

TWELVE POINTS OF LIGHT

POINT ONE - FIRST COUNCIL OF NICAEA: WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

A. Introduction

1. It was convened on July 4, 325, by Emperor Constantine at Nicea, a little town near the Bosphorus Straits between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.
2. About 300 hundred bishops and deacons attended with most from the eastern half of the Roman Empire.
3. Kenneth Latourette, *In the conference hall where they waited was a table. On it lay an open copy of the Gospels. The emperor, Constantine the Great, entered the hall in his imperial, jewel-encrusted, multicolored brocades, but out of respect for the Christian leaders, without his customary train of soldiers. Constantine spoke only briefly. He told the churchmen they had to come to some agreement on the crucial questions dividing them. "Division in the church," he said, "is worse than war.*
4. The dispute was between Arius and Alexander.
 - a. Arians wanted it said that the Son was of a different substance (heteroousios).
 - b. Moderates suggested of similar substance (omoousios).
 - c. Athanasius (ca. 296-373), a deacon in Alexandria under Alexander, wanted it stated that the Son was of the same substance (homoousios) as the Father.
 - 1) He maintained the unity of God
 - 2) He distinguished three essential persons in God.
 - 3) He insisted that the Son was the same substance as the Father.
 - 4) He taught that the Son was generated, but that this was an eternal and internal act of God.

B. Issues

1. Preexistence of the Son
 - a. Meaning - Jesus existed before His birth.
 - b. Importance
 - 1) If He was not pre-existent, He is not God.
 - 2) If He was not pre-existent, He is a liar.
 - c. Evidences
 - 1) Heavenly origin, John 3:13, 31.
 - 2) His work as Creator, John 1:3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2.
 - 3) His relationship with God
 - a) He claimed equality of nature with God, John 10:30.
 - b) He claimed equal glory with the Father before the world began, John 17:5.
 - c) Paul claimed Christ had the same nature as God, Phil. 2:6.
 - d) His attributes, Col. 2:9.
 - e) His relation to John the Baptist, John 1:15, 30
2. Eternality of the Son
 - a. Meaning - not only did Christ exist before His birth or even before creation but He existed always, eternally.
 - b. Importance
 - 1) If the Son is not eternal, He does not possess full Deity
 - 2) If the Son is not eternal, there is no Trinity.
 - 3) If the Son is not eternal, He lied.
 - c. Evidences
 - 1) Relationship with God, same essence (nature), Heb. 1:3.
 - 2) Divine attributes, Micah 5:2; Hab. 1:12.
 - 3) Christ's claims, John 8:58
 - 4) John's statement, John 1:1

3. Trinity
 - a. Unity and uniqueness of God, Deut. 6:4.
 - b. Suggestion of Trinity, Is. 48:16
 - c. Oneness (name) and threeness, Mt. 28:18-20
 - d. Trinitarian benediction, 2 Cor. 13:14
 - e. Simple illustration of diversity to Trinity
 - 1) Diversity, Gen. 1:24
 - 2) Triunity, Is. 48:16
 - 3) Trinity of Father, Son, Holy Spirit, 2 Cor. 13:14

C. Temporary Resolution

1. Emperor Constantine sided with Athanasius.
2. Christ is the same substance as the Father (homoousios).
3. The Nicene Creed: *We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of the Father, that is, of the substance [ousias] of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance [homoousion] with the Father, through whom all things came to be, those things that are in heaven and those things that are on earth, who for us men and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, and was made man, suffered, rose the third day, ascended into the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead.*
4. Enforcement by Constantine
 - a. Death penalty for disobedience.
 - b. Burning of all books composed by Arius.
 - c. Banished Arius and his closest supporters
5. Issue still to be resolved - hypostasis.
 - a. The relationship between the divine and human in Christ.
 - b. John Hannah, "Before the relationship between the divine and human in Christ could be resolved, the question of His preexistence had to be delineated... after the Council of Nicea (which argued that in Christ's preincarnate being He was co-equal, co-eternal, and one essence with the Father), the fourth-century church was able to debate the relationship between Christ's deity and humanity."

OBSERVATIONS ON CHRISTOLOGY

A. Early Church Views

1. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 110), *We have also as a physician the Lord our God, Jesus the Christ, the only-begotten Son and Word, before time began, but who afterwards became also a man, of Mary the virgin.*
2. Irenaeus (c. 170), *...the incomprehensible being made comprehensible, the impossible becoming capable of suffering, and the Word being made man.*
3. Tertullian of Carthage (c. 160-220), *..we see plainly the twofold state, which is not confounded, not intermixed but conjoined in One person, Jesus, God and Man.*

B. Reformation Views

1. Luther accepted the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity because he felt it was taught in Scriptures though he felt that faith alone could comprehend it.
2. Augsburg Confession (1530), *that there is one divine essence and power, who also are coeternal, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.*
3. Westminster Confession (1647), *In the unity of the Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding: The Son is eternally begotten of the Father: the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.*

C. Modern Views

1. Reasons advanced against orthodox Christianity
 - a. Belief in Christ as Lord should be abandoned because that makes Christianity exclusive.
 - b. Christian claims to truth are culturally insensitive.
 - c. The cross should be eliminated from Christianity because it espouses an atonement in which God abuses His son, glorifies suffering and encourages victims to be subservient.
2. Portrait of Jesus based on current theological trends
 - a. No miracles but certain psychic powers.
 - b. No special relationship to God the Father.
 - c. No salvific significance of His death.
 - d. No resurrection.
3. Quotes from today
 - a. Nels Ferre, *man's need to create gods made Jesus into a God, ...Jesus became the effective God of the Christian faith...From Judaism and Islam Christianity should learn to repent of its central idolatry: its substitution, in effect, of Jesus for God, its making Jesus God.*
 - b. John Walvoord, *The evidence of Scripture is so complete that one who denies the deity of Christ must necessarily reject the accuracy of Scriptures.*

D. Key Christological Passages

1. John 8:58, *Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.*
 - a. J. B. Rowell, *Jesus did not claim mere pre-existence to Abraham, which would have been expressed by the imperfect tense of the verb used concerning Abraham, but eternal existence, the self-existence that belongs to God alone.*
 - b. Our Lord did not just pre-date Abraham which is an amazing declaration itself, He pre-dates creation.
2. John 10:30, *I and the Father are one.*
 - a. Here the word "one is neuter and not masculine gender. The emphasis is not that Jesus and the Father are one person but a "unity of essence."
 - b. Jesus is not only co-eternal but co-equal in nature with the Father.
3. Matthew 26:63-66, especially 64, *...I tell you hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.*
 - a. Council of Nicea, *...in Christ's preincarnate being he was co-equal, co-eternal, and one essence with the Father.*
 - b. Jesus acknowledged that He is not only co-eternal and co-equal in nature but also co-equal in power.

E. Essential elements of the Trinity

1. God is one.
2. Each of the Persons within the Godhead is Deity.
3. The oneness of God and the threeness of God are not contradictory.
4. The Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is eternal.
5. Each of the persons of God is of the same essence and is not inferior or superior to the others in essence.
6. The Trinity is a mystery which we will never be able to understand fully.

F. Fundamental affirmations

1. Jesus is God the Son.
2. Jesus is mankind's only Savior.
3. Jesus is Lord.

G. Practical ramifications

1. Redemption - all Persons of the Godhead are involved (John 3:6, 16; Rev. 13:8).
2. Revelation - the Son and the Spirit both involved in communicating God's truth (John 1:18; 16:13).
3. Fellowship and love within the Godhead is only possible in a Trinitarian concept of God.

4. Priority without inferiority as seen in the Trinity is the basis for proper relationship between men and women (1 Cor. 11:3).
5. Prayer is practiced in a Trinitarian way - normally we address the Father in the Name of Christ as the Spirit directs, John 14:14; Eph. 1:6; 2:18; 6:18.

H. Personal response

1. Conformity to Christ, Gal. 4:19, Romans 8:29, and 2 Cor. 3:18.
2. Considerations
 - a. Reformation demands regeneration.
 - b. Regeneration demands conformation.
 - c. Conformation demands authenticity.

<i>BASIC OUTLINE OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST</i>

A. Preincarnate Christ

1. Son, Psalm 2:7
2. Jehovah, Gen. 19:24
3. God, Psalm 45:6
4. Angel of the Lord, Gen. 16:7-14
5. Creator, Hebrews 1:3

B. Incarnate Christ

1. Reasons for incarnation
 - a. To confirm God's promises
 - b. To send His Son into the world, Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2.
 - c. Two lines of prediction concerning the coming of Christ
 - 1) Servant (Savior), Isaiah 52 - 53.
 - 2) King, Isaiah 11:1-10.
 - d. To reveal the Father, John 14:9.
 - e. To become our High Priest, Hebrews 4.
 - f. To put away sin, Hebrews 9:26; 2 Corinthians 5:21.
 - g. To destroy the works of the Devil, 1 John 3:8; Hebrews 2:14.
 - h. To give an example of a holy life, 1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:6.
 - i. To prepare for the Second Advent, Hebrews 9:28.
2. Historicity
 - a. The pre-existent Son became man, John 1:14; Galatians 4:4; Philippians 2:6; Hebrews 2:14.
 - b. Nativity accounts, Matthew 1 - 2; Luke 1 - 2.
 - c. Apostolic preaching, Acts 17:3.
 - d. Secular history
 - 1) Jewish historian Josephus, 75 A.D.
 - 2) Roman historian Tacitus, 112 A.D.
3. Nature of the incarnation
 - a. Deity of Jesus
 - 1) Attributes of deity
 - a) Eternality, John 1:15.
 - b) Omnipresence, John 3:13; Matthew 18:20.
 - c) Omniscience, John 16:30; Colossians 2:3
 - d) Immutability, Hebrews 1:12; 13:8.

- 2) Prerogatives
 - a) Creator, John 1:3; Hebrews 1:2.
 - b) Forgiver of sins, Matthew 9:2.
 - c) Judge, John 5:22.
 - d) Life giver, John 5:25-29.
 - e) Recipient of worship, Matthew 14:33.

- 3) Identification with Old Testament Yahweh
 - a) Creator, Psalm 102:24-27.
 - b) Seen by Isaiah, Isaiah 6:1-4.
 - c) Preceded by a forerunner, Isaiah 40:3.
 - d) Disciplines His people, Numbers 21:6f.
 - e) Regarded as holy, Isaiah 8:13.
 - f) Object of faith, Joel 2:32.

- 4) Names implying deity
 - a) *I Am*, John 8:58.
 - b) *Alpha and Omega*, Revelation 22:13.
 - c) *Immanuel*, Matthew applies Isaiah 7:14 to Jesus, Matthew 1:22.
 - d) *The Word*, John 1:1-14.
 - e) *God*, John 1:1; 20:28; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; 2 Peter 1:1; 1 John 5:20.

- 5) Relationships proving deity
 - a) Baptismal formula, Matthew 28:19.
 - b) Apostolic benediction, 2 Corinthians 13:14.
 - c) Essence, John 10:31 (construction in Greek demands unity of substance not person).

- b. Humanity of Jesus
 - 1) In form, Colossians 2:9.
 - 2) In birth, Galatians 4:4.
 - 3) In identity, 1 Timothy 2:5.
 - 4) In limitations
 - a) Weary, John 4:2f.
 - b) Hungry, Matthew 4:2.
 - c) Thirsty, John 19:28.
 - d) Death, Luke 23:46.

- c. Hypostatic union
 - 1) the relationship of Jesus' human and divine natures.
 - 2) It is personal whereby the two natures constitute one person.
 - 3) It insures the constant presence of both humanity and deity.

- d. Kenosis
 - 1) The subordination of Jesus' divine attributes.
 - 2) His divine power was veiled but not surrendered, John 1:14; 17:5.
 - 3) He voluntarily relinquished independent use of His divine attributes, Phil.. 2:7f.
 - 4) Definition: Jesus surrendered no attributes of deity but He did voluntarily subordinate His use of them in keeping with His purpose of living among men and their limitations.

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