

Church History: Heresies & Councils (1st - 6th Century)

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Resources

Books

- Fr Shenouda Maher
 - Christology and the Council of Chalcedon - [Link](#)
- Fr VC Samuel
 - The Council of Chalcedon Re-Examined - [Link](#)
- John Anthony McGuckin
 - Saint Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy - [Link](#)
- Fr John Behr
 - Formation of Christian Theology Volume 1: The Way to Nicaea - [Link](#)
 - Formation of Christian Theology Volume 2: The Nicene Faith Part 1 & 2 - [Link](#)
- Historical Texts for Historians
 - The Council of Ephesus of 431 - [Link](#)
 - The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon Volumes 1-3 - [Link](#)
 - Chalcedon in Context 400-700 - [Link](#)
- James Papandrea
 - The Earliest Christologies: Five Images of Christ in the Postapostolic Age - [Link](#)

COA Podcasts

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4I4DKvx82bQ> - COA Podcast with Michael Mishriky (Christology)
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8_t88fpjUVA - COA Podcast with Daniel Kakish (History, Pre-Chalcedon)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQFVnPCn-5Q> - COA Podcast with Daniel Kakish (History, Chalcedon)

Theology Academy Series

1. The Arian Controversy before the Nicene Council
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQbcEwS8ArU>
2. The First Nicene Council of AD 325: Uniting the Early Church
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKd_5ULqIfI
3. The Cappadocians: Prelude to the Council of Constantinople
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPOR3ik_5DA
4. The Council of Constantinople
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6oqkoZZwG4>

5. The Nicene Constantinopolitan Creed: A Foundation of Christian Orthodoxy
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmzkyBvU_MA
6. Cyril vs Nestorius: The Battle for Christ's Identity
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLBZZsfj7j8>
7. Council of Ephesus Explained: Key Decisions, History, and Impact on Christianity
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nh1_K1sAzRY

Fr Luka Maher

1. 1st and 2nd Century - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqoskaxKhmA>
2. 3rd and 4th Century - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkmWqlUFjyo>
3. 4th Century - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TO_0-FV1Teo
4. 5th Century - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FWHKvFmzZo0>
5. 5th and 6th Century - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x4Q0qs2Y0Bl>

Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325 AD)

Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (381 AD)

Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431 AD)

The Making of Nestorius

The Making of Nestorius

- Early Ideas about the Son of God
 - Some referred to the Son as one intimately related in dependence on the eternal God
 - Some to God himself in his relation to the world of nature
 - Some to a man like us who had the spirit of God working pre-eminently in him
 - Some to a perfect creature whom God brought into being before everyone else
- Nestorius' Ancestry
 - Nestorius is a disciple of Theodore of Mopsuestia
 - Theodore is a disciple of Diodorus of Tarsus
 - Diodorus is a disciple of Lucian of Antioch
 - Lucian is a disciple of Paul of Samosata
 - Paul of Samosata's ideas developed from the gnostic ideas of Artemon and Theodotus of Byzantium

Gnosticism

- Basic Ideas
 - Hidden, uncorrupted supreme being and a flawed demiurge responsible for creating the material reality.
 - Material existence is evil
 - Salvation is direct knowledge of the supreme divinity which is attained by mystical insight
 - Jesus
 - Some say Jesus is became incarnate to bring gnosis (spiritual knowledge) to the earth
 - Some say Jesus was a mere human who attained enlightenment through gnosis and taught his disciples to do the same
 - Some say Jesus was divine but did not have a physical body
 - The incarnation comes into question because why would God, who is good, take material flesh, which is evil?
 - The baptism of Christ is a pivotal moment when the divine spirit descended upon the human Jesus of Nazareth (i.e. Jesus received the Christ in the form of a dove)
 - Before the crucifixion, the divine spirit detached from the human Jesus, leaving him to suffer on the cross
- Origins
 - "These diverse Gnostic groups generally emphasized personal spiritual knowledge (*gnosis*) above the authority, traditions, and proto-orthodox teachings of organized

religious institutions." (Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* 1958, p. 334)

- There is no single "origin" of Gnosticism as a school of thought... rather it is the influence of Greek Philosophy (especially Plato), Jewish Apocalyptic writings, Eastern religions (like Zoroastrianism), etc.
- Greek Philosophy
 - Distinction between spiritual and material world; material is inferior
 - Gnosticism took this to an extreme by saying matter is evil
- Eastern Religions
 - Dualism: Cosmic struggle between light and darkness, good and evil
 - Gnosticism took this to an extreme
- Interpreting Hebrew Scripture in Light of Those Ideas
 - Genesis: The creator is oppressive (for creating a fallen world), Eden is a prison of ignorance (no-gnosis), serpent is a liberator
- Similarities to Modern Day
 - Radical answers to the "Problem of Evil and Suffering"
 - "Spiritual but not religious"
 - "Against organized religion" - "Organized religion is oppressive"
 - Hidden Knowledge
 - Nowadays on the internet everyone is trying to reveal the "hidden knowledge"
 - Sola Scriptura
 - Interpreting the Scripture in light of my own knowledge or ideas, as opposed to the traditional sense
 - Rejecting the traditional understanding in favor of my own personal understanding
- These ideas are the result of putting personal knowledge above authority, traditions, teachings, discipleship, etc.
 - Clear that the devil is working because this is the result of pride

Paul of Samosata (200 - 275 AD)

- Patriarch of Antioch (pre-Nicaea)
- Possibly the earliest origin of dyophysitism
- Taught that Jesus was adopted to be God's son in the baptism - the Holy Spirit came on Him and then the Father said "Today you are My Son" - adopting Him
- According to Eusebius of Caesarea's Ecclesiastical History [Book V](#), Paul adopted the gnostic ideas of Artemon and Theodotus of Byzantium. Here, he is quoting from an anonymous writer who is called in modern times "Little Labyrinth" by scholars
 - "For [the Artemonites] say that all the early teachers and the apostles received and taught what they now declare, and that the truth of the Gospel was preserved until the times of Victor, who was the thirteenth bishop of Rome from Peter, but that from his successor, Zephyrinus, the truth had been corrupted." (V.28:3)
 - Victor I is the one who declared Theodotus' beliefs of Dynamic Monarchianism (Adoptionism) as heretical
 - They considered that the truth of the Gospel was corrupted after Victor I
 - "And what they say might be plausible, if first of all the Divine Scriptures did not contradict them. And there are writings of certain brethren older than the times of

Victor, which they wrote in behalf of the truth against the heathen, and against the heresies which existed in their day. I refer to Justin and Miltiades and Tatian and Clement and many others, in all of whose works Christ is spoken of as God. For who does not know the works of Irenæus and of Melito and of others which teach that Christ is God and man? And how many psalms and hymns, written by the faithful brethren from the beginning, celebrate Christ the Word of God, speaking of him as Divine. How then since the opinion held by the Church has been preached for so many years, can its preaching have been delayed as they affirm, until the times of Victor? And how is it that they are not ashamed to speak thus falsely of Victor, knowing well that he cut off from communion Theodotus, the cobbler, the leader and father of this God-denying apostasy, and the first to declare that Christ is mere man? For if Victor agreed with their opinions, as their slander affirms, how came he to cast out Theodotus, the inventor of this heresy?" (V.28:4-6)

- The Scriptures contradict the ideas
- Writings of certain brethren before Victor I contradict the ideas
 - Justin the Martyr
 - Miltiades
 - Tatian
 - Clement of Rome
 - Irenaeus
 - Melito of Sardis
 - Psalms and Hymns of the Christian Church
- Victor, himself, disagreed with them and excommunicated Theodotus!
- "They have treated the Divine Scriptures recklessly and without fear. They have set aside the rule of ancient faith; and Christ they have not known. They do not endeavor to learn what the Divine Scriptures declare, but strive laboriously after any form of syllogism which may be devised to sustain their impiety. And if any one brings before them a passage of Divine Scripture, they see whether a conjunctive or disjunctive form of syllogism can be made from it. And as being of the earth and speaking of the earth, and as ignorant of him who comes from above, they forsake the holy writings of God to devote themselves to geometry. Euclid is laboriously measured by some of them; and Aristotle and Theophrastus are admired; and Galen, perhaps, by some is even worshipped. But that those who use the arts of unbelievers for their heretical opinions and adulterate the simple faith of the Divine Scriptures by the craft of the godless, are far from the faith, what need is there to say? Therefore they have laid their hands boldly upon the Divine Scriptures, alleging that they have corrected them." (V.28:13-15)
 - They subordinate Scripture to Philosophy. It is not wrong that they study Philosophy, but they subject the Scripture to it! They devise syllogisms and then re-interpret the Scripture through them!
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Beginnings of Arianism

- Lucian of Antioch (240-312 AD)
 - Priest
 - Nephew of Paul of Samosata

- Teacher of Arius, Diodorus of Tarsus, Eusebius of Nicomedia
- Arius (256-336 AD)
 - Priest in Alexandria
 - Main heretic of the Council of Nicaea
- Diodorus of Tarsus (?-390AD)
 - Bishop
 - Supporter of the Council of Nicaea
 - One of the 150 at Constantinople who opposes Apollinaris
 - Friend of St Basil, St Meletius of Antioch - they are all united against Arianism.
 - Like Paul of Samosata, Jesus and the Logos are uniting - but it's at conception, not at the baptism. It is not God becoming Man, but rather God adopting the man.
 - Gregory writes 8 statements/anathemas towards Diodorus (not-named). Word Theotokos is used in one. St Cyril's 12 anathemas will later be based on these.
 - Teachings, taken to an extreme, lead to Nestorianism
 - Started a school in Antioch
 - Theodore of Mopsuestia
 - St John Chrysostom
- Apollinaris (?-382 AD)
 - Bishop of Laodicea
 - Opponent of Arianism
 - In his eagerness to emphasize the divinity of Jesus, he denies the existence of a rational human soul in Christ. He believes that Christ is fully human but instead of a soul, it's the Divinity. His Divinity united with His Body (not with His Humanity).
- Eusebius of Nicomedia (?-341 AD)
 - Arian Priest & Bishop
 - One of the 318 at Nicaea - it is said he "signed by hand, but not by heart" against Arianism
 - Exiled St Athanasius
 - Baptized Constantine the Great on his deathbed
- Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428 AD)
 - Bishop of Mopsuestia
 - The teacher of Nestorius, Theodoret of Cyrus, Ibas of Edessa, John of Antioch, Domnus II of Antioch
 - Was the most popular student of the School of Antioch - even as a contemporary of John Chrysostom
 - Teaching: There is One Person in Christ, in Two Natures
 - In order for humanity to have salvation, God needs to restore Adam. How? By putting Adam on and leaping back into Paradise
 - If He merely unites Himself to a man, then He does not become man. He only saves Jesus of Nazareth. How am I saved? How are you saved?
 - St Cyril says that what is described here is no more than what happens in the Prophets... "The Spirit of the Lord came upon me."
- Nestorius of Constantinople (386-451 AD)
 - Patriarch of Constantinople
- Theodoret of Cyrus (393-458 AD)
 - Bishop of Cyrus

- Successor of Theodore of Mopsuestia
- Ibas of Edessa (?-457 AD)
 - Bishop of Edessa
 - Edessa is the Syriac See of the Church bridging the Church of the East with the Church of Antioch
- John I of Antioch
- Domnus II of Antioch
 - Nephew of John I of Antioch
 - Student of Theodore of Mopsuestia and friend of Theodoret of Cyrus

St. Cyril & Nestorius

St Cyril & Nestorius

- Visiting Bishop (student of the School in Antioch) gives a sermon (in the presence of Nestorius) cautioning the use of the word Theotokos.
- The people of Antioch write to St Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria.
 - In those days, Alexandria has primacy in the East...
 - There are conflicts & rivalry with Constantinople
 - Alexandria deposed patriarch of Constantinople 7 times (Athanasius: 3 times?, Timothy deposed Macedonius, Theophilus deposed St John Chrysostom, Cyril deposes Nestorius, Dioscorus will depose Flavian)
- Cyril's First Letter to Nestorius
 - <https://www.reformedhistory.com/Content/Letters/CyriToNestorius1>
 - Cyril is very charitable, giving the benefit of the doubt
 - He continues to go that way - even after making conclusions about Nestorius' heresy, he will continue to call him "Most Holy" and "Blessed" and "Minister of Christ" etc. because he is not deposed
- Nestorius' First Letter to Cyril
 - <https://www.fourthcentury.com/nestorius-of-constantinople-first-letter-to-cyri-cyri-letter-3-cpg-5666-8628/>
 - Short and not-so-sweet
 - Greeting, complaint against the priest delivering the letter, then...
 - "As far as we are concerned, although your reverence has done many things not in keeping with brotherly love (to put it gently), we write this salutation with patience and love."
 - And salutation
- Cyril's Second Letter to Nestorius
 - <https://www.reformedhistory.com/Content/Letters/CyriToNestorius2>
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Council of Chalcedon (451 AD)

Council of Chalcedon (451 AD)

Before Chalcedon

Relevant Context from the Council of Ephesus

Home Synod of Constantinople (448 AD)

Second Council at Ephesus (449 AD)

Death of Emperor Theodosius

Council of Chalcedon (451 AD)

Council of Chalcedon Re-Examined - Fr. V.C. Samuel

This sentence summarizes the bulk of the book.

"The fact about the council of Chalcedon, which the present writer has shown elsewhere, may be noted here: It abrogated the decisions of the second council of Ephesus without ever examining them against the background of their theological assumptions; it proceeded from the beginning by consider Eutyches a confirmed heretic, showing at the same time no concern at all to establish that fact against him in the light of evidence or at least stating in clear terms what his teaching was; it exonerated Flavian of Constantinople and Eusebius of Dorylaeum, the president of the synod of 448 and the accuser of Eutyches respectively, without looking into the ground of their condemnation by the council of 449; it ratified a sentence of deposition passed against patriarch Dioscorus of Alexandria by a section of the delegates, specifying no definite charge against him; it adopted a definition of the faith with the phrase 'in two natures' in the face of a determined opposition from a large majority of the council's delegates, including patriarch Anatolius of Constantinople; and it acquitted Theodoret of Cyrus and Ibas of Edessa, both of them highly controversial figures, without examining whether there was any ground at all for the charges that had been levelled against them in an impartial way, so that the council of 553 had to pass a resolution justifying the decision, not of Chalcedon, but of Ephesus in 449."

Second Council of Constantinople (553 AD)

Christology Pre-Nicaea

Five Christologies

For each one:

- What did they believe
- Maybe what misunderstood verses did they use
- What problem were they trying to solve
- Seems a lot of it is to avoid saying something "not logical" or "not explainable"
- What groups believed it
- Any groups that believe it today?
- When/how was it refuted
- Etc.