

The Development of Catholic Trinitarian Theology

Fill in the blanks below. The missing information can be found in the following articles in the student book:

- “The Early Church Faces Challenges to Apostolic Faith” (article 6)
- “Early Christological Heresies” (article 7)
- “The Ecumenical Councils of the Early Church” (article 8)

“The Early Church Faces Challenges to Apostolic Faith”

The Trinity is a complex reality to grasp and express. God revealed the truth of our Trinitarian faith to the very earliest Christians, but it took time for the Church to clarify the depths of this truth.

The early Church faced the enormous task of precisely articulating the doctrine about the Trinity and about Jesus and defending those truths against those who challenged them. During these first centuries, bishops and _____ worked at these tasks. They often did so in official gatherings called _____. They developed the language that would reflect, as fully as possible, the depth, breadth, and meaning of these sacred, revealed truths.

In his Second Letter to the Corinthians, _____ writes: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the holy Spirit be with all of you” (13:13). This very early _____ Testament letter (written in the mid-50s AD) reflects the early Church’s firm belief in the Trinity from the earliest times.

To express the doctrine of the Trinity, the Church Fathers turned to the language of _____. This language, though often difficult for us to understand, was in common use at that time. Paragraph 252 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains the following words, which are used to describe Trinitarian doctrine:

- The word _____ is used to name “the divine being in its unity.”
- The word _____ (in Greek, *hypostasis*) is used to refer to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each fully God, yet each distinct.
- The word _____ is used to indicate that the distinction among the three Persons lies in the relationship of each to the others.



“Early Christological Heresies”

The mystery of Jesus’ being _____ doesn’t make sense like math or science does. During the first several centuries of the Church, some _____ heresies, or incorrect beliefs about Jesus, developed.

- Focusing on Jesus’ Humanity Only
 - _____ claimed that Jesus was _____, just like we were, and that he did not exist before he was conceived in Mary’s womb. Arius believed that Jesus was a higher _____ than humans but less than God.
 - _____ believed that in Jesus there were actually two _____. One was divine and one was human. _____ argued that it was wrong to say things like “God suffered and died for us” or “God was born of the Virgin Mary.” These statements would only apply to the _____ person Jesus, but not to the _____ Person. This heresy stressed the humanity of Jesus, not even allowing the Virgin Mary to be known as the _____ of God.
- Focusing on Jesus’ Divinity Only
 - _____ alleged that Jesus’ humanity was a sort of _____—he looked like a human and acted like a human, but inside, he was really solely _____.
 - _____ believed that Jesus’ divinity fully absorbed his humanity, so that, in the end, he was only _____ and not _____.
 - _____ (from *gnosis*, the Greek word for _____) was a series of religions, common in the Greco-Roman world. It claimed that _____ can be reached only by getting special, _____ knowledge from God or God’s agent.

It wasn’t until the Ecumenical Council of _____, held in 451, that the bishops fully renounced all these heresies and definitively declared that Jesus Christ is one Person, fully divine and fully human, true God and true man. _____ is a Greek word that literally means “God-bearer” but that is often translated as “Mother of God.” However, Mary did not receive the title “Mother of God” until the Nestorian heresy was renounced at the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431.



“The Ecumenical Councils of the Early Church”

Throughout the Church’s history, bishops have met in gatherings called _____ to discuss the challenges facing the Church. A particular focus of the Ecumenical Councils in the early centuries of the Church was the challenges to Christological and Trinitarian doctrines. Between AD 325 and AD 787, seven Ecumenical Councils were held. The _____ most important of these took place in ancient cities located in modern-day Turkey:

The Council of Nicaea, AD

- This Council declared that Jesus is truly God.
- In technical language it declared that God the Son is “of the same _____” as God the Father (against Arianism).
- Jesus is “eternally _____ of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God.”

The Council of Chalcedon, AD

- The Council of Chalcedon declared that Jesus’ two natures (his human nature and his divine nature) are _____ and _____.
- Jesus is 100 percent human and 100 percent divine. He is not half man and half God; nor is he two _____ somehow pushed into one.
- Jesus, God the Son, is _____ Divine Person with _____ natures. Jesus is “_____ with the Father as to his divinity and _____ with us as to his humanity”¹ (CCC, 467).

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Endnote Cited in a Quotation from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition*

1. Council of Chalcedon (451): Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* (1965) 3004; cf. 3026; Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum* 301; cf. *Hebrews* 4:15.

