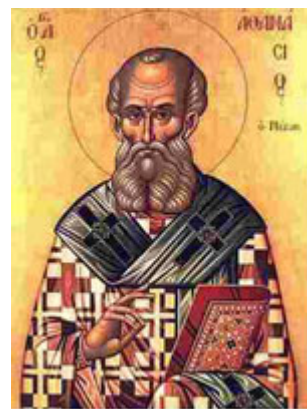
Arius said: "There was [a time] when he [the Son] was not". He meant:



Athanasius of Alexandria and the consubstantial (homoousios)

Read: [The Creed of Nicaea \(325 AD\)](#) found on this lesson's Readings page.

Left: Arius of Alexandria, Christian priest
Right: Saint Athanasius of Alexandria
(Source for both: Wikipedia)



Slide 8: The Trinitarian Controversy (cont'd)

Phase II - The Council of Constantinople (381 AD)

Main Actors

- Eunomius of Cyzicus (c. 335-395 AD)
- Basil of Caesarea (c. 329-379 AD)
- Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-394 AD)
- Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329-389 AD)
- Augustine (354-430 AD)

Listen to your professor discuss the second phase of the Trinitarian (Arian) Controversy.

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The Declaration

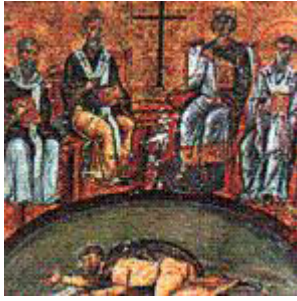
- The Council of Constantinople (held in 381 AD) spoke of God as being one in nature (or substance) and three in persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit)
- It declared that the Holy Spirit is also God, but avoided the troublesome, non-biblical word "homoousios"
- General information:
substance/nature is *ousia*;
person is *prosopon*, *hypostasis*

Slide 9: The Trinitarian Controversy (cont'd)

Phase II - The Council of Constantinople (cont'd)

Arianism was formally defeated.

Read: [The Creed of Constantinople \(381 AD\)](#), found on this lesson's Readings page.



Above: A 4th-century miniature of the Council, which condemned Arius's teaching.
Right: Icon of St. Gregory of Nyssa, 14th-century fresco, Chora Church, Istanbul
(Source for both: Wikipedia)

