

Glossary

- Adoptionism** — The belief that Jesus was born human and became divine through his sinless devotion to the will of God. Some consider that the idea arose in the second century through efforts to reconcile the ideas of Jesus as the Son of God with Jewish monotheism. Some have even seen the influence of such ideas in the Gospel of Mark and in Paul's writings. Condemned as heretical by later church councils.
- Arius, Arianism** — Arius (c. 250-336) was a Christian priest of Alexandria who denied that Jesus was to be identified with the eternal and divine **Logos**, so that it could be said there was a time before which the Son did not exist. He was condemned at the Council of **Nicaea**, later exonerated, and later still condemned again. Several other movements are associated with Arianism.
- Athanasius, Athanasian Creed** — Athanasius (c. 293-373) was Bishop of Alexandria and a vigorous defender of Trinitarian orthodoxy against **Arianism**. The creed that bears his name was certainly not by him but it articulates his views in full.
- Augustine of Hippo** — Perhaps the greatest of the early church fathers, c. 354-430. His defense of **Trinitarian** orthodoxy, along with his views on original sin, salvation, grace, just war and a host of other topics, permanently influenced the course of Christianity. His views on the role of the Son influenced the Western church's addition of the **filioque clause** to the **Nicene Creed**.
- Chalcedon, Council of (Chalcedonian Creed)** — A council of 451, following on the **Nicene** tradition, affirmed that in Christ the divine **Logos** assumed human nature in full; that Mary was the *Theotokos*, 'God-bearer'; that Jesus was both fully God and fully human, with two natures and two wills. Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican and most mainstream Protestantism profess this view. Oriental Orthodox churches (Armenian, Syrian, Coptic and Ethiopian) never accepted the language of Chalcedon and its duality of natures and wills.
- Docetism** — From the Greek 'to seem,' a variety of **Gnosticism** holding that Jesus' physical body was an illusion and that the crucifixion did not take place.
- Filioque** — Latin 'and the Son', a clause added by Western Christianity to the language of the Holy Spirit in the **Nicene Creed**. The clause is still a point of controversy between the Western and Eastern Orthodox churches, though both Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism have affirmed the validity of the Creed without it.
- Gnostics, Gnosticism** — From the Greek *gnosis*, or 'knowledge', referring to a variety of beliefs in the second century and beyond. Generally speaking Gnostics held that matter is evil; human souls are trapped in a material world created by an imperfect God; and only by possession of secret knowledge passed on to initiates can the worthy hope to escape the prison of materiality through union with the true Godhead. Some Gnostics believed that Jesus was an embodiment of the supreme being, sent to bring the *gnosis* to humans.

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Homoiousios — Greek 'of similar being,' referring to beliefs that hold the Father and the son to be less than identical.

Homoousios — Greek 'of one being,' as expressed in the **Nicene Creed** to refer to the relationship between the Father and the Son. The Son is said to be "begotten, not made," as a child is begotten of a parent, "of one substance with the Father." The relationship is understood to be not one of time but of an eternal process of begetting.

Hypostasis — Greek, literally 'that which stands beneath', or underlying reality. See **Person**.

Logos — Greek 'word,' or more broadly the inward intention underlying the speech act (thought, rational discourse, grounds of belief or action). Originating in earlier Greek philosophy, the concept influenced both Jewish and Christian ideas. Following the Gospel of John, Christian thought early on identified Jesus with the divine Logos or Word of God, through whom the world was created, and an intermediary between God and the world.

Modalism — A variety of beliefs holding, essentially, that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are aspects or modes of the one God, perceived differently by believers. In most forms, rejected as heretical by early Church councils.

Nicaea, Council of (Nicene Creed) — Constantine the Great (272-337), the first Christian Emperor of Rome, convened the first ecumenical council of church leaders and bishops in this city (now in modern Turkey). The purpose was to settle the doctrinal dispute between **Trinitarians** and **Arians** that was threatening the unity of the Church. All but 2 or 3 bishops signed the thoroughly Trinitarian Nicene Creed produced by the council. Arianism gained back ground later in the fourth century; at one point St. Jerome wrote that "the world groaned to find itself Arian." Officially defeated at last by later councils, Arianism has persisted in some strains of Christian thought even if not officially recognized.

Person — Related to Greek **hypostasis**, 'underlying reality,' via Latin. Trinitarian theologians used the term to distinguish it from *ousia*, as in **homoousia** – though not without confusion, since both terms at different times could mean 'being.' In Greek 'three Hypostases in one Ousia' is the equivalent of "three Persons in one Godhead."

Pneuma — Greek 'breath,' a term used by Gnostics to refer to the Spirit.

Ruach — Hebrew 'spirit, breath.'

Trinitarian, Trinity — The unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three distinct **persons** in one Godhead. Accepted by the Roman Catholicism, Orthodox, Anglican and most mainline Protestant denominations as "the central dogma of Christian theology" (*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*).

Notes

Why the Trinity?

Abstract, theoretical ideas – Greek and Latin philosophy

Does not appear in Bible

Great concern centuries ago –but now?

Far removed from ideas of community; of outreach, service, social justice

Perhaps most Christians understand it in ways that Church fathers would have considered heretical

We are part of community – shouldn't we be intentional?

Fundamentally the nature of God; and of Jesus

Historical context of these ideas

Origins in mystery religions

Development by early church fathers