

# The Development of Catholic Trinitarian Theology

Fill in the blanks below. The missing information can be found in the chapter 2 introduction and articles 6–8 in the student book.

## 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 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 Church Fathers 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 New Testament letter (written in the mid-50s AD), reflects the early Church’s firm belief in the Trinity.

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 as math or science. During the first several centuries of the Church, some \_\_\_\_\_, 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.



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- \_\_\_\_\_ believed that in Jesus there were actually two \_\_\_\_\_. One was divine and one was human. Nestorius 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. Nestorius was very concerned about people overemphasizing the humanity of Jesus. He would not even allow 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 just \_\_\_\_\_.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ believed that Jesus’ divinity fully absorbed his humanity, so that, in the end, he was only \_\_\_\_\_ and not \_\_\_\_\_.
- Another Heresy
  - \_\_\_\_\_ (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 Chalcedon, held in AD 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 AD 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 \_\_\_\_\_<sup>1</sup>” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 465) as God the Father (against Arianism).
- Jesus is “\_\_\_\_\_ of the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God” (Nicene Creed).



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## 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 of the \_\_\_\_\_ as God the Father when it comes to his divinity, and he is of the \_\_\_\_\_ as we are when it comes to his humanity.

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The quotation labeled Nicene Creed is from the English translation of *The Roman Missal* c 2010, International Commission on English in the Liturgy in the Liturgy Corporation [ICEL] [Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011], page 522.)

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

1. Council of Nicaea I (325): Denzinger-Schönmetzner, *Enchiridion Symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* (1965) 130, 126.

