

0325-0325 – Concilium Nicaenum I – The Creed

The Nicene Creed

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The Nicene Creed.

(Found in the Acts of the Ecumenical Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon, in the Epistle of Eusebius of Cæsarea to his own Church, in the Epistle of St. Athanasius Ad Jovianum Imp., in the Ecclesiastical Histories of Theodoret and Socrates, and elsewhere, The variations in the text are absolutely without importance.)

The Synod at Nice set forth this Creed.⁴⁹

The Ecthesis of the Synod at Nice.⁵⁰

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 his Father, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten (γεννηθέντα), not made, being of one substance (ὁμοούσιον, consubstantialem) with the Father. By whom all things were made, both which be in heaven and in earth. Who for us men and for our salvation came down [from heaven] and was incarnate and was made man. He suffered and the third day he rose again, and ascended into heaven. And he shall come again to judge both the quick and the dead. And [we believe] in the Holy Ghost. And whosoever shall say that there was a time when the Son of God was not (ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν), or that before he was begotten he was not, or that he was made of things that were not, or that he is of a different substance or essence [from the Father] or that he is a creature, or subject to change or conversion⁵¹ — all that so say, the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes them.

Notes.

The Creed of Eusebius of Cæsarea, which he presented to the council, and which some suppose to have suggested the creed finally adopted.

(Found in his Epistle to his diocese; vide: St. Athanasius and Theodoret.)

We believe in one only God, Father Almighty, Creator of things visible and invisible; and in the Lord Jesus Christ, for he is the Word of God, God of God, Light of Light, life of life, his only Son, the first-born of all creatures, begotten of the Father before all time, by whom also everything was created, who became flesh for our redemption, who lived and suffered amongst men, rose again the third day, returned to the Father, and will come again one day in his glory to judge the quick and the dead. We believe also in the Holy Ghost. We believe that each of these three is and subsists; the Father truly as Father, the Son truly as Son, the Holy Ghost truly as Holy Ghost; as

⁴⁹ This is the heading in the Acts of the IIIrd Council. Labbe, *Conc.*, tom. iii., 671.

⁵⁰ This is the heading in the Acts of the IVth Council. Labbe, *Conc.*, tom. iv., 339.

⁵¹ This word, in the Greek *τρέπτὸν* is translated in the Latin *convertibilem*, but see side note in Labbe.

our Lord also said, when he sent his disciples to preach: Go and teach all nations, and baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Excursus on the Word *Homousios*.⁵²

The Fathers of the Council at Nice were at one time ready to accede to the request of some of the bishops and use only scriptural expressions in their definitions. But, after several attempts, they found that all these were capable of being explained away. Athanasius describes with much wit and penetration how he saw them nodding and winking to each other when the orthodox proposed expressions which they had thought of a way of escaping from the force of. After a series of attempts of this sort it was found that something clearer and more unequivocal must be adopted if real unity of faith was to be attained; and accordingly the word *homousios* was adopted. Just what the Council intended this expression to mean is set forth by St. Athanasius as follows: "That the Son is not only like to the Father, but that, as his image, he is the same as the Father; that he is of the Father; and that the resemblance of the Son to the Father, and his immutability, are different from ours: for in us they are something acquired, and arise from our fulfilling the divine commands. Moreover, they wished to indicate by this that his generation is different from that of human nature; that the Son is not only like to the Father, but inseparable from the substance of the Father, that he and the Father are one and the same, as the Son himself said: 'The Logos is always in the Father, and, the Father always in the Logos,' as the sun and its splendour are inseparable."⁵³

The word *homousios* had not had, although frequently used before the Council of Nice, a very happy history. It was probably rejected by the Council of Antioch,⁵⁴ and was suspected of being open to a Sabellian meaning. It was accepted by the heretic Paul of Samosata and this rendered it very offensive to many in the Asiatic Churches.

On the other hand the word is used four times by St. Irenæus, and Pamphilus the Martyr is quoted as asserting that Origen used the very word in the Nicene sense. Tertullian also uses the expression "of one substance" (*unius substantiæ*) in two places, and it would seem that more than half a century before the meeting of the Council of Nice, it was a common one among the Orthodox.

⁵² Our older English writers usually wrote this word "*homoousion*," and thus spoke of the doctrine as "the doctrine of the *homoousion*." For the Arian word they wrote "*homoiousion*." Later writers have used the nominative masculine, "*homoousios*" and "*homoiousios*." The great Latin writers did not thus transliterate the word, but, wrote "*homousios*," and for the heretical word "*homoæsius*" or "*homæsius*." I have kept for the noun signifying the doctrine, our old English "*Homoousion*," but for the adjective, I have used the ordinary latinized form "*homousios*," in this copying Smith and Wace, *Dict. Christian Antiquities*

⁵³ Athanas., *De Decret. Syn. Nic.*, c. xix., *et seq.*

⁵⁴ Vide Swainson, in Smith and Wace, *Dict. Christ. Biog.*, *sub voce Homousios*, p. 134.

Vasquez treats this matter at some length in his *Disputations*,⁵⁵ and points out how well the distinction is drawn by Epiphanius between *Synousios* and *Homousios*, “for *synousios* signifies such an unity of substance as allows of no distinction: wherefore the Sabellians would admit this word: but on the contrary *homousios* signifies the same nature and substance but with a distinction between persons one from the other. Rightly, therefore, has the Church adopted this word as the one best calculated to confute the Arian heresy.”⁵⁶

It may perhaps be well to note that these words are formed like ὁμόβιος and ὁμοιόβιος, ὁμογνώμων and ὁμοιογνώμων, etc., etc.

The reader will find this whole doctrine treated at great length in all the bodies of divinity; and in Alexander Natalis (*H. E.* t. iv., Diss. xiv.); he is also referred to Pearson, *On the Creed*; Bull, *Defence of the Nicene Creed*; Forbes, *An Explanation of the Nicene Creed*; and especially to the little book, written in answer to the recent criticisms of Professor Harnack, by H. B. Swete, D.D., *The Apostles’ Creed*.

Excursus on the Words γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα .

(J. B. Lightfoot. *The Apostolic Fathers*—Part II. Vol. ii. Sec. I. pp. 90, *et seqq.*)

The Son is here [Ignat. *Ad. Eph.* vii.] declared to be γεννητός as man and ἀγέννητος as God, for this is clearly shown to be the meaning from the parallel clauses. Such language is not in accordance with later theological definitions, which carefully distinguished between γεννητός and γεννητός between ἀγέννητος and ἀγέννητος; so that γεννητός, ἀγέννητος respectively denied and affirmed the eternal existence, being equivalent to κτιστός, ἄκτιστος, while γεννητός, ἀγέννητος described certain ontological relations, whether in time or in eternity. In the later theological language, therefore, the Son was γεννητός even in his Godhead. See esp. Joann. Damasc. *de Fid. Orth.* i. 8 [where he draws the conclusion that only the Father is ἀγέννητος, and only the Son γεννητός].

There can be little doubt however, that Ignatius wrote γεννητός καὶ ἀγέννητος, though his editors frequently alter it into γεννητός καὶ ἀγέννητος. For (1) the Greek ms. still retains the double [Greek nun] ν, though the claims of orthodoxy would be a temptation to scribes to substitute the single ν. And to this reading also the Latin *genitus et ingenitus* points. On the other hand it cannot be concluded that translators who give *factus et non factus* had the words with one ν, for this was after all what Ignatius meant by the double ν, and they would naturally render his words so as to



⁵⁵ Vasquez, *Disput.* cix., cap. v. “Rightly doth the Church use the expression *Homousios* (that is Consubstantial) to express that the Father and the Son are of the same nature.”

⁵⁶ Vasquez may also well be consulted on the expressions ουσία, substantia, ὑπόστασις, etc.

make his orthodoxy apparent. (2) When Theodoret writes γεννητὸς ἐξ ἀγεννήτου, it is clear that he, or the person before him who first substituted this reading, must have read γεννητὸς καὶ ἀγέννητος, for there would be no temptation to alter the perfectly orthodox γεννητὸς καὶ ἀγέννητος, nor (if altered) would it have taken this form. (3) When the interpolator substitutes ὁ μόνος ἄληθινὸς Θεὸς ὁ ἀγέννητος... τοῦ δὲ μονογονοῦς πατὴρ καὶ γεννήτωρ, the natural inference is that he too, had the forms in double ν, which he retained, at the same time altering the whole run of the sentence so as not to do violence to his own doctrinal views; see Bull *Def. Fid. Nic.* ii. 2 § 6. (4) The quotation in Athanasius is more difficult. The mss. vary, and his editors write γεννητὸς καὶ ἀγέννητος. Zahn too, who has paid more attention to this point than any previous editor of Ignatius, in his former work (*Ign. v. Ant.* p. 564), supposed Athanasius to have read and written the words with a single ν, though in his subsequent edition of Ignatius (p. 338) he declares himself unable to determine between the single and double ν. I believe, however, that the argument of Athanasius decides in favour of the νν. Elsewhere he insists repeatedly on the distinction between κτίζειν and γεννᾶν, justifying the use of the latter term as applied to the divinity of the Son, and defending the statement in the Nicene Creed γεννητὸν ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς τὸν υἱὸν ὁμοούσιον (*De Synod.* 54, 1, p. 612). Although he is not responsible for the language of the Macrostich (*De Synod.* 3, 1, p. 590), and would have regarded it as inadequate without the ὁμοούσιον, yet this use of terms entirely harmonizes with his own. In the passage before us, *ib.* §§ 46, 47 (p. 607), he is defending the use of *homousios* at Nicæa, notwithstanding that it had been previously rejected by the council which condemned Paul of Samosata, and he contends that both councils were orthodox, since they used *homousios* in a different sense. As a parallel instance he takes the word ἀγέννητος which like *homousios* is not a scriptural word, and like it also is used in two ways, signifying either (1) Τὸ ὄν μὲν, μήτε δὲ γεννηθὲν μήτε ὄλως ἔχον τὸν αἴτιον, or (2) Τὸ ἄκτιστον. In the former sense the Son cannot be called ἀγέννητος, in the latter he may be so called. Both uses, he says, are found in the fathers. Of the latter he quotes the passage in Ignatius as an example; of the former he says, that some writers subsequent to Ignatius declare ἔν τὸ ἀγέννητον ὁ πατήρ, καὶ εἷς ὁ ἐξ αὐτοῦ υἱὸς γνήσιος, γέννημα ἀληθίνον κ.τ.λ. [He may have been thinking of Clem. Alex. *Strom.* vi. 7, which I shall quote below.] He maintains that both are orthodox, as having in view two different senses of the word ἀγέννητον, and the same, he argues, is the case with the councils which seem to take opposite sides with regard to *homousios*. It is clear from this passage, as Zahn truly says, that Athanasius is dealing with one and the same word throughout; and, if so, it follows that this word must be ἀγέννητον, since ἀγέννητος would be intolerable in some places. I may add by way of caution that in two other passages, *de Decret. Syn. Nic.* 28 (1, p. 184), *Orat. c. Arian.* i. 30 (1, p. 343), St. Athanasius gives the various senses of ἀγέννητον (for this is plain from the context), and that these passages ought not to be treated as parallels to the present passage which is concerned with the senses of ἀγέννητον. Much confusion is thus created, *e.g.* in Newman's notes on the several passages in the Oxford translation of Athanasius (pp. 51 sq., 224 sq.), where the three passages are treated as parallel, and no attempt is made to discriminate the readings in the several

places, but “ingenerate” is given as the rendering of both alike. If then Athanasius who read γεννητός καὶ ἀγέννητος in Ignatius, there is absolutely no authority for the spelling with one ν. The earlier editors (Voss, Ussher, Cotelier, etc.), printed it as they found it in the ms.; but Smith substituted the forms with the single ν, and he has been followed more recently by Hefele, Dressel, and some other. In the Casanatensian copy of the ms., a marginal note is added, ἀναγνωστέον ἀγέννητος τοῦτ' ἔστι μὴ ποιηθείς. Waterland (*Works*, III., p. 240 sq., Oxf. 1823) tries ineffectually to show that the form with the double ν was invented by the fathers at a later date to express their theological conception. He even “doubts whether there was any such word as ἀγέννητος so early as the time of Ignatius.” In this he is certainly wrong.

The MSS. of early Christian writers exhibit much confusion between these words spelled with the double and the single ν. See *e.g.* Justin *Dial.* 2, with Otto's note; Athenag. *Suppl.* 4 with Otto's note; Theophil. *ad Autol.* ii. 3, 4; Iren. iv. 38, 1, 3; Orig. *c. Cels.* vi. 66; Method. *de Lib. Arbitr.*, p. 57; Jahn (see Jahn's note 11, p. 122); Maximus in Euseb. *Præp. Ev.* vii. 22; Hippol. *Hær.* v. 16 (from Sibylline Oracles); Clem. Alex. *Strom.* v. 14; and very frequently in later writers. Yet notwithstanding the confusion into which later transcribers have thus thrown the subject, it is still possible to ascertain the main facts respecting the usage of the two forms. The distinction between the two terms, as indicated by their origin, is that ἀγέννητος denies *the creation*, and ἀγέννητος *the generation or parentage*. Both are used at a very early date; *e.g.* ἀγέννητος by Parmenides in Clem. Alex. *Strom.* v. 14, and by Agothon in Arist. *Eth. Nic.* vii. 2 (comp. also *Orac. Sibyll.* prooem. 7, 17); and ἀγέννητος in Soph. *Trach.* 61 (where it is equivalent to δυσγενῶν. Here the distinction of meaning is strictly preserved, and so probably it always is in Classical writers; for in Soph. *Trach.* 743 we should after Porson and Hermann read ἀγέννητον with Suidas. In Christian writers also there is no reason to suppose that the distinction was ever lost, though in certain connexions the words might be used convertibly. Whenever, as here in Ignatius, we have the double ν where we should expect the single, we must ascribe the fact to the indistinctness or incorrectness of the writer's theological conceptions, not to any obliteration of the meaning of the terms themselves. To this early father for instance the eternal γέννησις of the Son was not a distinct theological idea, though substantially he held the same views as the Nicene fathers respecting the Person of Christ. The following passages from early Christian writers will serve at once to show how far the distinction was appreciated, and to what extent the Nicene conception prevailed in ante-Nicene Christianity; Justin *Apol.* ii. 6, comp. *ib.* § 13; Athenag. *Suppl.* 10 (comp. *ib.* 4); Theoph. *ad. Aut.* ii. 3; Tatian *Orat.* 5; Rhodon in Euseb. *H. E.* v. 13; Clem. Alex. *Strom.* vi. 7; Orig. *c. Cels.* vi. 17, *ib.* vi. 52; Concil. Antioch (A.D. 269) in Routh *Rel. Sacr.* III., p. 290; Method. *de Creat.* 5. In no early Christian writing, however, is the distinction more obvious than in the *Clementine Homilies*, x. 10 (where the distinction is employed to support the writer's heretical theology): see also viii. 16, and comp. xix. 3, 4, 9, 12. The following are instructive passages as regards the use of these words where the opinions of other heretical writers are given; Saturninus, Iren. i. 24, 1; Hippol. *Hær.* vii. 28; Simon Magus, Hippol. *Hær.* vi. 17, 18; the Valentinians, Hippol. *Hær.* vi. 29, 30; the Ptolemæus in

particular, Ptol. *Ep. ad. Flor.* 4 (in Stieren's Irenæus, p. 935); Basilides, Hippol. *Hær.* vii. 22; Carpocrates, Hippol. *Hær.* vii. 32.

From the above passages it will appear that Ante-Nicene writers were not indifferent to the distinction of meaning between the two words; and when once the orthodox Christology was formulated in the Nicene Creed in the words γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα, it became henceforth impossible to overlook the difference. The Son was thus declared to be γεννητός but not γενητός. I am therefore unable to agree with Zahn (*Marcellus*, pp. 40, 104, 223, *Ign. von Ant.* p. 565), that at the time of the Arian controversy the disputants were not alive to the difference of meaning. See for example Epiphanius, *Hær.* lxiv. 8. But it had no especial interest for them. While the orthodox party clung to the *homousios* as enshrining the doctrine for which they fought, they had no liking for the terms ἀγέννητος and γεννητός as applied to the Father and the Son respectively, though unable to deny their propriety, because they were affected by the Arians and applied in their own way. To the orthodox mind the Arian formula οὐκ ἦν πρὶν γεννηθῆναι or some Semiarian formula hardly less dangerous, seemed always to be lurking under the expression Θεὸς γεννητός as applied to the Son. Hence the language of Epiphanius *Hær.* lxxiii. 19: "As you refuse to accept our *homousios* because though used by the fathers, it does not occur in the Scriptures, so will we decline on the same grounds to accept your ἀγέννητος." Similarly Basil *c. Eunom.* i., iv., and especially *ib.* further on, in which last passage he argues at great length against the position of the heretics, εἰ ἀγέννητος, φασὶν, ὁ πατήρ, γεννητός δὲ ὁ υἱός, οὐ τῆς αὐτῆς οὐσίας. See also the arguments against the Anomœans in [Athan.] *Dial. de Trin.* ii. passim. This fully explains the reluctance of the orthodox party to handle terms which their adversaries used to endanger the *homousios*. But, when the stress of the Arian controversy was removed, it became convenient to express the Catholic doctrine by saying that the Son in his divine nature was γεννητός but not γένητος. And this distinction is staunchly maintained in later orthodox writers, *e.g.* John of Damascus, already quoted in the beginning of this Excursus.



The Canons of the 318 Holy Fathers Assembled in the City of Nice, in Bithynia.

Canon I.

IF any one in sickness has been subjected by physicians to a surgical operation, or if he has been castrated by barbarians, let him remain among the clergy; but, if any one in sound health has castrated himself, it behoves that such an one, if [already] enrolled among the clergy, should cease [from his ministry], and that from henceforth no such person should be promoted. But, as it is evident that this is said of those who wilfully do the thing and presume to castrate themselves, so