

Emperor Constantine and the Theology of Christianity - 3 (Eirini Artemi)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



The new heresies which led to the Second Ecumenical Council

After the end of the First Ecumenical Council, some other heresies appeared. which misunderstood not only the Trinitarian doctrine, but also Christological and Pneumatological one. The fathers of these heresies were Macedonius, Marcellus, Eunomius and Apollinarius.



Macedonius I was the bishop of Constantinople during the mid-fourth century. He was an Arian, and with the support of Emperor Constantius II, the Semi-Arian party was able to install him as the bishop of Constantinople. Macedonius had been appointed Bishop of Constantinople after the deposition and subsequent murder of Paul (a Nicene), but was himself in turn deposed by the Synod of Constantinople in 360 A.D.[23]. Macedonius had the temerity to teach blasphemously of the Holy Spirit. He distorted the apostolic teaching concerning the Holy Spirit. He denied the Divinity of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity. He supported the concept that the Holy Spirit was a creation of the Son, and a servant of the Father and the Son. Macedonius, found followers of himself among former Arians and Semi-Arians.

Marcellus, bishop of Ancyra, was one of the bishops who opposed Arius. He was teaching that Christ did not preexist his birth, and his kingdom would end. Marcellus stressed absolute monotheism, taking the Nicene *homoousion* as *tautousion*, or “numerically identical in essence”. God, for Marcellus, is a Monad; in technical language, he insisted on one *ousia*, one *hypostasis*, and one *prosôpon* in God. The Monad may be called “God” and “Lord,” but not “Father.” The Word exists eternally, as the dynamic element in the Godhead, but it is identical with the Monad; from all eternity it reposed in God, and was not spoken until creation. Marcellus understood the Trinity in a strictly economic sense. It was in connection with creation and redemption that an expansion “*platysmos*” of the Monad into a Dyad, and then into a Triad, took place. Marcellus underlined the three economies. The first is at the moment of creation, when the Word proceeded from the Father,

without becoming a distinct *hypostasis*, and created the world. The second economy was the Incarnation: when the Word became man, it also became Son. Before the Incarnation, the Word had no other name but Word; after the Incarnation, it or the Incarnate received all the other titles of Christ such as Way, Life, Resurrection, and many others. The third economy was the expansion of the Godhead into a Triad, which took place on Easter night with the sending of the Holy Spirit[24]. It is only then that the Spirit is distinguished from the Word. Since the expansion of the Monad into a Triad existed for the economy, or the order of redemption, it was not eternal. At the end, Marcellus believed, the Word and the Spirit would return into the Godhead, and God would again be an absolute Monad[25].

Another founder of a new heresy, Apollinarius appeared. He put at risk the unity of the Church. Apollinarius of Laodice taught that Jesus could not have had a human mind; rather, that Jesus Christ had a human body and lower soul -the seat of the emotions- but a divine mind[26]. Apollinarius' rejection that Christ had a human mind was considered an over-reaction to Arianism and its teaching that Christ was not divine. If Christ took only the human flesh and not the mind, he could save the human beings from sins and death. Apollinarius tried to combine the teaching of the Incarnation and the teaching of Aristotle and Democritus. Apollinarius supported that from two things, one thing could not appear. In order to explain his thought, he insisted that the unity of the two natures gave two persons and not one Christ. According to Apollinarius' view Christ had one nature and one thought, "willing"[27].

In the end, the last «creator» of a heresy was Eunomius. He taught the Son is a being drawn forth from nothing by the will of the Father, yet superior to all Creation in as much as He alone was created by the One God to be the Creator of the world. The term *Agennesia* perfectly expressed the Divine Essence as the Unbegotten, God is an absolutely simple being. The Father is *agennetos*, the Son *gennetos*, so there must be diversity of substance. If it is allowed the use of *agennesia* to be a Divine attribute, the simplicity of God excludes all multiplicity of attributes. So the term *agennesia* is the unique feature which is advantageous to the Divine nature, the only one therefore essential to Him. In other words, God is essentially incapable of being begotten. The one God, unbegotten and without beginning, *agennetos* and *anarchos*, could not communicate His own substance, nor beget even a consubstantial Son. The Father and the Son have no essential resemblance, *kat ousian*, but at most a moral resemblance. Son does not share in the incommunicable Divine Essence (*ousia*), but he does partake in the communicable Divine creative power (*energeia*), and it is that partaking which constitutes the Son's Divinity and establishes Him, as regards creation, in the

position of Creator -as the principle of paternity in God is not the *ousia* but the *energeia*- the sense in which the term *Son of God* may be used is clear[28].

All these erroneous teachings were “defaced” by the teaching of Cappadocian Father. Basil of Caesarea insisted that the names of God define the God’s energies and not His “ousia”, His being[29]. The divine nature “ousia” is unknown and inaccessible to anyone except the God Himself. The name of Father indicates the relationship between He and His Son. The same is for the name of Son, for the adjectives *agennetos* and *gennetos*[30]. The different divine actions, idioms make the God known to us[31]. Basil told God has one nature “ousia” but three hypostases. There is one God with three persons. Therefore the Spirit is not inferior to the Father and the Son. He is God, too, and He has the same nature with the other two persons of the Trinity[32]. Gregory of Nazianzus supported the every person of the Trinity God has His own way of being. The Father is *agennetos*, the Son is *gennetos* and the Holy Spirit is proceeding only from the Father eternally and in a specific time He is given by the Son (through Son)[33]. Gregory, in order to defend Apollinarius’ teaching, supported that the Embodied Logos had body, soul and mind. He was God and Human together. In the end Gregory of Nyssa agreed to the other fathers.

The Cappadocian Fathers’ theology was the dogmatical base of the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381.

The Council condemned Macedonius’ teaching and defined the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The Council decreed that there was one God in three persons “hypostases”: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Marcellus’ and Apollinarius’ teaching were condemned too.

CONCLUSIONS

We dealt with this period from the autocracy of Constantine to the second Ecumenical Council because it is basically the foundation of the early period of the Byzantine Empire. The new Empire was “characterized” by teaching Christianity. Around the new religion developed various doctrinal issues which undermined not only the unity of the Church but the unity of the Empire too.

The Emperors, sometimes, had dynamic and powerful personalities and sometimes were incompetent and subservient to the Commissioners scheming advisers, stalling in the solution of theological issues, trying to achieve solutions that will bring peace to Byzantium. Their actions are not always effective, sometimes rising up many reactions. The emperor who made Christianity, the base of the Empire, was Constantine the Great.

[23] J.F. Bethune – Baker, [...], 212,213. Socrates Scholasticus underlined that “the exploits of Macedonius on behalf of Christianity, consisted of murders, battles, incarcerations, and civil wars” *Socrates Scholasticus, History Ecclesiastic, II, 38*

[24] Jn 20, 22

[25] Cf St. Papadopoulos, [...] 347, 348.

[26] Ibid. 348.

[27] Apollinarius of Laodicea, *De fide et incarnatione contra adversarios*. Cf H. Lietzmann, *Apollinaris von Laodicea und seine Schule*, 1, Tübingen 1904, 193-203.

[28] Myers, E. (1909). [...]

[29] Basilus of Caesarea, *Against Eunomius*, 1, 12-13 and 2, 31.

[30] Ibid. 1, 14-15.

[31] Ibid. 1, 14 and 2, 28.

[32] Basilus of Caesarea, *Epistle* 125, 1.

[33] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily*, 31, 9.