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The formation and ecumenical importance of the so-called *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*

ISTVÁN PÁSZTORI-KUPÁN

This study presents the doctrinal environment of the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum, including its lost Tomus, mentioned by the synodal epistle of 382, in light of which the Creed's theology ought to be explained. Despite some lacunae, modern scholarship established links between the West (Rome), the Antiochene council of 379 and the ecumenical council of 381. The Fathers' attempts to find new methods of expressing a pneumatology based on the threefold ὁμοούσια demonstrate that the consubstantiality was meant to be extended to the Spirit. The Early Church regarded the Nicene Creed as being "the faith" (ἡ πίστις) or "the symbol" (τὸ σύμβολον). The other three formulae (of 381, 433 and 451) were definitions or explanations (ὅροι) of, yet by no means additions to "the ancient faith of the 318 holy Fathers". This, of course, does not mean that these four credal statements should not be regarded as being of equal rank today, since they constitute the indispensable basis for any ecumenical discussion.

Keywords: Decree of Theodosius (380), neo-Nicene orthodoxy, Nicene Creed, Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum, Romano-Nicaenum, pneumatology, Antiochene council of 379, Trinitarian doctrine, councils of Constantinople (381 and 382), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451)

Early Creeds as part of the Reformed tradition

The ancient Christian Creeds and Definitions are definitely part of the tradition inherited and cherished by all Reformers of the sixteenth century. For example, *The Second Helvetic Confession* composed by Heinrich Bullinger (Zwingli's successor in Zürich) in 1562, then published as the confession of the Swiss Reformers in 1566, being accepted and appreciated by virtually all Reformed communities in Europe and in Britain, states:

Et ut paucis multa hujus causae dicamus, quaecunque de incarnationis Domini nostri Jesu Christi mysterio definita sunt ex Scripturis Sanctis, et comprehensa symbolis ac sententiis quatuor primarum et praestan-

And, to say many things in a few words, with a sincere heart we believe, and freely confess out loud, whatever things are defined from the Holy Scriptures concerning the mystery of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and are summed up in the

tissimarum synodorum, celebratarum
Niceae, Constantinopoli, Ephesi et
Chalcedone, una cum beati Athanasii
symbolo, et omnibus his similibus
symbolis, credimus corde sincero, et
ore libero ingenue profiteamur, con-
demnantes omnia his contraria.

Creeds and decrees of the first four
most excellent synods convened at
Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus and
Chalcedon, together with the Creed
of the blessed Athanasius,¹ and all
similar symbols; and we condemn
everything contrary to these.²

The above statement defines the orthodox Christian faith, including the much disputed issue of divine incarnation as resulting from Scripture as well as the creeds (symbols) and definitions of the first four ecumenical councils. This adherence to the common root of the universal Christian tradition is the distinguishing mark of all major sixteenth-century Reformers, including Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Melancthon and Bullinger. The dogmatic formulae and catechisms produced during this period are built not merely upon the structure of the Apostles' Creed, but also upon the so-called *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*. Our present study is primarily concerned with the formation and universal theological message of this famous formula, which by its very structure and message inspired the sixteenth century authors of various catechisms and confessions.

The historical-doctrinal background of the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*

The universal Christian tradition holds that the so-called Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed had been formulated by the Fathers gathered at the second ecumenical council in 381 in Constantinople. Based on the number of the attending orthodox bishops, it was also labelled as the Creed of the "150 holy Fathers" (οἱ ἅγιοι ρν' πατέρες).³ The documents of the first two ecumenical councils, i.e. those of Nicea (325) and Constantinople (381) were lost, and only a few elements and fragments of these survived in copies amongst the acts of the third and fourth councils. In order to reconstruct some

¹ The so-called *Athanasian Creed* was certainly not written by Athanasius, but dates from a much later period. Its other title is *Symbolum Quicunque*, derived from the opening words of the text: "quicunque vult salvus esse" (whoever wants to be saved).

² *Confessio Helvetica Posterior* (*The Second Helvetic Confession*), XI, 18 (hereafter: CHP).

³ The Ephesian Ecumenical Council of 431 led by Cyril of Alexandria does not yet mention the creed of the 150 fathers, yet the Council of Chalcedon (451) refers to it repeatedly. See Eduard Schwartz, Johannes Straub (ed.), *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, Series I, Berlin 1914-1984; Series II, ed. sub auspiciis Academiae Scientiarum Bavaricae, Berlin 1984- (hereafter: ACO), II, 1, 2, p. 80 and ACO II, 1, 2, p. 128.

of the documents and proceedings of these previous meetings or to uncover certain details one must turn to the texts coming from later ecumenical and local councils, to the letters and memoirs of church historians and theologians as well as to imperial decrees and various ancient correspondences.

Events preceding the synod. The edict of Theodosius

It would be inadequate to settle as the scope of the present work the recapitulation even in headwords of the theological and political struggles between 325 and 379. As a very brief general assessment we can say that following the almost half a century long political rule of the Arians, the ascension of Theodosius I of Spanish origin to the position of *Augustus* on 19 January 379 represented a clear turning point both within the life of the Empire and of the Christian Church. Theodosius, honoured for his support for the orthodox party with the epithet “The Great”, was the last single Emperor of the still undivided Roman Empire (346–379–395).

Shortly after his ascension to the throne, more exactly during his sojourn in Thessalonica in the winter of 379–380, the Emperor fell very ill and was baptised by the local orthodox bishop, Ascholius. The event is also indirect evidence showing that infant baptism was not yet a widespread practice even towards the end of the fourth century.⁴

Theodosius, after having survived, did not waste any time: together with his fellow rulers, the young Gratian who had elevated him from army commander to Augustus and Valentinian II, he issued the following decree from Thessalonica already on 27 February 380:⁵

Imppp. Gratianus, Valentinianus et
Theodosius AAA. Edictum ad Po-
pulum urbis Constantinopolitanae.
Cunctos populos, quos clementiae
nostrae regit temperamentum, in

Emperors Gratian, Valentinian and
Theodosius Augusti. Edict to the
people of Constantinople. It is our
desire that all the various nations
which are subject to our clemency

⁴ Constantine the Great had also been baptised as an adult, well after the Council of Nicaea. The ceremony was performed in 337 by Eusebius of Nicomedia, who became the leading figure of the Arians denying the consubstantiality (ὁμοούσια) of the Father and the Son. He also consecrated Wulfila, the famous Bible-translator and missionary of the Goths, as bishop. Concerning the ancient Christian practice of baptism see David F. Wright, “At What Ages Were People Baptized in the Early Centuries?”, in *Studia Patristica* 30 (1997), pp. 189–194.

⁵ Henry Wace, William C. Piercy (eds.), *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, London 1911. Online version: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wace/biodict.pdf> (accessed: 25 July 2010), p. 974. Cf. Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 7, 4.

tali volumus religione versari, quam divinum Petrum apostolum tradidisse Romanis religio usque ad nunc ab ipso insinuata declarat, quamque pontificem Damasum sequi claret et Petrum Alexandriae episcopum, virum apostolicae sanctitatis; hoc est ut secundum apostolicam disciplinam evangelicamque doctrinam Patris et Filii et Spiritus sancti unam deitatem sub parili majestate et sub pia trinitate credamus. Hanc legem sequentes Christianorum catholicorum nomen jubemus amplecti, reliquos vero demones vesanosque judicantes haeretici dogmatis infamiam sustinere, nec conciliabula eorum ecclesiarum nomen accipere, divina primum vindicta, post etiam motus nostri, quem ex coelesti arbitrio sumpserimus, ultione plectendos.

and moderation, should live in that religion which had been delivered to the Romans by the divine Apostle Peter, as it was manifestly handed down from him continuously until now, and which is now clearly followed by the Pontiff Damasus and by Peter, Bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic holiness. 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 authorise the followers of this law to assume the title of Catholic Christians. The others, whom we deem foolish madmen, shall bear the infamy of heretic doctrine and their assemblies shall not be accepted to be named churches, being punished first by divine condemnation and then by our authority derived from heavenly will.⁶

At this point Theodosius was not acquainted with all the nuances of Eastern theology and, as a result, the above edict could not yet have been an exclusive support of the orthodoxy built upon the tradition of the *Nicene Creed* over against the Arian faction. Nevertheless, the very wording of the text, especially the passage “Patris et Filii et Spiritus sancti *unam deitatem sub parili majestate* et sub pia trinitate” could be exploited much easier in favour of the orthodox interpretation. Given the fact that the Emperor was baptised by an orthodox bishop (Ascholius of Thessalonica) and named two others (Damasus of Rome and Peter of Alexandria⁷) as followers of the religion

⁶ Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologia Latina* (hereafter: PL) 13, pp. 530-531.

⁷ Theodosius must have been ignorant of the fact that Peter of Alexandria died on 14 February 380, i.e. two weeks before the issuing of his edict. Nonetheless, Peter's life and teaching proved his orthodoxy. See H. Wace, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, pp. 833-834. The name of Meletius of Antioch, a staunch defender of the Nicene tradition, does not appear in the decree. This, however, could well have been caused by the Meletian schism of Antioch (Paulinus having been the bishop of the “old Nicene”, whilst Meletius of the “neo-Nicene” community) and also by the fact that both Rome and Alexandria preferred Paulinus at the time. Athanasius already attempted to pacify the two Antiochene parties, as attested by the

which he came to label as Catholic, it is not far-fetched to assume that some political preference was already given to the orthodox party, or, at least, it was in the making. This is confirmed also by the custom of Theodosius, who, in his edicts concerning ecclesiastical matters, nominated the bishops whom he considered as being orthodox, and consequently sanctioned by the imperial power. This is what he did after the closure of the Council of Constantinople (381) also while sanctioning its decisions.⁸

The Trinitarian teaching professed by the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil the Great, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa and Amphilochius of Iconium) and by the Antiochenes (Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia) are usually labelled as neo-Nicene orthodoxy. This is mainly due to the fact that these theologians have already clarified the terminological problems caused partially by the Arian challenge and the Nicene anathema, which equated the term οὐσία with ὑπόστασις. The return to the classical Origenian idea of one οὐσία and three hypostases facilitated not only the successful refusal of the Arian idea of the Son's adoption, but also cleared the path for a better terminological understanding between East and West.

The above imperial edict has another significant bearing upon our present endeavour, since the aforementioned *Second Helvetic Confession* contains an important reference to it. The signatories of this sixteenth century confession deemed it extremely important to show that their teaching was not an innovation, but rather a conscientious return to the Bible and to the faith

tone of Chapter 3 of his famous *Tomus ad Antiochenos*. See Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* (hereafter: PG) 26, pp. 797-800.

⁸ The imperial edict confirming the decisions of the Council of 381 can be found in Codex Theodosianus 16, 1, 3. Online version: <http://ancientrome.ru/ius/library/codex/theod/liber16.htm#11> (accessed: 15 September 2010). The full text of this edict containing the names of the prelates considered as being orthodox is the following: "Idem AAA. ad Auxonium proconsulem Asiae. Episcopis tradi omnes ecclesias mox iubemus, qui unius maiestatis adque virtutis patrem et filium et spiritum sanctum confitentur eiusdem gloriae, claritatis unius, nihil dissonum profana divisione facientes, sed trinitatis ordinem personarum adsertione et divinitatis unitate, quos constabit communioni Nectari episcopi Constantinopolitanae ecclesiae nec non Timothei intra Aegyptum Alexandrinae urbis episcopi esse sociatos; quos etiam in Orientis partibus Pelagio episcopo Laodicensi et Diodoro episcopo Tarsensi: in Asia nec non proconsulari adque Asiana dioecesi Amphilochio episcopo Iconiensi et Optimo episcopo Antiocheno: in pontica dioecesi Helladio episcopo Caesariensi et Otreio Meliteno et Gregorio episcopo Nysseno, Terennio episcopo Scythiae, Marmario episcopo Marcianopolitano communicare constiterit. Hos ad optinendas catholicas ecclesias ex communione et consortio probabilius sacerdotum oportebit admitti: omnes autem, qui ab eorum, quos commemoratio specialis expressit, fidei communione dissentiunt, ut manifestos haereticos ab ecclesiis expelli neque his penitus posthac obtinendarum ecclesiarum pontificium facultatemque permitti, ut Verae ac Nicaenae fidei sacerdotia casta permanant nec post evidentem praecepti nostri formam malignae locus detur astutiae. Dat. III kal. aug. Heracleae Eucherio et Syagrio cons." (30 July 381).

of their Christian ancestors. This is why in the *Preface* of this document the authors declare that if anyone were to teach them “better from God’s Word”, they are ready “to yield to them in the Lord”.⁹ Moreover, apart from the reference to the authority of Scripture, the *Preface* is followed by two important documents: the first one is the edict of Theodosius quoted above, defining the category of Christians who are rightly called Catholics, and the second is the so-called *Creed of Damasus* (*Symbolum Damasī*).¹⁰ As a conclusion to these two documents, those who signed the *Second Helvetic Confession* added the following remark:

<p>Cum autem nos omnes simus hujus fidei religionisque, speramus nos ab omnibus habendos, non pro hæreticis, sed pro Catholicis et Christianis, etc.</p>	<p>And since all of us are in this faith and religion, we hope that we will be held by everyone not as heretics, but as Catholics and Christians etc.¹¹</p>
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Thus, according to the signatories of CHP the distinction between Catholics and heretics can be made by one’s loyalty to Scripture and to the faith inherited from the ancestors. It is therefore clear that the primary goal of the Reformation was not the production of a new schism (which regrettably happened), but a healthy return to the somewhat faded ancient professions of faith. This statement makes the old creeds even more valuable for ecumenical purposes. In the following we shall provide a few observations concerning the imperial edict.

The decision of Theodosius on 27 February 380 undoubtedly had church-political consequences. Its results were soon to be felt in the major cities and smaller settlements throughout the empire, where the formerly supported Arian leaders had to relinquish their positions and places of worship to the orthodox. Neo-Nicene Christianity, labelled as “Catholic”, i.e. “universal” gradually became the state-religion of the Roman Empire.

The text of the edict makes clear references to two contemporary ecclesiastical figures, whose faith is in accordance with the teaching of the Apostle Peter and the will of the Emperor. Based on the primacy derived

⁹ “Ante omnia vero protestamur, nos semper esse paratissimos, omnia et singula hic a nobis proposita, si quis requirat, copiosius explicare, denique meliora ex verbo Dei docentibus, non sine gratiarum actione, et cedere et obsequi in Domino, Cui laus et gloria.” CHP, *Praefatio*.

¹⁰ As shown by Hahn, the formula quoted in the CHP under the name of Damasus does not derive from him. See Georg Ludwig Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der Alten Kirche*, 3. Aufl., Breslau 1897, p. 275.

¹¹ CHP, *Praefatio*.

from Peter, the Bishop of Rome occupies the first place, being followed by the successor of Mark the evangelist, i.e. the Patriarch of Alexandria. The two leaders invested with apostolic authority – amongst whom the Pope had always represented the Western (Latin), whilst the Alexandrian Patriarch the Eastern (mainly Greek, but also Syrian, Coptic and other) Christianity – were listed for the last time side by side in this order, i.e. Mark's heir at a hairbreadth behind Peter's. In one and a half year's time a major change happens: the political capital, Constantinople, a city lacking any apostolic foundation, obtains the second place behind Rome through the second ecumenical council's third canon, which arguably becomes the apple of discord between East and West, Alexandria and Constantinople, as well as between Alexandria and Antioch.

It also belongs to the church-political preliminaries of the second ecumenical council, that the Emperor travelled to Constantinople in November 380 and installed Gregory Nazianzen (since 379 the preacher of the orthodox community of the city) as patriarch of the capital. This decisive step clearly showed that the Emperor did not issue his edict without purpose, since until that moment Constantinople had an Arian bishop, who had to leave immediately because of his refusal to accept the *Nicene Creed*. At the same time Theodosius obliged the Arians to hand every church over to the orthodox.

The convocation and progression of the synod

The Arian party, which enjoyed imperial patronage for such a long time, did not surrender its positions light-heartedly. In order to settle the ever increasing and multiplying conflicts across the empire, Theodosius convened the bishops serving within his jurisdiction to a council in Constantinople.¹² Rome was not represented: it may be inferred that initially Theodosius thought to settle the dissensions within the Eastern part of the Church, and did not intend to organise an ecumenical council.¹³

The synod began its activities in May 381. The initial hope that the Macedonians and the Pneumatomachi will return to orthodoxy became shattered very soon: they could acknowledge the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, yet flatly refused to extend it upon the Holy Spirit. 36 of their bishops were present at the council, among them Eleusius of Cyzicus and

¹² See Theodoret of Cyrus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5, 6.

¹³ Karl Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Christian Councils*, trans. by William Clark, 5 vols., Edinburgh 1872-1896, II, p. 343.

Marcion of Lampsacus. They departed after the first meetings and advised their followers to reject the Nicene doctrine.¹⁴

The synod was then left with the 150 bishops representing the orthodox party. The most famous amongst them were Meletius of Antioch (who consecrated Gregory Nazianzen as Patriarch of Constantinople), Timothy of Alexandria (the brother of the deceased Peter who had been mentioned in the edict “Cunctos populos”), Cyril of Jerusalem, Gelasius of Caesarea (from Palestine), Ascholi of Thessalonica (who had baptised Theodosius), Helladius of Caesarea (Basil’s successor in Cappadocia), Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, Peter of Sebasteia (Basil’s youngest brother), Amphilochius of Iconium, Diodore of Tarsus, Acacius of Beroea and others.¹⁵

The council was at first presided over by Meletius of Antioch, and after his death by Gregory Nazianzen. Being attacked unjustly by his opponents, Gregory resigned both as patriarch and as chairman, being replaced by the newly elected patriarch of the capital, Nectarius, who had to be baptised before his formal inauguration. The Emperor himself was present at the opening and saluted Meletius with great honour, because before being made Augustus he had had a dream with the bishop offering him the throne and the robe.

The death of Meletius caused some commotion due to the so-called Meletian schism which existed at that time in Antioch. The town had indeed two orthodox bishops: the old Nicene community was overseen by Paul, known also as Paulinus (who enjoyed the support of Rome), the neo-Nicene group had Meletius at its rudder. Both were alive when an agreement was reached, according to which in the case of the passing away of either of them, their community would not elect someone else to replace him, but will accept the surviving prelate in order to re-establish the unity.¹⁶ Gregory Nazianzen, who at the time was chairman of the council, worked very hard to enforce the agreement, yet without success. The council finally validated Flavian’s election in the place of Meletius: the so-called Meletian schism continued.¹⁷ This inconsistency also contributed to Gregory Nazianzen’s resignation.¹⁸

¹⁴ According to the assessment of Socrates Scholasticus, the Pneumatomachi would rather choose the Arian doctrine, than to adhere to the Nicene teaching: *Mᾶλλον ἔφασαν τὴν Ἀρειανὴν αἰρεῖσθαι ὁμολογεῖν δόξαν ἢ τῷ ὁμοουσίῳ συντίθεσθαι*. Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5, 8.

¹⁵ Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5, 8; Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5, 8.

¹⁶ Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5, 5.

¹⁷ One ought to mention that whilst the Arians had been persecuting the orthodox in Antioch, Meletius had to leave the town several times. During his exile the spiritual care of the neo-Nicene community of Antioch was provided by Flavian and Diodore of Tarsus. After the death of Meletius, Diodore and Acacius consecrated Flavian.

¹⁸ K. J. Hefele, *Councils*, II, pp. 345-347.

After the closure of the proceedings, the orthodox bishops issued an epistle (*Tomus*), which summarised the teaching about the Holy Trinity. The so-called Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed may well have been part of this lost *Tomus*. As it will become evident from the following, the council relied heavily on the decisions of the Meletian synod of Antioch, held in 379.

In 381 two important synods were also held in the West. The first one took place in Aquileia under the chairmanship of Valerian. Here Palladius, Secundianus and Attalus were deposed with the charge of Arianism. The synod defended Pope Damasus against the allegations of Ursinus, interceded on behalf of Paulinus of Antioch and Timothy of Alexandria and forwarded the idea of a great synod to be summoned in Alexandria.

The city of Milan hosted the second western synod in 381, headed by Ambrose. The participants expressed their wish again for the convocation of an ecumenical council – this time to Rome – in order to put an end to the schisms, including the Meletian one in Antioch. They also urged the investigation of Apollinarian doctrines, and objected to the elections of Flavian, Nectarius and even of Gregory Nazianzen as bishops.¹⁹

The nearly forgotten *Tomus* of the second ecumenical council of 381

As a result of the above, Theodosius convened another synod in 382, yet the venue was neither Alexandria nor Rome, but Constantinople again. This council was attended by virtually the same bishops who were there a year earlier.²⁰ We know of the very existence of the *Tomus* of the earlier (i.e. of the second ecumenical) council from the acts of this synod and from Theodoret of Cyrus.²¹ The participants of this synod of 382 sent an epistle to their western colleagues gathered previously in Milan as a reply to their invitation to Rome, and in this epistle they refer to the now lost *Tomus* of the second ecumenical council of 381.²² Behind the invitation to Rome there might have been not only the fact that in 381 in Constantinople there were no western delegates, but at least with the same weight the unrest created by the third

¹⁹ K. J. Hefele, *Councils*, II, pp. 375-378.

²⁰ This was the council which Gregory Nazianzen refused to attend. In his letter to Procopius, the prefect of Constantinople, he explains the reasons of his absence, stating that he flees every gathering of bishops, because he had never seen a good ending of any synod or the solution of problems, but rather their increase due to the continuously persistent antagonism inexpressible in words. See Gregory Nazianzen, "Letter 130", in Paul Gallay, *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze: Lettres*, 2 vols., Paris 1964–1967.

²¹ K. J. Hefele, *Councils*, II, pp. 348-349. Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5, 8-9.

²² K. J. Hefele, *Councils*, II, pp. 375-378.

canon of that council which labelled Constantinople as “the new Rome”. The bishops gathered in Milan may well have considered it a wiser move to meet their eastern brothers on home ground, i.e. in the old Rome instead of “the new one”.

The fathers gathered in 382 in Constantinople tried to be as polite as possible in their refusal to attend the council in Rome. First they enumerated all the former persecutions which had befallen them from the part of the Arians, and then elegantly turned to present the reasons why a travel to Rome at that moment was impossible. Amongst these we read that they cannot leave the communities alone when they are still under constant threat; that the bishops were informed about the plan for a council in Rome only in Constantinople, so could not prepare for a significantly longer trip; consequently, they could not consult with the bishops left behind in the provinces in order to travel to Rome with their approval and authorisation.²³ In the given situation they could think of only one solution: they sent three representatives (Cyriacus, Eusebius and Priscianus) to Rome with the reply, which, based on the Nicene Creed, summarised the theological decisions of the council of 381 held in Constantinople.²⁴

The epistle of the council of 382 sent to the West is crucial concerning the correct interpretation of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, since it comes from practically the same fathers who had gathered a year earlier in the imperial palace. The text of the letter was preserved in Theodoret’s Ecclesiastical history:

Ἡμεῖς γὰρ εἴτε διωγμούς, εἴτε θλίψεις, εἴτε βασιλείους ἀπειλάς, εἴτε τὰς τῶν ἀρχόντων ὀμότητας, εἴτε τινὰ πειρασμὸν ἕτερον παρὰ τῶν αἰρετικῶν ὑπεμείναμεν, ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐαγγελικῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐν Νικαίᾳ τῆς Βιθυνίας παρὰ τῶν τιῆ πατέρων κυρωθείσης ὑπέστημεν.

For we, whether we suffered persecutions, or afflictions, or the threats of Emperors, or the cruelties of princes or any other trial at the hands of heretics, have undergone all for the sake of the evangelic faith, ratified by the three hundred and eighteen fathers at Nicaea in Bithynia.

²³ The council in Rome was nonetheless held, yet its acts appear to have been lost. Among those present there were Pope Damasus, Ambrose, Jerome, Epiphanius of Salamis and Paulinus of Antioch.

²⁴ Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5, 9; K. J. Hefele, *Councils*, II, pp. 378-381.

Ταύτην γὰρ καὶ ὑμῖν καὶ ἡμῖν καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς μὴ διαστρέφουσι τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθοῦς πίστεως συναρέσκειν δεῖ πρεσβυτάτην τε οὖσαν καὶ ἀκόλουθον τῷ βαπτίσματι, καὶ διδάσκουσαν ἡμᾶς πιστεῦειν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος,

δηλαδὴ θεότητος καὶ δυνάμεως καὶ οὐσίας μιᾶς τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος πιστευομένης, ὁμοτίμου τε τῆς ἀξίας καὶ συναϊδίου τῆς βασιλείας, ἐν τρισὶ τελειοτάταις ὑποστάσεσιν, ἡγουν τρισὶ τελείοις προσώποις,

ὥς μήτε τὴν Σαβελλίου νόσον χώραν λαβεῖν συγχεομένων τῶν ὑποστάσεων εἴτ' οὖν τῶν ιδιοτήτων ἀναιρουμένων, μήτε μὴν τὴν Εὐνομιανῶν καὶ Ἀρειανῶν καὶ Πνευματομάχων βλασφημίαν ἰσχύειν, τῆς οὐσίας ἢ τῆς φύσεως ἢ τῆς θεότητος τεμνομένης καὶ τῇ ἀκτίστῳ καὶ ὁμοουσίῳ καὶ συναϊδίῳ τριάδι μεταγενεστέρας τινὸς ἢ κτιστῆς ἢ ἑτεροουσίου φύσεως ἐπαγομένης.

Καὶ τὸν τῆς ἐνανθρωπήσεως δὲ τοῦ κυρίου λόγον ἀδιάστροφον σώζομεν, οὔτε ἄψυχον οὔτε ἄνουν ἢ ἀτελῆ τὴν τῆς σαρκὸς οἰκονομίαν παραδεχόμενοι, ὅλον δὲ εἰδότες τέλειον μὲν πρὸ αἰώνων ὄντα θεὸν λόγον, τέλειον δὲ ἄνθρωπον ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν γενόμενον.

This is the faith which ought to be sufficient both for you and for us, as well as for all who do not wrest the word of the true faith; for it is the ancient faith and accompanies baptism; it is the faith that teaches us to believe in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

According to this faith there is one Godhead, power and essence of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; the dignity being equal, and the majesty being equal in three perfect hypostases and three perfect persons.

Thus there is neither room for the sickness of Sabellius by the confusion of the hypostases or removal of the properties; nor is the blasphemy of the Eunomians, of the Arians, and of the Pneumatomachi valid, which divides the essence, the nature and the Godhead and introduces on the uncreated coessential and co-eternal Trinity a nature, which is posterior, created and of a different essence.²⁵

We also preserve the teaching of the incarnation of the Lord undistorted, holding that the dispensation of the flesh is neither soulless nor mindless nor imperfect; and knowing full well that God's Word was perfect before the ages, and became perfect man in the last days for our salvation.²⁶

The above quoted section of the epistle can be interpreted correctly only if we do not forget that the authors are clinging to the “evangelic faith” ratified by the 318 Fathers gathered in Nicaea. During the decades which

²⁵ I chose to translate οὐσία with “essence” rather than “substance” to avoid confusion

²⁶ Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5, 9.

passed since the council of Nicaea – especially because of the persecutions suffered from the part of the Arians – the *Nicene Creed*, rediscovered and promoted by Athanasius,²⁷ became not only the measure of orthodoxy, but also a sign, a veritable symbol (σύμβολον) of resistance against every heresy which questioned the divinity of the Son and/or of the Holy Spirit.

It derives from this character of σύμβολον of the *Nicene Creed* that the fathers gathered in 382, despite all disputes concerning its interpretation, emphasise unequivocally: the ancient formula *ought to be sufficient* (συναρέσκειν δεῖ) both for the Eastern and for the Western half of the Christian Church. This statement increased even more the authority of the Nicene Creed. Moreover, it could transmit towards the West the indirect message that the fathers of Constantinople did not have the intention to participate at a synod in Rome in order to change the creed accepted one year before, i.e. the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*.

The *Nicene Creed* was also a baptismal formula aiding one's complete integration into the community of the believers. As the epistle says: it “accompanies baptism” (ἀκόλουθον τῷ βαπτίσματι). As it becomes clear from the subsequent explanation – actually even clearer than from the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* itself – the signatories interpret the Trinitarian doctrine, i.e., the so-called θεολογία of the *Creed* in a neo-Nicene sense: they speak of one οὐσία, three ὑποστάσεις and three πρόσωπα. From a doctrinal-historical perspective the epistle represents the turning point in the orthodox Trinitarian teaching, because as opposed to the anathema attached to the *Nicene Creed* of 325 – which practically equated the terms οὐσία and ὑπόστασις – the authors return to the old Origenian idea of “one οὐσία – three ὑποστάσεις”. The terminological clarification and the repeated strengthening of Origen's one-time scheme had been performed mainly by the Cappadocians, and especially by Gregory of Nyssa, who attended the council of 381, and in one of his short writings (held for a long time as written by Basil) had already settled the relationship between the two terms and elucidated their distinction.²⁸

The signatories clearly repudiate the approach of Sabellius, who “confused” the hypostases and “removed” or “destroyed” the properties. Similarly, the teaching of the Arians and Pneumatomachi is also rejected.

²⁷ See e.g. Athanasius' famous work *De decretis Nicaenae Synodi*.

²⁸ See R. M. Hübner, “Gregor von Nyssa als Verfasser der sog. Ep. 38 des Basilii”, in Jacques Fontaine, Charles Kannengiesser (ed.), *Epektasis. Mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou*, Beauchesne, Paris 1972, pp. 463-491; Johannes Zachhuber, “Nochmals: Der 38. Brief des Basilii von Caesarea als Werk des Gregor von Nyssa”, in *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 7 (1/2003), pp. 73-90.

The concluding part of the quotation above interprets God's saving plan, the οἰκονομία, and although it does not mention the name of Apollinaris, it is clearly directed against his doctrine. The statements referring to the Word's becoming human – “neither soulless/lifeless, nor mindless, nor imperfect” (οὔτε ἄψυχον οὔτε ἄνουν ἢ ἀτελῆ) – are unmistakably targeting his Christology. The mode of formulation reminds us of the anti-Apollinarian arguments of the Cappadocians: it is emphasised that Jesus Christ is perfect God and perfect man.

This theological formula of 382 was somewhat neglected for a considerably long time not only by the universal church, but also by the relevant scholarship, although this is the only theological document which can be brought into closest relationship with the second ecumenical council and the majority of its participants. Consequently, a correct analysis of the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* ought to be based on the theological affirmations of this synodal letter. Its importance is enhanced by the fact that in order to summarise their teaching and prove their orthodoxy, the Eastern Fathers inserted the following text into the epistle addressed to Rome:

Τὰ μὲν οὖν κατὰ τὴν πίστιν τὴν παρ' ἡμῶν ἀνυποστόλως κηρυττομένην ὡς ἐν κεφαλαίῳ τοιαῦτα· περὶ ὧν καὶ ἐπὶ πλεῖον ψυχαγωγηθῆναι δυνήσεσθε, τῷ τε ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ τόμῳ παρὰ τῆς ἐκεῖ συνελθούσης συνόδου γεγεννημένων καταξιώσαντες ἐντυχεῖν καὶ τῷ πέρυσιν ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει παρὰ τῆς οἰκουμένης ἐκτεθέντι συνόδῳ, ἐν οἷς πλατύτερον τὴν πίστιν ὡμολογήσαμεν καὶ τῶν ἐναγχοῦς καινοτομηθεισῶν αἱρέσεων ἀναθεματισμὸν ἔγγραφον πεποιήκαμεν.

Let this then serve as a summary of the faith which is fearlessly preached by us, and concerning which you will be able to be still further satisfied if you will deign to read the Tome of the synod of Antioch, and also that issued last year by the ecumenical council held at Constantinople, in which we have confessed the faith at greater length, and have appended an anathema against the heresies to which innovators have recently adhered.²⁹

It is clear, then, that the previously quoted part of the epistle addressed to Rome had indeed been meant to serve as a “summary of faith” (ἐν κεφαλαίῳ) presented by the fathers gathered in Constantinople both in 381 and in 382. To this we may add that the Meletian council of Antioch held in 379 and especially its Tome (also lost) is mentioned not in passing, but as a reference point or even milestone on the pathway towards the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*.

²⁹ Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5, 9.

We have to emphasise that this epistle, composed in 382, labels the council of Constantinople held a year earlier in the absence of Latin delegates as *ecumenical* (οἰκουμένηκη συνόδος).³⁰ Since the addressees are exactly those western theologians who on their part wanted to invite their eastern colleagues to an ecumenical council, the mere use of the expression must have transmitted a strong message.

The formation of the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*

After our brief survey of the church-political and theological developments which surrounded the second ecumenical council, we may proceed to the presentation of what is currently known concerning the formation of the text of the so-called *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*. The creed attributed to the council of 381 is not yet mentioned by the third ecumenical council of Ephesus in 431, nevertheless, it is twice referred to as the declaration of faith of “the 150 holy fathers” (οἱ ἅγιοι ρν’ πατέρες),³¹ which is in accordance with the holy and great Nicene council.³²

Researchers have long ago demonstrated that the text of the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* cannot be drawn exclusively from the council held in 381. In the history of the formula there are still some lacunae, although great scholarly works are consecrated to it.³³

A very important study was published on the subject by Luise Abramowski,³⁴ who, based amongst other sources on the Syriac version of Theodore of Mopsuestia’s *Catecheses*³⁵ shows that the initial form of the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* should be sought after in the theological interaction between Rome (Pope Damasus) and Antioch. The story she put

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ The number 150 obviously represents the number of orthodox bishops after the departure of the 36 Macedonian and Pneumatomachi delegates.

³² ACO II, 1, 2, p. 80 and ACO II, 1, 2, p. 128. In the second instance when they quote the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* within the Chalcedonian minutes, they do it right after the *Nicene Creed*, introducing it with the following formula: „and the same [symbol] of the 150 holy fathers gathered in Constantinople” (καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ [τὸ σύμβολον] τῶν ρν’ ἁγίων πατέρων τῶν ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει συναχθέντων). Cf. K. J. Hefele, *Councils*, II, p. 351.

³³ See e.g. Adolf Martin Ritter, *Das Konzil von Konstantinopel und sein Symbol*, Göttingen 1965. Reinhart Staats, “Die Römische Tradition im Symbol von 381 (NC) und seine Entstehung auf der Synode von Antiochien 379” in *Vigiliae Christianae* 44 (1990), pp. 209-221.

³⁴ Luise Abramowski, “Was hat das Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum (C) mit dem Konzil von Konstantinopel zu tun?” in *Theologie und Philosophie* 67 (1992), pp. 481-513.

³⁵ See Alphonse Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia On the Nicene Creed*, Woodbroke Studies 5, Cambridge 1932.

together almost as a jigsaw puzzle from various pieces is roughly the following: some western theologians – presumably those present at the Roman council of 369 presided over by Damasus³⁶ – augmented the *Nicene Creed* of 325, and this augmented version was then fitted by the neo-Nicene teachers in Antioch to the local circumstances. The supposed formula, which may have thus resulted, is labelled by Abramowski as *Romano-Nicaenum*.³⁷ According to her, this formula represented the starting point for later textual changes.

Abramowski's proposal was criticised by A. M. Ritter³⁸ and R. Staats,³⁹ who contended that there were no sources corroborating Abramowski's supposed *Romano-Nicaenum* and its transmission from Rome to Antioch.⁴⁰ In a literal sense, this affirmation is correct. Nevertheless, given the known links between Rome and Antioch, in this case one might consider avoiding drawing definite conclusions based almost exclusively on an argument from ignorance. As we all know, the absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence, and although at present the existence of a *Romano-Nicaenum* cannot be proven (so it remains only a hypothesis), yet the collaboration between Rome and Antioch is nonetheless highly plausible. Although it may be a more difficult approach, I tend to see Ritter's and Staats' criticisms as complementing and, wherever needed, correcting Abramowski's thesis rather than diametrically opposing it. This is due also to the fact that some of Staats' conclusions drawn from the text of the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* concerning e.g. the "lordship" of the Holy Spirit in my reading do not necessarily support the theory of a creed formulated in order to please both the orthodox and the Pneumatomachi (see below).

From the perspective of doctrinal history it can be asserted that concerning the development of Trinitarian teaching there is a continuity among the Roman synod of 369, the Antiochene synod of 379,⁴¹ the second ecumenical council of 381 as well as the synod of Constantinople held in

³⁶ See K. J. Hefele, *Councils*, II, pp. 360-361.

³⁷ L. Abramowski, "Was hat das Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum", pp. 498-503.

³⁸ A. M. Ritter, "Noch einmal: Was hat das Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum (C) mit dem Konzil von Konstantinopel zu tun?" in *Theologie und Philosophie* 68 (1993), pp. 553-561.

³⁹ Reinhart Staats, *Das Glaubensbekenntnis von Nizäa-Konstantinopel. Historische und theologische Grundlagen*, Darmstadt 1996.

⁴⁰ See e.g. R. Staats, *Das Glaubensbekenntnis von Nizäa-Konstantinopel*, pp. 337-338, note 88.

⁴¹ This was the local (yet quite large) synod of the Meletians, in which Abramowski's supposed *Romano-Nicaenum* may have been presented and/or adapted. According to Hefele, 146 orthodox bishops of the East were present (K. J. Hefele, *Councils*, II, p. 361). It is this synod to which the above quoted epistle of the council of 382 refers.

382. The clearest evidence for this may be found in the fifth canon attributed to the council of 381, which speaks of the *Tomus* of the westerners and the Antiochenes:

<p>Περὶ τοῦ τόμου τῶν Δυτικῶν καὶ τοὺς ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ ἀπεδεξάμεθα τοὺς μίαν ὁμολογοῦντας πατρὸς καὶ υἱοῦ καὶ ἀγίου πνεύματος θεότητα.</p>	<p>Concerning the Tome of the westerners we have also accepted the Antiochenes, who confess the one deity of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.⁴²</p>
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The text of the decision is consonant with the reply sent by the participants of the council of Constantinople in 382 to the western bishops. The Greek and Latin manuscripts show that the so-called fifth canon of Constantinople was not produced by the council held in 381, but by the next one in 382,⁴³ yet by virtually the same group of bishops. The referred “*Tome* of the westerners” (τόμος τῶν Δυτικῶν) was, according to Hefele’s compelling argument, the dogmatic letter of the council of Damasus held in 369 to the orientals. Only fragments of this epistle have survived.⁴⁴ This western Tome was accepted by the 146 orthodox bishops assembled at Antioch in 379.⁴⁵

This connection of the Roman council of 369 with the Antiochenes leaves some ground for Abramowski’s hypothesis concerning the so-called *Romano-Nicaenum*, although it does not prove its existence beyond a reasonable doubt. So, the affirmation that the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* is in fact the modification of the supposed *Romano-Nicaenum*, finalised by the council of Antioch in 379 may indeed be exaggerated, and needs refinement. The text adopted in Antioch (whether it was based on a formula received from Rome or not) certainly was the starting point for the Fathers gathered in 381 in Constantinople, although its wording might not have been identical in all details with the finally adopted *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*.

The formulation of the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* is closely similar to the confession, which in Antioch was used as a baptismal symbol also in 428–429.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, as more recent scholarship has proven, Theodore

⁴² K. J. Hefele, *Councils*, II, p. 360

⁴³ K. J. Hefele, *Councils*, II, pp. 352 and 360.

⁴⁴ K. J. Hefele, *Councils*, II, pp. 361–363.

⁴⁵ K. J. Hefele, *Councils*, II, p. 361.

⁴⁶ L. Abramowski, “Was hat das Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum”, p. 508. Cf. Heinrich Denzinger, Adolf Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, Freiburg 1965, *51 (pp. 35–36).

of Mopsuestia knew and interpreted not only the Antiochenum of 379, but also the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* of 381.⁴⁷ The striking resemblance of the latter with the formula contained in the closing part of the *Ancoratus* of Epiphanius,⁴⁸ a work written in 374, i.e. seven years before the Council of Constantinople, was solved by Weischer, who proved that the creed in Epiphanius' *Ancoratus* was an interpolation.⁴⁹

This *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* of 381 reappears in 451 at the Council of Chalcedon, where the Fathers had to create a new theological formula. This forthcoming of a 70 year-old symbol may not have been accidental: knowing that Cyril of Alexandria's Ephesian council in 431 had forbidden the making of any other creeds beside the *Nicene*,⁵⁰ the legacy of "the 150 Fathers" could have easily constituted a precedent and motive for producing the *Chalcedonian Definition* in 451.

Some textual observations concerning the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*

The text of the formula is obviously based on the framework of the *Nicene Creed*, but we encounter both additions and omissions in comparison to its forerunner. In the following we shall take only a glance at some of these, whilst referring the reader to the established scholarship in the field.⁵¹

In the passage about the Son the Nicene explanatory introduction "that is, of the essence of the Father" (τουτέστιν ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Πατρὸς) before the term ὁμοούσιος is left out. The disputes of previous decades had made the expression so widely known that it needed no further explanation. The

⁴⁷ Theodor von Mopsuestia. *Katechetische Homilien*, übersetzt und eingeleitet von Peter Bruns, Freiburg 1995; Peter Bruns, *Den Menschen mit dem Himmel verbinden. Eine Studie zu den katechetischen Homilien des Theodor von Mopsuestia*, Leuven 1995; Simon Gerber, *Theodor von Mopsuestia und das Nicaenum. Studien zu den katechetischen Homilien*, Leiden 2000.

⁴⁸ See Epiphanius of Salamis, *Ancoratus* 118, pp. 9-13.

⁴⁹ Bernd Manuel Weischer, "Die ursprüngliche nikänische Form des ersten Glaubenssymbols im Ancyrotos des Epiphanius von Salamis: ein Beitrag zur Diskussion um die Entstehung des konstantinopolitanischen Glaubenssymbols im Lichte neuester äthiopischen Forschungen" in *Theologie und Philosophie* 53 (1978), pp. 407-414. Although Epiphanius was a respected authority, he appears to have been absent from the councils held at Constantinople in 381 and 382, yet, as mentioned above, he participated at the Roman council together with Ambrose, Jerome and Paulinus of Antioch.

⁵⁰ Concerning the decision of Cyril's council forbidding the making of any other formula see the Excursus at the end of the present work.

⁵¹ See e.g. A. M. Ritter, *Das Konzil von Konstantinopel und sein Symbol*; John Norman Davidson Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, Harlow 1972; Staats, *Das Glaubensbekenntnis von Nizäa-Konstantinopel* etc.

seemingly reiterative Nicene “God of God” (θεὸν ἐκ θεοῦ) is also omitted, although it does not appear to be a mere repetition.⁵²

Concerning the creation through the Son, i.e. “everything was made through Him”, the following sentence is omitted: “both in heaven and on earth” (τά τε ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, καὶ τὰ ἐν τῇ γῇ). This sentence at the same time is present as an addition within the passage on the Father, where the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* calls the Father “Creator of heaven and earth” (ποιητὴν οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς). Since the creation through the Son is evident in the second passage, here the point is that in comparison to the *Nicene Creed* this second symbol contains a lot more biblical references: this one alludes to Gen. 1,1.⁵³

Beside the addition mentioned above, as an explanation of the mode of the Son’s begetting, the following explanatory affirmation is introduced: the Father begat the Son “before all times” (πρὸ πάντων τῶν αἰώνων), i.e. before any world epochs or aeons. This idea of the Son’s eternal, timeless begetting finally enters the Creed after centuries of disputes, successfully removing the basis of any Trinitarian subordinationism.

Concerning the question of the Son’s inhumanation and suffering we encounter the introduction of the names of Mary and Pilate. Neither of these should be seen as an exclusively western addition: the Antiochene baptismal formula interpreted by Theodore of Mopsuestia also contained both.⁵⁴ It is nonetheless clear, that neither is introduced accidentally.

The reference to Mary emphasises the real humanity of Christ as opposed to Docetism or any other teaching which might regard his manhood as incomplete (even Apollinarianism). The Son became flesh “of the Holy Spirit and of Virgin Mary”. As Paul pointed out, “God sent forth his Son, born of a woman” (Gal. 4,4). He therefore arrived into this world like all humans: he took his flesh from the Virgin, did not bring it from heaven. This

⁵² The Nicene “God of God, light of light, very God of very God” seems indeed as a repetition. Nevertheless, the intent of the authors may well have been to avoid the Arian construal at all costs with a gradually increasing emphasis. “God of God” first means that God, i.e. not man was generated by God. This, arguably, could be accepted even by the Arians in a symbolic sense. The same is emphasised by the phrase “light of light” – over against “light of the sun”. The last expression rather establishes the manner of generation: the One who is born is God exactly in the same way as the One who generated, i.e. he is very God, not some demigod with a few divine qualities. Some modern versions of the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* often contain this formula “God of God” borrowed from the *Nicaenum*.

⁵³ This process is not accidental: since the Arians objected to the use of non-biblical expressions in the creed, the fathers intended to balance it by introducing more biblical references and allusions. See below.

⁵⁴ L. Abramowski, “Was hat das Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum”, p. 513. H. Denzinger, A. Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* *51 (pp. 35-36).

reinforces the enumeration according to which the Son “became flesh and became man”, which gains here a specifically anti-Apollinarian significance, strengthened both by the first canon of the council and the epistle of 382 sent to Rome.

The reference to Pilate, which was part of earlier traditions,⁵⁵ is on the one hand a time expression proving the historicity of Christ’s earthly life and saving death: God’s Son did not perform his duty in some undefined period or perhaps within the imagination of the disciples. This occurred in a historically verifiable moment during the governorship of Pontius Pilate. On the other hand, the Early Christian Church cited Pilate’s witness to the innocence of Jesus in order to exonerate him (and, during the time of the persecutions, the entire Christian community) of any charge regarding his alleged threat to Rome’s political supremacy.⁵⁶

Several biblical allusions and references appear in the second passage: Christ resurrected “according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15,4), sat “at the right hand of the Father”,⁵⁷ and will return “in glory” (Matt. 25,31). It is perhaps not unrealistic to suppose that the increase of the biblical character of the text is partly due to the influence of Antiochene theology, i.e. of Diodore and even Theodore.

The closing part of the passage concerning the Son deserves some attention: “and his kingdom shall have no end”. This does not merely allude to Isa. 9,6 and to the *Annunciation* (Luke 1,33), but also represents a concrete theological answer to the eschatological views of Marcellus of Ancyra and his circle. Marcellus, who had rejected the doctrine concerning the three hypostases (in this sense he was old-Nicene) and thought of the Trinity as of some extending and shrinking reality, on the basis of 1 Cor. 15,24-28 supposed that at the end of time the Son shall surrender everything to the Father and “God will be all in all” – perhaps in the sense that the Son will somehow be drawn back into the Father’s person.⁵⁸ The first canon of the council of 381 also condemned the teachings of Marcellus.

⁵⁵ See e.g. Justin Martyr, *Apologia* 13, 3.

⁵⁶ Cf. Berard R. Marthaler, *The Creed. The Apostolic Faith in Contemporary Theology*, New London 2007, pp. 137-138.

⁵⁷ See Mark 16,19; Eph. 1,20; Hebr. 1,3; Hebr. 8,1; Hebr. 10,12; Hebr. 12,2.

⁵⁸ Everett Ferguson (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Early Christianity*, London 1998, pp. 713-714. Cf. L. Abramowski, “Was hat das Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum”, p. 489. The correct assessment of the theology of Marcellus – due to the fragmentary surviving evidence – is still a matter of dispute. He most likely did not harbour completely identical views with Photinus, his disciple. For an excellent presentation of the theology of Marcellus see Sara Parvis, *Marcellus of Ancyra and the lost years of the Arian controversy 325–345*, Oxford Early Christian Studies, Oxford University Press 2006.

The time has come for the expansion of the section concerning the Holy Spirit, and although the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* does not state it expressly, in its formulation the idea of the extension of coessentiality / consubstantiality onto the Spirit can be felt. It is peculiarly on this point that I think the assumption of some researchers concerning the production of the *Creed* as a chiefly mediating formula between the Orthodox and the Pneumatomachi may need correction.

The idea of the Spirit's ὁμοούσια with the Father and the Son is often treated with reserves by some modern scholars, who usually draw attention to the fact that the Holy Spirit in the text of the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* is not called κύριος, i.e. τὸν κύριον (noun), but rather τὸ κύριον (adjective). Readers are also reminded to interpret the divine rank of the Spirit in light of Basil's *De Spiritu Sancto*. It would appear that according to this approach, the "lordship" of the Spirit is less evident than that of the Father and of the Son (presumably in order to please the Pneumatomachi?).

It is commonplace enough to say that during the centuries-long controversies against all Adoptionist and Subordinationist tendencies concerning the Son, the orthodox teachers exploited most of the Scriptural and theological resources available to them in order to defend the true Godhead of the second hypostasis of the Trinity. The metaphors ranged from "the Wisdom" of the Proverbs through all the other, more obvious models until "the Ancient of days" or "the Son of Man" (Dan. 7,9-13). In this sense one may claim that upon facing the subsequent challenge against the divinity of the Spirit, at first they were running short of biblical images, most of those having already been applied to the Son. This "shortage", however, should not be mistaken for doctrinal deficiency: the lack or dearth of suitable analogies did not mean that the orthodox teachers of the fourth century thought less of the Spirit than of the Father or the Son. On the contrary: their ardent quest for new modes of Scriptural (and non-Scriptural) expression is the very proof that these theologians endeavoured to articulate their correct faith despite the limitations imposed on them by the human language and the almost exhausted biblical resources. A clear example of this remarkable effort can be found in Gregory of Nyssa's comparison of the rainbow to depict the one οὐσία and equal divinity (i.e. the common "radiance") as well as the specific properties (i.e. "colours") of the three hypostases or πρόσωπα.⁵⁹ The rainbow in the Bible is primarily a token of the covenant between God and the earth,⁶⁰

⁵⁹ See Gregory of Nyssa (Pseudo-Basil), *Epistle* 38, 5.

⁶⁰ Gen. 9,12-17.

not a symbol of God's inner being. Gregory, however, presents the scientific explanation of how this phenomenon appears in the air and then uses this image to explain the κοινότης τῆς οὐσίας of the three divine hypostases.

Still concerning the Trinitarian teaching and pneumatology of individual theologians, it can be observed that Basil the Great (who passed away on 1 January 379) wrote his work *On the Holy Spirit* about 375, i.e. 6 years before the Council of Constantinople held in 381.⁶¹ His thoughts clearly shaped the thinking of those present at the synod, yet even his own testimony is rather in favour of the equal essence and lordship of the Spirit with the Father and the Son than against it. The very title of Chapter 21 of this work emphasises the Spirit's "lordship": Μαρτυρίαὶ ἐκ τῶν Γραφῶν τοῦ κυριολογεῖσθαι τὸ Πνεῦμα.⁶² It is from this particular perspective that I can agree with the affirmation of A. M. Ritter, a statement which preceded his dispute with L. Abramowski:

“Dass auch die Wahl des adjektivischen τὸ κύριον statt des Substantivs τὸν κύριον zum Ausdruck der ‘Herrenwürde’ und Nicht-Geschöpflichkeit des Geistes in NC [*Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*] auf dessen ‘unionistischen Charakter’ hindeutete (R. Staats, *Das Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* 111),⁶³ ist zwar philologisch möglich, historisch aber deshalb nicht sehr wahrscheinlich, weil es an der Streitliteratur der Zeit m. W. keinen Anhalt hat. Speziell Basilius lässt sich in diesem Falle nicht als Gewährsmann anführen, der sich vielmehr [...] ausdrücklich für das κυριολογεῖσθαι des Geistes ausgesprochen hat; nach Analogie mit θεολογεῖσθαι kann das nichts anderes als die Zuerkennung des κύριος-Prädikates bedeuten.”⁶⁴

If we consider the same issue from a wider perspective, it is also a matter of principle that on assessing the doctrine of a council one should give weight to those extant documents to which most participants adhered. In our case, the obvious and inevitable choice is the synodal letter of 382. It

⁶¹ See Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, 4 volumes, Utrecht 1950–1986, III, p. 210.

⁶² Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto* 21, 52.

⁶³ See R. Staats, “Das Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum als Fundament für die Einheit der Christen?” in *Materialdienst des konfessionskundlichen Instituts Bensheim* 32 (1981), pp. 109–115.

⁶⁴ See A. M. Ritter, “Konstantinopel, Ökumenische Synode I” in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Bd. 19, Berlin 1990, p. 521. In fact, upon reading the passage on the Spirit of the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*, one ought to remember that the expression τὸ κύριον is inseparably bound to the next term, i.e. ζωοποιόν in every textual version (1. τὸ κύριον καὶ ζωοποιόν, or 2. τὸ κύριον καὶ τὸ ζωοποιόν, or 3. τὸ κύριον, τὸ ζωοποιόν), and both are directly referring to τὸ Πνεῦμα, which is of neuter gender.

is important also from a pneumatological viewpoint to interpret the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* in the light of this epistle addressed to the West, which was written by virtually the same theological community only a year after the second ecumenical council. This text clearly emphasises that one has to believe in the one divinity, one power, and *one essence* of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: thus, the idea of the ὁμοούσια is unquestionably valid for the Spirit as well.⁶⁵ The fact that the Spirit is Lord (or “lordly” for that matter), means he is not smaller than the One to whom the title Κύριος rightly belongs, since the title can accompany both the names of the Father and of the Son. The term “life-giving” or “vivifying” (ζωοποιόν) refers both to the creation, the breath of life and to the possibility of a new life in Christ. The worshipping and glorifying together with the Father and the Son emphasises again the equal rank of the three divine hypostases. The inspiring power and Old Testament presence of the Spirit is substantiated by the reference to the prophets.

The Antiochene confession explained by Theodore contained a further biblical reference to the Spirit, i.e. “Spirit of truth” (πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας).⁶⁶ This in the end did not become part of the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*, yet it may not necessarily be a mere omission.

The mode of the Spirit’s procession was defined earlier by the Cappadocians: the Spirit was neither “born” nor “begotten” (for the Son is Only-begotten), and was not created (because then the Spirit would not be God). Instead, the Holy Spirit “comes forth” from the Father or, according to several Eastern teachers, “proceeds” from the Father *through* the Son. It would be anachronistic to mention the mode of the Spirit’s procession as a problem of the fourth century. Instead, at this point it should be clearly seen that from the perspective of the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* the divinity and equal rank of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son is independent from one’s rejection or acceptance of the *Filioque*, since – as the testimony of the synodal epistle of 382 goes – the coessentiality is valid also for the Spirit.⁶⁷

Within the realm of Christendom, during the later centuries the following approaches emerged concerning the interrelationship between the three divine hypostases: according to the Eastern thought and approved by the original version of the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* the Son is *begotten*

⁶⁵ As we have quoted above already: οὐσίας μιᾶς τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος πιστευομένης. Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5, 9.

⁶⁶ John 15,26 and John 16,13.

⁶⁷ Concerning the debate around the Spirit’s procession during the Nestorian controversy, see André de Halleux, “Cyrille, Théodoret et le Filioque” in *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 74 (1979), pp. 597-625.

by the Father, whilst the Spirit *proceeds* from the Father (by some: through the Son). In the view of the Latin theologians the Son is *begotten* by the Father, whilst the Spirit *proceeds* from the Father and the Son.

Apart from these two well-known models we have knowledge of another early image of the Trinity known to a considerably smaller circle, in which the Holy Spirit fulfils the role of a mother, the Son being born of the Father and of the Holy Spirit (i.e. of “the Mother”). The traces of this thinking can be found amongst other sources in the so-called *Gospel according to the Hebrews*, to which both Origen and Jerome made references.⁶⁸

The anathema appended to the *Nicene Creed* already mentioned the distinguishing features of the church, but did not present them as credal statements. The Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum does not achieve a merely formal change: by asserting as part of the symbol that the Church of Christ is one, holy, Catholic and apostolic, it states a fact, but also formulates a clear expectation from the part of the believer. If I believe the one, holy, Catholic (universal) and apostolic church, I also have to make an effort so these distinguishing marks may be valid for the visible community as well.

Since the features of the church and the explanation of the creeds are subjects of many theological works, I shall refer to these four distinguishing marks very briefly. The Church is one, because she has one fountainhead. She is holy, belonging to God and being reserved exclusively for Him. She is Catholic, i.e. universal, according to the whole (καθ’ ὅλον → καθολικόν), for she binds together all the living members of Christ’s body both in space and time. Her apostolicity derives from her missionary vocation received from Christ.

The fathers emphasise that they confess *one* baptism (ἐν βάπτισμα) which they bind together with the remission of sins based on Mk. 1,4. Nevertheless, the emphasis upon the one baptism has a further significance. It does not only mean that the one and the same baptism is valid everywhere, but also that this baptism for the remission of sins is *one*, i.e. unrepeatable: a second application does not provide remission for the sins committed after the first reception of the sacrament.⁶⁹ Therefore, baptism is one in the sense

⁶⁸ For a more detailed presentation of this issue see István Pásztori-Kupán, “The Holy Spirit as the Mother of the Son? Origen’s Interpretation of a Surviving Fragment from *The Gospel According to the Hebrews*”, in Heidl György, Somos Róbert (eds.), *Origeniana Nona: Origen and the Religious Practice of His Time*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, 228, Leuven 2009, pp. 285-291.

⁶⁹ A comprehensive discussion of this issue can be found in the excellent study of David F. Wright, “One Baptism or Two? Reflections on the History of Christian Baptism”, *Vox Evangelica* 18 (1988), pp. 7-23.

that *for the remission of sins* it may be applied only *once*. Consequently, the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* does not speak of “one baptism” in the sense of Eph. 4,5.

Apart from the remission of sins, John Chrysostom enumerates nine other benefactions of baptism.⁷⁰ Gregory of Nyssa harshly criticised the practice of delaying one’s baptism in fear of lapsing again.⁷¹ Beside this interpretation, the notion of *one baptism* in the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* implies also the truly valid baptism bound together with the right doctrine, as it appears in e.g. Athanasius’ Second Oration against the Arians and in the 19th canon of Nicea.⁷²

The *Creed* ends with the statement referring to the expectation of the resurrection of the dead and of eternal life. It is remarkable that the Antiochene baptismal formula did not contain the general idea of the resurrection of the “dead”, but that of the “body”. The Syriac term *pagra* corresponds chiefly with σῶμα, but it was used to translate σάρξ as well. Thus the text quoted by Theodore in his Catecheses (surviving only in Syriac) can be interpreted both in the sense of ἀνάστασις σώματος (resurrection of the body), and ἀνάστασις σαρκός (resurrection of the flesh).⁷³ It is important to note that the Syriac language has a separate expression for σάρξ: this is the correspondent of the Hebrew בשר, i.e. *besra*. The Syriac version of the New Testament, the Peshitta is also inconsistent in respect to the translation of σῶμα and σάρξ. E.g. the latter is translated with *besra* in Mt. 19,5, and with *pagra* in Mt. 19,6. In the same manner σῶμα in Rom. 12,5 and Col. 3,15, as well as σάρξ in 1 Cor. 6,16 are all translated with *pagra*. In a nutshell, since the text of the

⁷⁰ John Chrysostom, *Catecheses ad illuminandos* 3, 6 in: Jean Chrysostome, *Huit catéchèses baptismales*, ed. by Antoine Wenger, Sources Chrétiennes 50 bis, Paris 1970. As a child, Augustine also fell very ill and demanded to be baptised. His mother agreed to it in principle, but because the child quickly recovered from the illness, she decided to postpone the event, partly because of the contemporary fear from the sins committed after baptism. The event is recorded vividly in Augustine’s *Confessions* and we may well presume that it played a crucial role in forming the great theologian’s teaching about baptism and salvation. See Augustine, *Confessions* 1, 11.

⁷¹ See Gregory of Nyssa, *De iis qui baptismum differunt* in PG 46, pp. 416–432, especially 425.

⁷² Apart from the 19th Nicene canon, the 7th canon attributed to the council of 381 – which most likely was composed much later – determines the mode of readmission of repentant heretics into the church. According to it the Arians, Macedonians, Sabbatians, Novatians and Apollinarians are readmitted without rebaptism. The Eunomians, Montanists and Sabellians, however, are treated in the same way as the Pagans: they need to go through catechumenate and baptism again. See K. J. Hefele, *Councils*, II, pp. 367–368. Sabbatians were a group of Novatians, who celebrated Easter according to Jewish customs. See Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 7, 18.

⁷³ L. Abramowski, “Was hat das Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum”, p. 511. Cf. H. Denzinger, A. Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* *51 (pp. 35–36).

Antiochene baptismal formula is available only in Syriac, we cannot conclude with any certainty whether the original Greek contained *σῶμα* or *σάρξ*.

Excursus: clarifying remarks concerning the difference between *Creed* and *Definition*

As a closure to our presentation we ought to draw attention to a usage of terms by which the old teachers of the Church distinguished between *creed* or *symbol* (Greek *σύμβολον*, Latin *symbolum*) and *definition* or *clarification* (Greek *ῥος*, Latin *definitio*) respectively. The term *σύμβολον* had been applied initially only to the *Nicene Creed*.⁷⁴ Its significance was not realised during the first two decades following the Council of Nicea. It took a heroic rediscovery by no less an authority than Athanasius and his *De decretis Nicaenae Synodi* as a milestone in the history of doctrine to re-elevate the formula of “the 318 holy Fathers” to the rank of a veritable *σύμβολον*. The very proof of this single position of the *Nicaenum* can be found in the fact that all the communities which separated from the Eastern Church after the end of the fourth century – including the Nestorians, the Oriental Orthodox and others – unanimously upheld and venerated it.

The *Nicene Creed*, as an exclusive *σύμβολον* of all orthodox Christians persecuted by the Arians in the fourth century, gradually gained a unique status. The entire process was fuelled by the very legacy and example of Athanasius, its champion. This eminence of the *Nicaenum* did not change, but rather became strengthened in 381, as the epistle of the council in 382 addressed to the Latins clearly shows: the *Nicene Creed* literally “must suffice” (*συναρέσκειν δεῖ*) to all, even if with the tomes of the councils of Antioch (379) and of Constantinople (381) “we have confessed the faith at greater length” (*ἐν οἷς πλατύτερον τὴν πίστιν ὡμολογήσαμεν*). Consequently, “the confession at greater length” – part of which are both the *Tome*, and the new formula of the Creed – is not the *augmentation* of the *σύμβολον*, but rather its *explanation*. If one were to speak of an addition, it would imply that the original *σύμβολον* was incomplete. The epistle, however, speaks of the ancient formula of the 318 bishops in almost exact mathematical terms as a kind of necessary and sufficient premise.

The so-called *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* was therefore initially regarded as an explanation of the *Nicene Creed*, or perhaps its lengthier exposition. To this one may add that for the Western Church the council

⁷⁴ Socrates Scholasticus labels the text of the Nicene Creed “the teaching” (*τὸ μάθημα*). Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1, 8.

of 381 held in Constantinople could hardly attain the rank of the Nicene of 325. Bishops of Rome, among them Leo the Great, kept their reservation towards this council decades or even centuries later, and clearly distinguished between credal statements and canons.⁷⁵ In respect to the credal affirmations, following Pope Vigilius (?–555) and Pelagius II (?–590), Gregory the Great (ca. 540–604) compared the four ecumenical councils to the four gospels.⁷⁶ In the Eastern Church the formal reception of the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* happened at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, although the papal legates protested vehemently against the reinforcement of the third canon of 381, which had called Constantinople “the new Rome”.

In order to understand the difference between *creed* (σύμβολον) and *definition* (ῥος) or theological explanation, we have to take a glance at the decisions of the Ephesian council of 431. First we shall deal with Cyril’s council and then with the “little synod” or *conciliabulum* of the Orientals headed by John of Antioch. Cyril’s council in the course of its sixth meeting on 22 July 431 under the penalty of excommunication issued the following decision:

Τούτων τοίνυν ἀναγνωσθέντων,
ᾧρισεν ἡ ἀγία σύνοδος ἑτέραν πίστιν
μηδενὶ ἐξεῖναι προφέρειν ἢ γοῦν
συγγράφειν ἢ συντιθέναι παρὰ τὴν
ᾧρισθεῖσαν παρὰ τῶν ἁγίων πατέρων
τῶν ἐν τῇ Νικαέων συναχθέντων σὺν
ἀγίῳ πνεύματι.

Therefore, upon having read these,⁷⁷
the holy council determined that
nobody is allowed to produce, write
or compile any other faith [i.e. con-
fession] besides the one determined
by the holy fathers gathered in Nicea
together with the Holy Spirit.⁷⁸

The above text, whilst remaining completely silent about the creed attributed to the council of Constantinople in 381, does not only forbid any addition to the *Nicene Creed*, but commands literally that no other credal formula may be drawn up beside (παρά) it. The text employs the verb ᾧρίζω (= to define, to determine) twice, and calls the *Nicene Creed* exclusively as “the faith” (πίστις), compared to which no *other* faith (ἑτέρα πίστις) may exist.

In parallel with Cyril’s council, under the leadership of John of Antioch, the Oriental *conciliabulum* also held its meetings, proceeding, however, in

⁷⁵ See e.g. the *Epistle 106* of Leo the Great to Bishop Anatolius: PL 54, pp. 1001–1010 (especially Chapter II, pp. 1003–1004). Cf. K. J. Hefele, *Councils*, II, p. 371.

⁷⁶ Gregory the Great, *Epistles*, Book I, *Epistle 25*.

⁷⁷ I.e. the *Nicene Creed* and the relevant explanations of some earlier fathers

⁷⁸ ACO I, 1, 7, p. 105.

a different direction, since it came forward with a theological statement composed by Theodoret of Cyrus. With this the Antiochenes definitely did not mean to replace the *Nicene Creed*, the more so since this new formula dealt exclusively with Christological and soteriological questions. Nevertheless, this was their way to clarify the actual problems. This was the *Antiochene Formula*, presented for Theodosius II in autumn 431, which was then signed by Cyril two years later in 433. The credal statement of the Oriental *conciliabulum* thus became the *Formula of Reunion*, which is sometimes erroneously labelled as the *Ephesian Formula* or even *Ephesian Creed*.⁷⁹

Cyril was reprimanded by some of his own party members because of his acceptance of the *Formula* in 433. The critics claimed that the Alexandrian patriarch acted against the very decision of his own council of 431, which had forbidden the composition of “other creeds”. The only way out of this situation was to regard the *Formula of Reunion* neither as a “different creed” beside the *Nicene*, nor its enhancement, but only as an explanation or definition. Consequently, the *Formula of Reunion* in the two decades leading up to Chalcedon could not compete with the authority of the *Nicene Creed* either. Nonetheless, this was a matter of course, since neither the author, nor the signatories on either side intended to confer such importance to the *Formula* anyway.

The decision of Cyril’s Ephesian council, however, generated a dilemma for the Chalcedonian Fathers as well, because they were repeatedly instructed by Emperor Marcian to come forward with a theological formula to resist Eutychianism more effectively.⁸⁰ The commencement of the work of textual composition was preceded by fiery debates and even protests. Many of the participants considered that the production of any document was contrary to the decision of 431. The solution finally was that they came forward neither with a σύμβολον, nor with a πίστις, but rather with a so-called ὄρος, i.e. definition or explanation concerning the Person of Christ. Furthermore, as a fortunate compromise, this was built upon the text of the *Formula of Reunion*, which had been signed by Cyril in 433. The ὄρος of 451 became known to all Christendom as *Definitio Chalcedonense*, i.e. *Chalcedonian Definition*.

The *Chalcedonian Definition*, which at present we purposefully do not label as *Chalcedonian Creed*, originally did not have the same authority as the *Nicaenum* or the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*. The preamble of the

⁷⁹ We mean erroneously, because it does not derive from the council of Cyril, later accepted as ecumenical, but from the opposing party. Many readers, however, upon encountering the title *Ephesian Creed*, attribute it instinctively to Cyril and his Alexandrian group.

⁸⁰ See the Emperor’s ultimatum in ACO II, 1, 2, pp. 124-125.

Definition acknowledges both, yet a small differentiation still remains: the document of 451 labels the creed of the 318 Nicene Fathers as πίστις (faith), whilst calling the one of the 150 fathers of Constantinople διδασκαλία (teaching).⁸¹ The unchallenged primacy of the *Nicene Creed* is reinforced by the last sentence of the *Definition*, when it mentions the σύμβολον of the Fathers handed down to us in singular: there are not two symbols (the one of 325 and the other of 381), but only one: the *Nicene*. Following the text of the *Definition* the Chalcedonian document emphasises the same thing, when it reiterates almost word by word the decision of Cyril's Ephesian council, that according to the decision of the holy and ecumenical synod, under penalty of excommunication, nobody is allowed to come forward with any other creed or faith (ἑτέρα πίστις) or another symbol (ἕτερον σύμβολον).⁸² In the subsequent centuries, especially during the debates surrounding the council of Constantinople in 553 not only the Monophysites, but also the orthodox distinguished clearly between the authority of Nicea and that of Chalcedon.

The fifth-century hierarchy is therefore very clear: the first place is undisputedly reserved for the *Nicene Creed* as the only and exclusive πίστις or σύμβολον, followed by the teaching (διδασκαλία) attributed to the 150 fathers of Constantinople, as well as by the definitions (ὅροι) of 433 and 451. The liturgical recitation of the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* gradually replaced that of the *Nicene* to the extent that over time this enhanced formula of 381 became labelled as the *Nicene Creed*. This liturgical use may well have contributed to the fact that during the centuries the previously existent difference of authority between the first four ecumenical theological formulae faded away to the extent that in the Middle Ages as well as in the century of Reformation all theologians (rightfully) considered them as being of the same rank, as attested e.g. by the *Second Helvetic Confession* quoted above. In our time many theologians are unacquainted with the ancient taxonomy or consider it irrelevant. The present clarification, however, is necessary especially to avoid drawing any anachronistic conclusions concerning the early centuries of Christian teaching with a “reading back” of our present

⁸¹ ACO II, 1, 2, p. 129. We have to emphasise that within the documents of the Council of Chalcedon the twice quoted *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* is on both occasions cited after the *Nicene*, almost as its appendix. In ACO II, 1, 2, p. 80 the formula of the fathers of Constantinople is also labelled as πίστις, yet it is immediately added that this creed “is consonant (συμφωνοῦσα) with the holy and great Nicene synod”. In the case of the second occurrence, in ACO II, 1, 2, pp. 127-128 the *Nicene Creed* is called “the symbol” (τὸ σύμβολον), whereas the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* is labelled τὸ αὐτό, i.e. “the same”. This mode of expression also shows that in the view of the Chalcedonian Fathers there is only one σύμβολον: the others are merely explanations, or “the same”, but not real additions.

⁸² ACO II, 1, 2, p. 130.

paradigm (i.e. ranking all four formulae on the same level) into a period when it was not yet valid.

A final remark concerning the aim of this Excursus ought to be made. I definitely do not intend to suggest that either of the second, third or fourth ecumenical councils should be reassessed by some modern relativism with the purpose of establishing a certain subordination of their respective theological definitions, and to open the floor for a completely new ecumenical debate. Μὴ γένοιτο. The credal definitions of the first four ecumenical councils are of the same rank not only in the Catholic, the Orthodox, but also in the Reformed tradition and should definitely stay so. All of them are equally indispensable for our theological self-definition and have long become an unconditional prerequisite for any doctrinal statement. To give one example: the Reformed teaching about Christ, about salvation, about the interpretation of Scripture as well as about the Lord's Supper is absolutely inconceivable without the theological input concerning the one Person and two natures of Christ of the *Formula of Reunion* and of the *Chalcedonense*. The common ground for a responsible ecumenical discussion between the Catholic, the Orthodox and Reformed theologians is therefore provided by these four, equally valued theological formulae inherited from our forefathers in the common faith. Even during the ecumenical discussion with our Oriental Orthodox sisters and brothers, who regard the authority of Chalcedon differently than we do, when trying to emphasise what unites us rather than what may separate us, we should not seek to diminish within ourselves the value of the *Chalcedonense*, but should rather make an effort to find a mutually positive message in a commonly accepted expression, an appealing image or a fitting comparison within the very formulae which have regrettably separated us throughout the centuries. The above historical explanation was written exactly with the intention to show that although during the fifth century the authority of Chalcedon was questioned (see e.g. the effort of the *Henoticon* to circumvent the *Chalcedonense* by laying stress on the first three councils and Cyril's 12 anathemas), in the subsequent historical and doctrinal development the *Definition* of 451 did not fade, but rather strengthened, attaining its well-earned reputation as the apex of the theological edifice of "the golden age of the Fathers".

* * *

The *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* as well as the theological statements and definitions of the first four ecumenical councils, as acknowledged by the *Second Helvetic Confession* also, are undoubtedly the groundwork based on the

biblical teaching, which form the indispensable and common starting point for any serious ecumenical discussion. The recognition and analysis of these formulae make it evident that apart from the social and ethical message of the Christian Church, a mutual approach between different bodies of Christendom in a doctrinal sense must somehow emerge from the acknowledgement and rediscovery of all these commonly inherited values, handed down to us by the Creeds of earlier disciples of Christ.