

An Iota of Difference
The Establishment of Orthodoxy
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May 13, 2018

Slide 1

1. We ended last week in about 220 A.D., with many versions of Christianity existing throughout the Roman Empire, each claiming to represent the true faith.
2. Many of these beliefs are now considered heresies by most Christians.
3. Today, we will see that beliefs of the majority of Christians were the subject of votes and royal decrees, with the arguments of the winners becoming seen as undeniable truths and the arguments of the losers becoming seen as heresies.
4. In one decision, the outcome turned on one letter in a single word.
5. As we will see, the losers often did not simply go away, but formed versions of Christianity that continue to exist.
6. We will also see that one of those Christian heresies survives today as Islam.
7. Along the way, we will see differences beginning to develop between the churches in the east and west of the Roman Empire that eventually led to their separation.

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1. In the third century, things were not going well for the Roman Empire and there was **“increasing concern by the imperial authorities that the support of the pagan gods of Rome was being lost through the refusal of the growing number of Christians to sacrifice to them.”** Freeman, *A.D. 381* at 45.
2. **“The gods – or at least one of them had not been respected and worshipped properly or sufficiently.”** Ehrman, *The Triumph of Christianity* at 86.
3. So emperors from time to time persecuted the Christians to try to get them to sacrifice to the Roman gods so that good times would return.
4. The last of the persecutions took place in 304, when Emperor Diocletian condemned Romans to death if they refused to sacrifice to the gods of Rome. *Id.*

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1. Christians and others who refused to sacrifice to Roman gods were executed, most burned alive or decapitated, in what became known as the “Great Persecution.”

2. To save their lives, some bishops agreed to sacrifice to the Roman gods and surrendered to the Roman authorities any property they owned that was used by the Christians in their areas.
3. These bishops became known as “*traditors*,” because they had handed over property to the Romans.
4. The persecutions did not quickly eradicate Christianity as Diocletian had expected and he stopped them in about 305.

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1. Diocletian divided the Roman Empire into eastern and western units, each to be ruled by a co-emperor with the title “Augustus” and a junior emperor called “Caesar.”
2. Most of the people in the east spoke Greek, while Latin was the most common language in the west.
3. This division would prove very important in the development of Christianity.

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1. Constantine became a Caesar in the west in 307.
2. At the beginning of his reign, Constantine worshipped the Roman sun god.

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1. In 312, Constantine reportedly saw a vision of the cross shortly before a battle against a rival emperor at the Milvian Bridge in Italy and put the sign of the cross on the shields of his soldiers.
2. His victory in that battle gave him control of most of the Empire and he later attributed the victory to Jesus.

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1. In 313, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, which provided that “**now every individual still desirous of observing the Christian form of worship should without any interference be allowed to do so.**” Eusebius, *The History of the Church* at 322-23.
2. This edict also restored church property to the *traditors* who had given it up during the Great Persecution.
3. Bishops who had renounced their faith again began performing the sacraments.
4. A group called the “Donatists” because they were led by a bishop named Donatus who believed that the *traditors* were no longer qualified to be bishops and people baptized by them had to be rebaptized.

5. A group led by a rival bishop believed that God had forgiven the *traditors* and they had the right to administer the sacraments.
6. Constantine got involved in this dispute because “[u]nity of the empire was one of his chief ambitions, and a unified church could contribute to the cause.” Ehrman, *The Triumph of Christianity* at 221.
7. From this point forward, Roman emperors claimed the right to become involved in disputes over church doctrine.
8. The Donatists continued in North Africa, claiming to be the only true church. Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* at 131.

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1. Soon after he had legalized Christianity, Constantine became aware of a controversy in Alexandria, Egypt.
2. Most Christians at the time had accepted the idea that Jesus was the incarnation of the Greek *logos* (“the Word”) and that *logos* was the same as the “wisdom” of the Hebrew Scriptures, a view that originated with Philo of Alexandria.
3. Arius, a priest in Alexandria, looked at *Proverbs* 8:22, which says that God brought forth wisdom/*logos* as the first of his works.
4. Arius concluded that if God had created *logos*, there must have been a time when *logos* and therefore Jesus did not exist.
5. From this, Arius concluded that Jesus was not equal to God because the created cannot be equal to the creator.

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1. Arius found support for this view in writings considered authoritative at the time.
2. For example, in *Mark*, Jesus says this about the coming of the Son of Man: “**No one knows about the day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.**” *Mark* 13:32.
3. In *John*, Jesus says: “**If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.**” *John* 14:28.

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1. The view that Jesus had been created by God was opposed by Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria, who argued that Jesus had always existed and had not been created.
2. Alexander also cited the *Gospel of John*: “**He was with God in the beginning**” and “**The Father and I are one.**” *John* 1:2; 10:30.

3. This so-called “Arian Controversy” took on a life of its own, with songs written to express the two points of view.
4. One song of the Arians declared: **“There was a time when the Son was not.”**

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1. At the time, **“most participants believed that their salvation depended on finding the correct answer.”** Freeman, *A.D. 381* at 52.
2. But Emperor Constantine thought the dispute was trivial.
3. In a letter to the leaders on both sides, he said: **“I find the cause to be of a truly insignificant character, and quite unworthy of such fierce contention.”** Placher, *A History of Christian Theology* at 75.
4. When Hosius of Cordova, Constantine’s advisor on religion, was unable to resolve this dispute, Constantine invited about 1800 bishops to his summer palace in Nicaea, in what is now Turkey.

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1. About 300 bishops attended this Council at Nicaea in 325 A.D., all but six of them from the east, in what is considered to be the First Ecumenical Council.
2. Constantine paid the expenses of the bishops attending and presided over the opening session in full regalia.
3. At the beginning of the meeting, many of the bishops were sympathetic to the view of Arius that God had created Jesus, a view that seemed to be required by Scripture.

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1. Athanasius, the young secretary to Alexander, may have presented the arguments against Arius.
2. He argued from logic – because everyone agreed that God is unchanging, God must have always been the Father and Jesus must therefore have always been his son.
3. Consequently, there could never have been a time when Jesus was not.

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1. Eusebius of Caesarea was at the council and had just completed his now famous *History of the Church*, which provides much of what we know about the early church.
2. Eusebius, who favored Arius, proposed a formula that he thought both sides could accept: **“[Jesus was] the Word of God, God from God, light from light, Son only**

begotten, first-begotten of all creation, begotten before all ages from the Father.”
Freeman, *A.D. 381* at 54.

3. The English word “begotten” is a translation of a Greek word that can suggest being derived from something of like kind, as a flame can beget another flame.
4. But this language could have allowed Arius to continue to claim that God was greater than Jesus by being first, so it was unacceptable to Athanasius and Alexander.
5. Hosius, the religious advisor to Constantine, with the apparent support of Constantine, suggested adding that God and Jesus were of the same substance, using the Greek word “*homoousios*.”
6. Arius opposed this idea, noting that “*homoousios*” had no support in Christian writings and by itself did not answer the question of whether God had created Jesus.
7. Constantine ordered the bishops to come to an agreement: **“For to me, internal division in the Church of God is graver than any war or secular battle, and these things appear to cause more pain than secular affairs.”** *Id.* at 55.

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1. After additional discussion, the Council of Nicaea approved this text, translated here into English, with only two bishops voting against it.
2. It asserts that Jesus and God are of the same substance [*homoousios*] and that Jesus was involved in the creative process, meaning he was with God at the beginning.
3. The essential idea was that God and Jesus had both existed forever and that there was never a time when Jesus did not exist.
4. The last sentence about the Holy Spirit was tacked on **“almost as an afterthought”** because there was no consensus at this time about how the Holy Spirit related to Jesus and God. Armstrong, *A History of God* at 115.
5. When Arius refused to sign the document ending the council, Constantine personally excommunicated him.
6. The views of Arius became known as the “Arian Heresy.”

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1. Just before the Council of Nicaea, Constantine had beaten a rival emperor in the east and was the unquestioned leader of the entire Roman Empire.
2. Constantine moved his capital to the ancient city of Byzantium, which he renamed Constantinople or “City of Constantine.”
3. Constantine wanted Constantinople to be a Christian city, the “New Rome.”

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1. Despite the decision at the Council at Nicaea, the debate between followers of Arius and Alexander continued and **“the bishops went on teaching as they had before.”** Armstrong, *A History of God* at 111.
2. Part of the problem was that *homoousios* had a variety of meanings.
3. A great Greek philosopher had written that the souls of animals and humans were *homoousios*. Rubenstein, *When Jesus Became God* at 81.
4. But the most important objections were theological.
5. For example, if Jesus and God were of the same substance, how could Jesus have suffered and died on the cross, because God cannot die.
6. And, if Jesus and God were of the same substance, who was Jesus praying to at Gethsemane when he said: **“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.”** *Luke 22:42*.
7. Constantine himself appears to have had a change of heart on the debate.
8. Constantine later received Arius and reinstated his position in Alexandria.
9. On his deathbed, Constantine was baptized by Eusebius of Nicomedia, an early supporter of Arius.

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1. **“On the death of Constantine in 337, the debate between Arius and Alexander remained unresolved.”** Freeman, *A.D. 381* at 58.
2. There were a variety of efforts to either solve or eliminate the problem.
3. On Constantine’s death, his son Constantius had become the emperor in the east and became the sole emperor in 351.
4. He favored the Arian view and sought a compromise.
5. Constantius suggested that the word *“homoi”* be substituted for *“homoousios,”* which would mean that God and Jesus were similar, but without any reference to their substance.
6. Constantius assembled two councils of bishops, which agreed with his idea in a written statement: **“The word *ousia* because it was naively inserted by the fathers [at Nicaea], though not familiar to the masses, caused disturbance, and because the scriptures do not contain it, we have decided that it should be removed.”** *Id.* at 65.

7. The supporters of Athanasius rejected this idea, because it eliminated any reference to the substance of God and Jesus and was therefore inconsistent with the Nicene declaration -- the debate continued.

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1. Another compromise was then suggested – the word “*homoiousios*” would be substituted for “*homoousios*,” meaning that God and Jesus were of similar substance.

2. The difference between these two words – the single Greek letter iota – is the basis for our statement today that something “**does not make an iota’s difference.**”

3. But this iota was a life or death matter to Christians in the middle of the fourth century and the compromise was rejected – God and Jesus remained *homoousios*, made of the same substance, with Jesus having always existed.

4. A recent author shows how current Christian beliefs are dependent on the importance of the decision about this one letter: “**If [proponents] had succeeded in getting their iota into the creed, their point of view would have become orthodox Christianity. It would have meant that Christianity had degenerated into a form of paganism. The Christian faith would have had two gods and a Jesus who was neither God nor man.**” Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* at 104.

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1. In 357, a group of bishops meeting in Sirmium under the authority of Constantius drew up a proposed creed that made no mention of the substance of Jesus and God because “**it is clear that only the Father knows how he begot his Son and his Son how he was begotten by his Father.**” Freeman, *A.D. 381* at 62.

2. Adoption of this common sense view would probably have eliminated a lot of bloodshed over the years, but it was not adopted before Constantius died in 361, with no resolution of the issue.

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1. In 361, Constantius was succeeded by Julian, called “Julian the Apostate” by the Christians because he had not become a Christian.

2. Julian had no patience for the debates between Christians over the nature of Jesus: “**No wild beasts are such enemies to mankind as are most of the Christians in their deadly hatred of each other.**” Julian, quoted in Freeman, *A.D. 381* at 66.

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1. Julian died in 363, after a short reign.

2. In 367 A.D., Athanasius, now the Bishop of Alexandria, sought to bring a close to ongoing debates about which books should be included in the New Testament.
3. In his annual Easter letter to his churches in Alexandria, Athanasius identified the same 27 books we have in our New Testament, saying that “[o]nly in these is the teaching of piety proclaimed. Let no man add to these, nor take away from them.” Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers* at 342.
4. **“Most Christians ended up agreeing with the canon laid out by Athanasius.”** Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code* at 94.

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1. This is Cappadocia, an area in central Turkey.
2. Its extraordinary natural formations are not found anywhere else in the world.

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1. Probably because of that early influence of Paul, this area has a large number of early churches built into the rocks.
2. After the death of Julian, a group of church leaders originally from Cappadocia tried to resolve the ongoing controversy over the nature of Jesus.

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1. They are known collectively as the “Cappadocian Fathers,” the most important of whom was Basil, the Bishop of Caesarea.
2. What most Christians believe today about how Jesus relates to God the Father can be traced to the teachings of these Cappadocian Fathers.
3. The Cappadocian Fathers thought that the problem with the formulations dealing only with the substance of God and Jesus was that they did not account for the differences between Jesus and God that were apparent to everyone.
4. Jesus had clearly died on the cross and had suffered pain, but it was not possible to imagine that God could die or suffer pain.
5. When Jesus prayed that the Father’s will be done, no one thought he was talking to himself.

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1. The Cappadocian Fathers had studied philosophy at Athens and believed that the writings of the Greek philosophers could help people understand the truths about the nature of Jesus.

2. One author notes that Basil “**saw considerable use in the pagan literature of his day.**” Woodbridge, *Great Leaders of the Christian Church* at 72.
3. The Greek philosopher Plotinus had talked about a transcendent unity, which he called the “One,” that could take several forms.
4. The Cappadocian Fathers agreed with the Nicene conclusion that Jesus and God were of the same substance, since both could be thought of as light and one portion of a light beam can be “begotten” from another. Freeman, *A.D. 381* at 72.
5. But they added the idea that God and Jesus, although they were of the same substance, had different “*hypostases*,” a word that roughly means “expressions” and can also be translated “beings” or “persons.”
6. They said that three copper coins could be minted from the same ingot and therefore all had the same substance, but the coins clearly had different *hypostases* because the faces were different.
7. If the three coins were melted and three new coins were then minted, their substance would still be the same but they would have different *hypostases*.
8. These views helped maintain a difference between God and Jesus while maintaining the identity of their substance, the most important conclusion at Nicaea.

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1. In 379, Theodosius the Great became the emperor in the east.
2. He is described as “**a pious and intolerant Christian and heretic-hunter,**” who had come from Spain. Moynahan, *The Faith* at 107.
3. Theodosius invited Gregory of Nazianzus, one of the Cappadocian Fathers, to Constantinople to explain the issues that were dividing Christians.

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1. After hearing the views of Gregory of Nazianzus on the nature of Jesus, on February 27, 380, Theodosius and Gratian, the emperor in the west, issued the following edict: “**According to the apostolic teaching and the doctrine of the Gospel, let us believe in the one deity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in equal majesty and in a holy Trinity. We authorize the followers of this law to assume the title of Catholic Christians; but as for the others, since, in our judgment they are foolish madmen, we decree that they shall be branded with the ignominious name of heretics, and shall not presume to give to their conventicles the name of churches. They will suffer in the first place the chastisement of the divine condemnation and in the second the punishment of our authority which in accordance with the will of Heaven we shall decide to inflict.**” *Codex Theodosianus* XVI.1.2

2. As one author writes: “[T]here can have been few more important documents in the history of European thought.” Freeman, *A.D. 301* at 102.
3. By decree, belief in the Trinity, as articulated by the Cappadocian Fathers, was now required throughout the entire Roman Empire.
4. Those believing in accordance with the decree were allowed to call themselves “Catholic Christians,” meaning “Universal Christians.”
5. Those who rejected this belief were officially declared to be “foolish madmen” and “heretics,” subject to punishment.

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1. In July 381, Emperor Theodosius summoned about 150 eastern bishops to Constantinople.
2. This council was known as the Second Ecumenical Council even though it did not include any bishops from the west.
3. The council met in the Church of Holy Irene, the grandest church in Constantinople at the time.
4. The council affirmed the edict of Theodosius, making belief in the Trinity required for all Christians under the authority of the emperors.

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1. The Council at Constantinople put out a modified version of the creed that had been adopted at the Council at Nicaea, which represents the first articulation of the Trinity as most Christians today understand it.
2. The primary change to the Nicene Creed dealt with the Holy Spirit, making it a full member of the Trinity and rejecting the views that the Holy Spirit was not of the same substance as God and Jesus.
3. The added language said: “[We believe] in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Life-giver, who proceeds from the Father, who is worshipped and glorified together with the Father and the Son, who spoke through the prophets; And in one holy, catholic and apostolic Church; We confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins; We wait for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the coming age.” Freeman, *A.D. 381* at 206.
4. The conclusion that the Holy Spirit had come from the Father was based on *John* 15:26, in which Jesus promised “**the spirit of truth who goes out from the father.**”

5. Gregory of Nazianzus, one of the Cappadocian Fathers, selected the word translated as “proceeds” to explain how the Holy Spirit could come from the Father when he had only one “begotten” son. Placher, *A History of Christian Theology* at 101.
6. Again, the thought is that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father in the way that one flame might proceed from another while retaining the original substance.
7. In other actions, the Council at Constantinople stated that the bishop of Constantinople should have standing equal to that of the bishop of Rome.
8. This recognition of the bishop of Constantinople, who had no claim to being in the line of Peter, created a source of friction with the church in the west.

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1. Augustine of Hippo, a Christian from North Africa, later objected to the conclusion the Holy Spirit comes only from the Father, which he believed detracted from the identity of Jesus and God.
2. As we will discuss next week, disputes about the relationship of the Holy Spirit to Jesus contributed to the breakup that created what we know of today as the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox Church.

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1. The declaration that Arians were now heretics led to their persecution.
2. In 386, seven heretics, including a bishop, were burned at the stake in what is now France. Moynahan, *The Faith* at 86-88.
3. The persecution of heretics had the blessing of important church officials.
4. Soon after the Council at Constantinople, a group of Christians led by monks destroyed a Jewish synagogue and a chapel used by believers considered to be heretics.
5. When Emperor Theodosius issued an order to punish those responsible, Ambrose of Milan, an important western bishop, threatened to excommunicate him -- Theodosius withdrew the order. Rubenstein, *When Jesus Became God* at 225-26.
6. In 391 A.D., Theodosius banned paganism and made Christianity the only religion tolerated by the Roman Empire.
7. With no threat of punishment from the Empire, “[b]ands of wandering monks attacked synagogues, pagan temples, heretics’ meeting places, and the homes of wealthy unbelievers in Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt, Palestine, and North Africa.” *Id.* at 226.

8. Baptism of all infants was encouraged as an outward sign that the infant was a citizen of the now Christian Empire, in much the same way the circumcision had been used to identify the citizens of Israel. *See Colossians 2:11-12.*
9. It was only later and only in the west as a result of the teachings of Augustine that baptism of infants came to be seen as a way to avoid the consequences of original sin.

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1. After the Council at Constantinople, people continued to assert the views of Arius despite the threats of punishment.
2. As we will discuss next week, the “barbarians” that attacked Rome were Arian Christians, believing that Jesus was created by and subordinate to God the Father.
3. Even today, the Jehovah’s Witnesses and Unitarians adopt the Arian view and reject the proposition that Jesus and God are equal.

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1. According to Bart Ehrman, “[b]y the end of the fourth century about half of the empire was Christian.” Ehrman, *The Triumph of Christianity* at 275.
2. Many of these Christians had begun praying to Mary.
3. The veneration of Mary was apparently the natural reaction of people when Jesus was declared equal to God the Father at the Council at Nicaea – people wanted someone who could mediate between them and God.
4. This idea was typical of why people prayed to Mary: **“We ought to imitate the man who has incurred the king’s anger. What does he do? He goes secretly to the queen and promises her a present.”** Placher, *A History of Christian Theology* at 131.
5. Mary became known as the “Queen of Heaven,” assumed to have the power to intercede with Jesus on behalf of the people.

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1. People also began to call Mary “*Theotokos*” or “Mother of God.”
2. In 428, Nestorius, the bishop of Constantinople, attacked this label as inconsistent with what he understood to be the basic humanity of Jesus.
3. He believed that a God could not have been born to a woman, a view that he associated with pagan beliefs.
4. This picture from India shows the Hindu god Vishnon with his mother.

5. As one of the supporters of Nestorius stated: **“Let no one call Mary the mother of God, for Mary was a human being, and that God should be born to a human being is impossible.”** Moynahan, *The Faith* at 125.
6. In the view of Nestorius, *logos*, the divine nature of Jesus, was joined with his human nature after he had been born human. Armstrong, *A History of God* at 125.
7. Nestorius advocated calling Mary *“Christotokos,”* or “Mother of Christ.”
8. This position created an outcry: **“When theologians interfere with popular piety, they rouse opposition, and Nestorius soon found himself under bitter attack as a defamer of the Virgin Mary.”** Placher, *A History of Christian Theology* at 82.

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1. Nestorius was opposed by Cyril, the Patriarch of Alexandria.
2. In his view, Jesus was simultaneously man and God, so when he was born as a man he was also born as God, so it was proper to call Mary the “Mother of God.”

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1. Some people believe Cyril, an Egyptian Christian, intended to co-opt **“the ancient cult of the Egyptian goddess Isis.”** Wade, *The Faith Instinct* at 167-68.
2. This is a statue of Isis with the Egyptian god Horus, which has been described as the **“prototype of the most tender scene in Medieval art.”** *Id.* at 168.

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1. Once again, the Roman emperors (Theodosius II and Valentinian III) summoned the bishops to Ephesus to resolve this dispute.
2. The city in which this Third Ecumenical Council took place seems to have been selected to get the desired result.
3. Ephesus had long been associated with Mary because of the belief that John, the disciple of Jesus, had moved there and taken Mary with him. *See John 19:27.*
4. The bishops met in 431 in the new Church of the Mother of God, the first known church devoted to Mary, which may have been built especially for the council.
5. This council had a number of twists and turns, but eventually confirmed the view that Mary was the Mother of God because Jesus was simultaneously human and divine.
6. The council excommunicated the supporters of Nestorius as heretics, who fled beyond the boundaries of the Empire.

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1. **“Once free of Roman oversight, Christian leaders were free to establish their own churches, following the doctrines they believed to be correct.”** Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity* at 57.
2. Nestorius created a separate church in Persia, based on his view that Mary was not the Mother of God.
3. That new church, known today as the Assyrian church, took the Nestorian version of Christianity into Arabia, India and Turkestan. Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* at 172.

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1. The Council at Ephesus in 431 did not finally resolve the issues about how the human and divine natures of Jesus were combined.
2. To try to settle those issues, the Fourth Ecumenical Council was held in Chalcedon, across the Bosphorus River from Constantinople, in 451.
3. The Bishop of Rome at the time, Pope Leo I, resisted this council, claiming that his writings had already resolved the issue and that should be the end of the discussion.
4. As we will discuss further next week, Leo I, called “Leo the Great,” claimed that the Bishop of Rome was entitled to be considered the supreme ruler and teacher because he was the successor to Peter, who he claimed was the greatest of the disciples of Jesus.
5. This council reaffirmed the Nicene Creed of 325 and its modification in 381.
6. The council also expressly declared that Jesus had a dual nature, both fully human and fully divine - people with this view were called “Diophysites.”
7. You can see the language in this confession of Chalcedon: **“our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man.”**
8. The bishops from the important cities of Alexandria and Antioch, Syria, did not accept this view - they believed that Jesus had a single nature that was wholly divine - people with this belief are called “Monophysites.”

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1. Justinian became the eastern emperor of what remained of the Roman Empire, usually called the Byzantine Empire, in 527.

2. He was one of the most important figures of late antiquity, the period before what we call the Middle Ages.

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1. In 532, Justinian ordered the construction of the Hagia Sophia (“Holy Wisdom”) on the site of earlier churches in Constantinople.
2. Soon after it was built, the staff of this magnificent church contained 80 priests and hundreds of deacons. Clendemin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity* at 76.

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1. The figure on the left is Justinian, handing the church to Mary and Jesus.
2. As we will discuss more next week, by the time of Justinian, much of the Empire in the west had been lost to the barbarians and Justinian set about to reunite the Empire.
3. He recaptured some of the lost territory, including the city of Rome.
4. He then tried to unite the Empire’s religious beliefs, which had been divided by the Council at Chalcedon.
5. The vast majority of Christians in the eastern Empire were Monophysites, believing that Jesus had a single nature that was wholly divine.
6. Justinian tried to induce the Monophysites to accept the decision of the Council at Chalcedon by making concessions to them.
7. When the Bishop of Rome refused to accept those concessions, Justinian held him as a prisoner in Constantinople until he agreed with them, which led bishops in North Africa to excommunicate the Bishop of Rome.
8. The Bishop of Rome, who we now call the pope, later withdrew his assent to the actions of Justinian and then excommunicated both the Patriarch of Constantinople and Justinian’s religious advisor.

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1. To try to resolve this mess, in 553 Justinian summoned the bishops to Constantinople in what has become known as the Fifth Ecumenical Council.
2. They met behind this screen in the Hagia Sophia and condemned writings called the “Three Chapters” that were thought to be objectionable to the Monophysites.

3. The council also expressly rejected the idea that the soul could be reincarnated, a belief maintained by people who were followers of Origen, whose views we looked at last week.

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1. The decision of the Fifth Ecumenical Council did not satisfy the Monophysites, who began forming their own churches.

2. As one author has written: “[T]he controversies over the councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon divided the churches throughout the Mediterranean world.”

Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* at 180.

3. In Egypt and Ethiopia, Monophysites established what is now known as the Coptic Church and declared that the Patriarch of Alexandria was the successor to St. Mark.

4. This picture of Mark as Patriarch is from a modern Coptic church in Cairo.

5. Monophysite churches were also established in Syria and Armenia.

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1. In the early seventh century, a new group appeared in Arabia that rejected the views of both the Diophysites and the Monophysites.

2. The writings of this group included stories about Mary and Jesus “**derived from gospels that were popular in the Near East but were excluded from the New Testament, such as the story found in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas about the infant Jesus breathing life into a clay bird.**” Wade, *The Faith Instinct* at 186.

3. Their writings paraphrased the sayings of Jesus, saying that a person will not be saved “**until the camel pass through the eye of the needle.**” *Quran* 7:40.

4. They “**strove to present their faith as the true successor to older Christianity,**” believing that Jesus was a human Messiah, chosen by God but not divine. Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity* at 196.

5. Like the Ebionites we talked about in the first presentation, this group taught that Jesus was “**a plain human prophet**” and was determined “**to oppose the Trinitarian approach of Hellenistic Christianity.**” Wade, *The Faith Instinct* at 183.

6. Rejecting as blasphemy the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, they asserted: “**Certainly they disbelieve who say: God is the third of the three.**” *Quran* 5:73.

Slide 47

1. The followers of this group referred **“to Christians as al-Nasrani, an archaic term used by East Syrian Churches.”** Wade, *The Faith Instinct* at 165.
2. Like Syrian Christians today, they referred to God as “Allah.”
3. The name of their writings, the *Quran*, is a Syriac word **“meaning lectionary, a collection of holy texts.”** *Id.* at 186.
4. These people were, of course, the first Muslims.

Slide 48

1. Because of its apparent relationship to Syria, people have long speculated that Islam originated among Christians in Syria who held views similar to those of the earliest Jewish Christians that we talked about in the first presentation. Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity* at 186-87.
2. According to one common story, in 580 A.D., Muhammad, then about ten years old, stopped in Bosra, Syria, with his uncle, a Meccan caravan driver.
3. While there, Muhammad met with a monk named Bahira who rejected the orthodox Christian view that Jesus was the divine Son of God.
4. According to Islamic tradition, Bahira told the young Muhammad he was destined to correct the mistaken views of orthodox Christianity about the nature of Jesus.
5. Although scholars have tried for years to corroborate stories of a direct connection between descendants of the earliest Jewish Christians and the beginning of Islam, to date they have not found evidence of such a connection.
6. A recent author noted the possibility that the **“doctrinal connection between Jewish Christianity and Islam is *not* based on a historical connection.”** Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus* at 100.
7. The similarities between Islam and the beliefs of early Christians could be based on Muhammad’s **“intuition, if one prefers a secular concept, or . . . revelation, if one is open to a religious one.”** *Id.* at 101.

Slide 49

1. Whether a new idea or a resurrection of views of the earliest Christians, the Muslims’ unorthodox view of Jesus quickly spread in those areas where Christianity had originated.

2. By the late 600s Muslims had easily captured Egypt, Syria, Persia and North Africa and gained voluntary converts in those areas.
3. As Karen Armstrong writes: “[T]he new version of monotheism, which eventually became known as ‘Islam,’ spread with astonishing rapidity throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Many of its enthusiastic converts in these lands (where Hellenism was not on home ground) turned with relief from Greek Trinitarianism, which expressed the mystery of God in an idiom that was alien to them, and adopted a more Semitic notion of the divine reality.” Armstrong, *A History of God* at 131.

Slide 50

1. In about 690, Muslim forces erected the so-called “Dome of the Rock” on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the site of the Jewish Temple until it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.
2. An inscription inside the dome reads: “**For Messiah Jesus, son of Mary, is the messenger of God.**” Wade, *The Faith Instinct* at 184.
3. This reinforced the unorthodox view that Jesus, although the Messiah, was not divine, a view that orthodox Christians had rejected as heresy at the Council of Nicaea
4. Consequently, “[t]hroughout the Middle Ages, Christians saw Muhammad as a schismatic rather than the leader of an alien faith.” Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity* at 185.

Slide 51

1. The lands first captured by the Muslims were those in which the beliefs of the Monophysites, the Nestorians and the Donatists had been predominant.
2. Many scholars believe that the Byzantine Empire, having already rejected the Christians in these areas as “heretics,” did little to stop the Muslim advance – for the Empire, one Christian heresy was no better or worse than any other.

Slide 52

1. With much of the Byzantine Empire now lost to Muslims, Emperor Constantine IV saw the need to try to make common ground with the Bishop of Rome on the esoteric question of how many “wills” Jesus had, being both human and divine.
2. To resolve the issue, he summoned bishops to Constantinople in 680 in what became known as the Sixth Ecumenical Council.

3. The council adopted the western view, declaring that Jesus had two wills, one human and one divine.
4. So, when Jesus prayed that God's will be done, his human will was talking to his divine will.

Slide 53

1. Early Christians believed, as Jews and Muslims still believe, that any depiction of the divine is banned by the Commandment not to make graven images.
2. Christians in the west often represented Jesus, recognized as divine, as a lamb.
3. In 692 A.D, a council in Constantinople summoned by Emperor Justinian II ordered that Jesus be depicted **only** as a human figure and not as the lamb, in order to show his incarnation. Walker, *A History of the Church* at 183.

Slide 54

1. In about 730, Leo III, the eastern emperor, changed the official position and ordered that all images of Jesus be replaced by a cross.
2. His stated reason for this decision was that it was impossible to show the divinity of Jesus in a picture and portraying Jesus therefore rejected his divinity.
3. Some scholars believe that Leo III was influenced by the Muslim prohibition on the use of images of the divine. Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity* at 191.
4. Hundreds of icons were destroyed or defaced in the name of these "iconoclasts."

Slide 55

1. In 787, Empress Irene, the mother of a young emperor, shown here on the right, called the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea.
2. This council reaffirmed that the use of pictures of Jesus and Mary, as the Mother of God, on walls and panels was consistent with Christian teachings.
3. Icons such as this one were restored to eastern churches.

Slide 56

1. The Seventh Ecumenical Council is the last one accepted by both eastern and western Christians.

2. Next week, we will look at more of the differences that developed between the church in the east and that in the west, leading to a permanent split between these two groups, creating the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church.
3. We will also follow the Roman Catholic Church, both before and after the split, as it takes on the role of the state, not only maintaining learning, but crowning emperors, fighting wars and collecting taxes.
4. We will end this series in the west at the end of the fifteenth century, with some of the excesses that led to the Protestant Reformation and will try to determine why the western and eastern churches had such different responses to claimed heresies.

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