

"And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten from his Father before all ages, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one being with the Father, through whom all things were made."

Here is the summary of this 4th chapter taken from the Foreword.

The fourth and fifth chapters are devoted to Christology and Soteriology. If the Father-Son relationship occupies a place of primacy and centrality in the Christian understanding of God and the world, and of the Gospel itself, everything depends on precisely how we understand the relation of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, to the Father. Is Jesus Christ 'of' God in the same way that the universe is 'of' God, as created by him and unceasingly dependent on him for its existence and continued being? Did the Son of God himself come into being through an act of the will of God or was he eternally in the being of God as Son of the Father, of the same being and nature as God, and therefore not like a creature which is of a different being and nature from God? The Nicene and Constantinopolitan fathers realised that if they allowed the dualist ways of thought in the prevailing culture to cut the bond of being between Christ and God the Father, then the whole substance and heart of the Christian Gospel would be lost. If what Christ does, for example, in forgiving our sins, is not what God does, then it is not finally valid. If God himself has not come to be one with us in the incarnation, then the love of God finally falls short of coming all the way to be one with us, and is not ultimately love.

The relation of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God to the Father is central.

Is Christ "of" God the same way the the universe is?

Is Christ of the same nature as the Father?

Dualistic thinking would destroy the whole of the Gospel.

What Christ does, God does!

Between the Son and the Father the questions are:

1. How are we to think of the relation between them?
2. What does the Gospel mean when it tells us that Jesus Christ was sent by God, from God and is of God?
3. What are we to think of Jesus Christ himself in his revelation of the Father?
4. Given the priority of the Father/Son relation over the Creator/creature relation, how are we to understand the relation of the Son to the Father in an accurate and precise way; so that we can exclude the ambiguities and error of the 4th Century which seemed to threaten the heart of the Christian faith?

1 - HOW ARE WE TO THINK OF THE RELATION BETWEEN THE FATHER AND THE SON?

Errors in these matters came out of the dualistic influences of Greek [Hellenistic] thinking that emphasised the sharp differences between God and the material/sensible/intelligible world.

The New Testament had a wholeness to the way it presented Jesus Christ as God and man. The 'ebionite' and 'docetic' types of Christology arising from these emphases had the effect of separating the divine Christ from the man Jesus.

Ebonite Christology

is derived from a community of Jewish converts to Christianity. They were styled "the poor" [the ebionim אַבְיוֹנִיָּם]. In their thinking about the mystery of Christ they:

- accounted for his divinity as a special sonship by the descent of the Spirit upon him at his baptism in the Jordan.
- thought of him not as begotten, but created
- thought of him as you would think of a prophet indwell by God

So, as a result they:

- rejected that there was any relation of being with the Father
- in seeking how to explain that God was in Christ, their approach was from below upwards, yet in such a way as not to compromise the transcendence and absolute oneness of God.
- thought the Father was the focus of faith and that Jesus directed mankind to Him in his teaching
- found that, as a result,
 - that God was tangentially involved
 - God was basically hidden
 - God is the unknowable God of Judaism, Who does not give any access to any knowledge about himself or his own very being.
 - If they were to think of Jesus as divine, that would require them to cut themselves loose from the starting point in the humanity of Christ.

Docetic Christology

Arose from the spiritualistic sects. We already see the NT warning about docetic tendencies [1 John 2.22; 4.2ff; 2 John 7], but nevertheless it became common among the Gnostics of the 2nd and 3rd Centuries.

They held that the body of Christ, the Son of God, was not real but only seemed to be so. Their name comes from the Greek word δοκεῖν to seem.

- This approach was from above downwards and addressed the question how did God become man so as to give full reality to his divinity, but not in a way that He lost his unintelligibility or impassability through becoming flesh. The implications were that:
 - it treated his humanity as unreal
 - it idealised the gospel message
 - undermined the objective reality of Christ
 - the humanity of Christ ends up as a divinised human idea.

A similar dialectic can be seen here in both ebonite and docetic Christology. Their presuppositions were similar. Each of them presupposed/assumed a *dualistic antithesis* [a] between the Creator and the creature and [b] between the divine idea and the physical event. As a result, in holding both these things so apart, they tended to pass over into each other. In this way as the ideas passed over into one another they made a third thing [*tertium quid*] which was more like an amalgam of the two, but neither.

The New Testament data

The presentation of Jesus by the New Testament did not accept this split. Rather, the data of the New Testament does not present Jesus in contrast to God, or alongside God - both Ebionism and Docetism made these assumptions.

Rather, the NT presented him to us in his undivided wholeness of the divine human, as God become man. It insists in its presentation that if He is not God he cannot reveal God, and if he is not human, he cannot save us.

To the Arians, who have both the ebonite and docetic errors, Nicaea made clear that Jesus Christ is God's Son and Word: and that God's Son and Word is Jesus Christ. This they held against the Arians and the Sabellians. [See 📖 notes, Chapter 2 Access to the Father page X]

The Nicene fathers did not write what seemed good to them but what the Catholic Church believed. They used a reversible statement: Jesus Christ is God's Son or Word and God's Son or Word is Jesus Christ. They held this against Arianism and Sabellianism, both of which were the successors of the the ebonite and docetic christologies. If Jesus Christ is not God, then there is no divine relevance to what he did and said; if he is not man, then he has no saving relevance to human beings. The fathers saw the need for both.

"Faith in Jesus Christ requires emphatic belief equally in his Deity, for it is God himself who has become man in him, and in his humanity, for in Jesus Christ it is our human nature that God has made his own" Torrance, [1988], p. 115

Relating "one Lord Jesus Christ" [article 2] to the "Father Almighty" [article 1]

1. In relating these two articles Nicaea was indicating that they referred to the one being. That is, NT faith in Christ coincides with faith in God.
2. The unique relation of Christ to the Father was spelled out by the expressions:
 - only begotten Son of God
 - begotten of the Father before all worlds/ages [there was no interval of time or of any other kind between the Father and the Son]
 - begotten, not made
3. In speaking of the one being with the Father ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρὶ they meant
 - the oneness in being between the incarnate Son and God the Father
 - the terms "Son" and "Father" point to a distinction within the one being of God, for the Son is Son and not Father, and the Father is Father and not Son. [In this way the Sabellian idea of a Son-Father υἱοπάτωρ was rejected.]
4. The words "through whom all things were made" made it explicit that the Son was to be identified with the Creator.

Nicaea ruled out Arian views

1. Arius had taught that the being of God was utterly unique, eternal and transcendent. So he thought of the being of God as unknowable, undifferentiated and incommunicable. This really meant there was no place for the idea that the Son or Word would be another being [οὐσία or ὑπόστασις] who was eternally of the same untrue or being as God Himself - for this would mean that God's being was divisible and even plural.
2. That there might be another being like this Arius thought it could only be so if he were brought into being *ex nihilo* and so must be a creature. thinking then of a creature Arius spoke that he was adopted by God as Son, and he is in no sense proper to the being of God. [Arius held that the λόγος was a creature, but not as one of the creatures; an offspring, but not as one of the offspring].

3. It follows from this that Arius than thought that such a being could only know of God 'according to his measure' as a creature. So as a created intermediary he is
- neither properly divine [ebionite heresy]
 - neither properly human [docetic heresy]

So Nicaea saw that Arius' ideas struck at the roots of the faith by calling into question

- the divine reality of Christ's revelation and
- saving activity
- the actual nature of his humanity.

So they asserted in clear terms that Son was only begotten, he is the offspring [very being] of God and that he was not created.

2 - WHAT DOES THE GOSPEL MEAN WHEN IT TELLS US THAT JESUS CHRIST WAS SENT BY GOD, IS FROM GOD AND IS OF GOD?

The Nicaean Council spent a lot of time thinking about the way the Bible statements were to be understood when "by", "of", and "from" were applied to the incarnate Son. Athanasius and the Nicene fathers realised the the generation of the eternal son from the eternal Father was something that exceeds our conceptions and ideas. It was not to be imagined as having taken place at some moment on time [Arius] or by an "act of will" [Eusebius].

The use of human language and human analogies

Human terms were required because God had revealed in that way. Taken by themselves these analogies may not be pressed. But they may be employed by divine revelation in quite an exact way and yet they point beyond their creaturely content to what God discloses of his own inner divine relations.

"One must use a poor analogy taken from tangible and familiar objects to put out thought into words, for it is presumptuous to intrude into the incomprehensible nature" Athanasius In Illud Omnia .3

So we must interpret the images and the analogies according to the sense given by them by the Scriptures and within the whole scope of the biblical framework.

Use of light [φῶς] and radiance [ἀπαύγασμα] to relate Christ as Son and Word to the Father.

1. This [Hebrews 1.1-4], had the effect of showing, after a hard struggle within the council, that:

1. that as light is never without its radiance so the Father is never without his Son or Word.
2. they were of the same being, and so not alien to each other
3. If the father is the eternal Light, so is the Son.

2. So they put forward, so they could meaningfully speak of Christ as the true and natural Son of the Father who is proper to his being, [ἴδιος τῆς οὐσίας αὐτοῦ]; Christ as being true God, of one being with the Father ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρὶ ; and of Christ as the express image of the Father [ὑπόστασις].

3. The Arians agreed to the formula that the Son in "of God" or "from God" as in "Light from Light"; but the fathers were careful to insist on defining the "of God" and "from God" as 'from the being of the Father'. On this way they made clear that the analogies pointed beyond themselves.

4. The fathers realised that the Arians and the Eusebians, while they agreed, were simply going to interpret it in terms of what might be applied to human beings created in the image of God or as children of God. So they used the expression ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρὶ to imply that the Son and

the Father are equally God within the one being of God. They also added a rider which repudiated that the Son could be thought of as from some other ὑπόστασις or οὐσία [so condemning the Arian and the Sabellian which ran into one another.]

5. Some folks argued that the term ὁμοούσιος might be replaced by ὁμοιούσιος which would mean that the Son only had a "likeness of being". The fathers argued that the term was not adequate and anyway was already dealt with, being implied by, the term ὁμοούσιος.

6. That the Son is the offspring of the Father by nature [φύσει] means that he is proper to, or identical with the very being of the Father. He is one nature [ὁμοφυνής] with the Father who begot him eternally in himself.

ὁμοούσιος

Because ὁμοούσιος was a non-biblical - and relatively new - term it needed some careful interpretation. This they did after the council. It becomes a useful term to express "of one and the same being and nature". It had far-reaching implications.

- It is the self same God who was revealed to us as the Son of God and the Father. i.e. the incarnate Son is the very same 'being' as God the Father.
- to detract from the Son is to detract from the Father. To deny the divine nature of the Son is to deny that God is eternally and intrinsically Father, and to deny the divine reality of the Word is to say that in himself God is essentially wordless and wisdomless [ἄλογος and ἄσοφος]. "He who honours the Son, honours the Father also"
- The incarnate Son has all the prerogatives of God except Fatherhood.

ὁμοούσιος also expresses the distinction between the Father and the Son for nothing can be ὁμοούσιος with itself. The implications are that:

- the Father and the Son have the same being, but are eternally distinct from each other. The Father is unchangeably Father and the Son unchangeably Son. This was a bulwark against the Sabellians [who were unitarian] and the Arians [who were polytheistic].
- This will have large implications when we are to consider, after Nicaea the person and work of the Holy Spirit as being eternally distinct from the Father and the Son.

[1] The hermeneutical significance of the homoousion

In defending against the errors the Nicene fathers made use of the 'rule of faith' which we have seen earlier and the 'deposit of truth'. In this way they linked together the primacy of the apostolic tradition which came to mean the witness of Scripture. They had two issues to balance;

[a] On the one hand they were concerned about the faithful expression of Holy Scripture in regard to the relation of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Father.

[b] On the other hand they were striving to give precise formulations to their coherent belief in Jesus as the Son of God. This led them to confess with the Deity of Jesus Christ as God of God, and that He was one being with the Father. What laid the foundation for both of these was the expression "of one being with the Father" - ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρὶ.

[1] What all this did was to *establish the primacy of Scripture* to the mind of the Catholic church. And it was after the Council of Nicaea that the full anon of Scripture was laid down.

The clarity of the expression "of one being with the Father" aided the Church to grasp the meaning and the truth of the biblical images. The statements of the Bible and its conceptions had to be handled well and clarified when they faced the slippery way the Arians interpreted and cited the Scripture passages.

[2] *This led to a method*, a basic approach to Scripture and its interpretation. There were basic tools of interpretation which they followed, so that they could honestly find the exact meaning of what was being conveyed in Scripture:

- carefully compared Scripture with Scripture, seeking similarity of meaning
- they looked at the scope of a conception or biblical idea
- they noted the time when it was said, and how that fitted/contrasted with what else God was doing over the whole range of scripture
- they noted the person to whom things were said and the matter in question
- they noted if there was a distinctive way Scripture spoke of things

[3] *Use of un-Biblical terms [λέξεις] was carefully done:*

- in using terms like 'being', [] and 'of one being with the Father' [ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρὶ] they did this to express the indivisible unity the Son, Jesus Christ, with the Father
- Athanasius was careful to note that the important point, when using these terms, was not the actual words themselves but
 - the meaning they convey and
 - the realities to which they refer
- terms are to be understood none sense when used of human beings and in another sense when used of God: this implied that the same terms, when used of God and human beings had to be interpreted differently according other nature of the beings to which they refer.
- terms do not detract from God's nature; rather, does his nature draw those terms to itself and transforms them. For terms are not prior to 'beings' but beings come first and the terms second ie afterwards.
- terms like οὐσία and ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρὶ as applied to God were not to be used as in the Greek textbooks of the day; but were given an new meaning under the transforming impact of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. In this way the ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρὶ was a hermeneutical term - explaining and making clear the issue of being found in Scripture, and was also a theological term - used as an instrument or a window with which to refer to the reality of God.

[4] *Words were changed:* the change in the meaning of ordinary terms came to be as the church began to use them as theological terms: words like being, word, energy all were changed.

[a] In using the term 'of one being with the Father' ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρὶ about Jesus Christ meant that when God moves towards us, and comes into where we live, in the Word of God made flesh, He really is, in Himself, the Person He is in the inner [internal] relations of his own transcendent being. He is the very same Father, Son and Holy Spirit that He is his revealing and saving activity done in time and space towards mankind.

[b] 'being' οὐσία now refers to being that simply meant that which is in existence, but now to what being must refer to when we consider its internal reality which is eternally so.

[c] 'subsistence' ὑπόστασις refers to being, not just in its independent subsistence but now refers to its objective otherness - such as each member of the Trinity may spoken of. In this way οὐσία denotes being in its inward reference - saying what it is in itself - whereas ὑπόστασις denotes being in its outward reference - saying what it is in respect to others. Both these terms have a personal reference that they don't have in Greek usage.

[d] Again, ὁμοούσιος refers to the immanent, personal relation the Godhead. While the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each distinct, each is 'another' [ἄλλός]. In relation to one another they are hypostatic [ὑπόστατος, ὑπόστατικός] or enhypostatic [ἐνυπόστατικός, ἐνυπόστατος]

Yet They are all 'consubstantial', this refers to their substantive identity, their unity, their equality with the Father.

When we want to refer to the Trinity of God, that there is a unity of being within these three distinct person we speak of "one being" and 'three persons' [μία οὐσία, τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις]

[e] If God is in himself what he is in the Person and activity of his Incarnate Word and Son, then the very being [οὐσία] of God needs to be understood in a very un-Greek way. He will be an 'inbeing Word' [ἐνούσιος λόγος] and an 'inbeing action' [ἐνούσιος ἐνέργεια]. These words of Athanasius express the reality that God is not empty of word and activity but is dynamic and speaking; because his Word and being inhere. His being and his activity inhere in one another. His 'being' is his act-in-his-being and his act is his being-in-his-act.

[2] The gospel significance of the homoousion

The integrity of the gospel message has to do with the oneness in being, word and act between Jesus Christ and God. Words like the homoousion have a bearing on the gospel message that is so important to us - for it is by the test of what that word implies that the its significant will be disclosed.

[1] Question: "What would be implied if there was no oneness in being between Jesus Christ and God the Father?"

[a] Jesus Christ is God, and that he shares equally with the Father in the oneBeing of the Godhead, is the primary assertion of the gospel. If not thence is a creature, cannot mediate God and there is no access to the Father. We are left in the dark about God, who becomes unknowable - there is no authentic knowledge of God.

[b] If the Son a creature then there would be no identity between God and the content of his revelation to us.

[c] Then the Church is left with some kind of human self-understanding which is projected into God from a centre within itself and passed off as revelation. This is 'mythology' [μυθολογία]. The reality of the gospel is that we have received something from beyond ourselves and we are thinking it out in accordance with the objective truth if what is revealed. This is theology [θεολογία]. When Christ is detached from the gospel, there is no longer a gospel.

[2] "What kind of God would we have the if Jesus Christ were not the self-revelation or self-communication of God, if God were not inherently and eternally in his own being what the Gospel tells us he is in Jesus Christ?"

[a] Then He doesn't care to reveal himself.

[b] His love has stopped short of coming to us.

[c] there is no ontological or epistemological communication between the love of Jesus and the love of God; this would mock us, poke fun at us.

Such ideas as these contradicted the Gospel message. On the hinge of ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρι turns the understanding that;

- God has revealed Himself in the Incarnation
- God is identical with his elf revelation Jesus Christ
- There is a unity of act and being between them
- God is eternally in Himself what He is in Jesus Christ
- Knowledge of the Father through the Son, and knowledge of the Son through the Father are the same.

- the ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρὶ also applies to the relation between the incarnate Son and the Father. And therefore grounds our Lord's humanity - and all that it means for us - in the indivisible union with the eternal being of God.
 - Jesus Christ incarnate is the fountain, beginning [ἀρχὴ] of God's ways for us [Colossians 1.15]. This means that we must see this beginning in the vicarious life and work of the incarnate Son.
 - Means that the gospel states that God comes to us and reveals Himself to us as man. He shares in our human being, nature and our condition; and he does this in body, mind and soul.
 - All this was evaded by the Arians. Based on dualistic modes of thought, they saw the λόγος has the status of a creaturely intermediary, between God and the world.

[3] "What is implied if there is no oneness of act and being between the incarnate Son and the Father?"

The ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρὶ made clear that there was no division between the being/act of the Son and the being/act of the Father [John 5.17]. We cannot divide up the creation saying, "this is the Father's and this is the Son's".

If not so then:

- this degrades the Son's act to that of a creature
- then there is no final authority for human beings in what He did for them; for no creature can be saved by a creature
- the asserts both truths:
 - that God is the content of the revelation in Jesus Christ
 - God is the content of his saving grace in Jesus Christ

This consubstantial giving of Himself to us through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit is called by the Nicaea men θέωσις. Along with θεοποίησις it refers to the fact that the Father acts upon people in a divine and creative way, making them to partake of Himself through grace, and so they partake of God.

30 "I and the Father are one."

31 The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him.

32 Jesus answered them, "I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?"

33 The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God."

34 Jesus answered them, "Has it not been written in your Law, 'I SAID, YOU ARE GODS'?"

35 "If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken),

36 do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?"

37 "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me;

38 but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father." John 10.30-38 NASB 1960

This idea is re-enforced by the idea of enlightenment [φωτισμός] for since Christ is the real Light, his enlightening of us is a divine and deifying activity; making us 'sons of light' [John 8.12; 9.5; 12.35-6; Matthew 5.14-16].

Nicaea rejected

- entirely the idea of a created intermediary but asserted that God h=gave/revealed Himself, not something of himself.

- the idea that grace is a created medium between God and man. Rather it understood grace
 - as being the self-giving of God us in his incarnate Son, in whom the Gift and the Giver are eternally /and indivisibly One. [1 John 5.12; 2 Peter 1.4; Philippians 2.9-10
 - is not a transferrable and detachable quality which may inhere or be possessed by a human being. This would not be the right way to take 2 Peter 1.4

2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord;

3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.

4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. 2 Peter 1.2-4 NASB 1960

- "As the grace given is from the Father through the Son, so we can have no communion in the gift except in the Holy Spirit. For it is when we partake of him that we have the love of the Father, and the grace of the Son and the communion of the Spirit himself." Athanasius, *Ad Serapion* 1.30
- If there is no oneness in agency and being then the acts in the Gospels are not the acts of God himself "for us and for our salvation"
- Then there is no act of God in the sacrifice of the cross, forgiveness, for what we need is in incarnate God put to death so that we might be put to death with him and so glorified in Him.
- Similarly there is no gap between Jesus Christ and the Judge of all the earth

The Nicene fathers were overwhelmed and awed at the significance of the internal relation of the incarnate Son to the being of the living God. Jesus, son of Mary, who lived a fully human life among us as one of us is none other than God himself come to us as man.

At Nicea: the formulation of the homoousion

There was taking place

- something fundamental in the mind of the Church
- a decisive step in understanding the gospel
- it was an irreversable step eg of the jigsaw puzzle
- in-erasable step
- established the coherence of the Gospel

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