



# The 1,700-year anniversary of the Council of Nicaea

## A prominent event in the history of the Christian faith

### 1 The state of Christendom in the Roman Empire circa AD 300

Christianity was persecuted more or less intensively by the Roman authorities for nearly three centuries. Christians were killed for their faith, denounced, and discriminated against within society. This changed under Emperor Constantine, who ruled from AD 306 to 337 and proclaimed religious freedom in the year AD 313 (the Edict of Milan). The catalyst for what later became known as the Constantinian Shift is said to have been a divine sign that appeared to the emperor in the form of a cross or the Christological monogram (also known as the Chi-Rho symbol). Although Christians were still a minority in the Roman Empire, they became increasingly notable due to their tight ecclesiastical organisation and their spread.

In the years following 313, the position of Christians in the Roman Empire became stronger and stronger, as Constantine came to regard them as an unmistakable power factor and a constructive element for permanently stabilising his rule. So it was that the emperor, who was not a Christian, had an interest in maintaining the Christian church as a reliable entity within the empire. In this respect, he observed with interest the development of the Christian community, whose popularity and attraction increased due to the tolerance—and ultimately, the privilege—it was shown.

The theological dispute and the question of whether the Son was of the same essence as the Father or only similar in essence seemed to endanger the unity of the Christian church within the Roman Empire. Emperor Constantine thus considered it a necessity for the church to give a binding answer to this question.

### 2 The question of the nature of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

#### 2.1 Statements of the New Testament<sup>1</sup>

The New Testament attests that Jesus Christ is God. For example, it says the following about the *Logos* (the divine Word) who became God-Man in Jesus: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1: 1). The designation “God” is used in reference to the incarnate *Logos* a number of times in the gospel of John (John 1: 18; 20: 28). The New Testament likewise makes it clear that the Son of God was with God before His incarnation—which is a reference to His pre-existence. For example, Philippians 2: 6 mentions that Jesus Christ was “in the form of God” in heaven (Philippians 2: 6, 7), and that He became human, thereby abasing Himself. Similarly, Colossians 1: 15 declares: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” In Romans 9: 4–5 Paul expresses that Jesus Christ belongs to Israel according to the flesh—and is therefore human—but also that He “is over all, the eternally blessed God.” In Hebrews 1: 3 et seq. the divine nature of the Son is developed

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. CNAC 3.2.2



using a verse from the Psalms, certainly not least of all in order to emphasise the Old Testament's context of the New Testament message of Christ.

It is also expressed that the Son brings salvation, forgiveness of sins, and fellowship with God (Colossians 1: 13–14). While the old covenant makes it clear that salvation is always associated with God, the new covenant clearly shows that fellowship with God is always fellowship with Jesus Christ. Indeed, one can only really speak of salvation in association with the Christ event. It is for this reason that faith in Jesus Christ has a justifying effect (Romans 5: 1–11).

The most frequent and emphatic reference to the divinity of Jesus Christ is the designation *Kyrios* ("Lord"). In the Septuagint, the pre-Christian translation of the writings of the old covenant into the Greek language, the term *Kyrios* is used as a designation for God. In the writings of the New Testament, this designation is also applied to Jesus (for example, Matthew 9: 28; Luke 5: 8). In Acts 10: 36b, Jesus is described as "Lord of all". And Paul stresses—and this can already be read as an implicit reference to the unity of the divine persons: "[...] and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12: 3b).

While the Spirit of God is understood as an impersonal divine life force in the Old Testament, the New Testament speaks of the Holy Spirit in personal terms. In the gospel of Joh, the holy Spirit is the one who reminds the disciples and the church of the words and deeds of Jesus (John 14: 26). The Holy Spirit is "another Helper", who represents Jesus in the time of the church and imparts knowledge just as Jesus did (John 14: 26). It is also mentioned that the Holy Spirit "teaches" (Luke 12: 12), speaks, commands (Acts 13: 2: "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them"), ordains Bishops (Acts 20: 28), issues missionary mandates (Acts 8: 29), and serves as the source of all prophetic speech (Acts 28: 25; Hebrews 3: 7). In addition, the Holy Spirit teaches human beings the right way to pray (Romans 8: 26). The unconditional unity of God and the Spirit is referenced in 1 Corinthians 2: 11, and in 2 Corinthians 3: 17, the Spirit—just like Jesus Christ—is called "Lord" in order to emphasise His divinity and personhood.

The testimony of the New Testament is—and this already implies a doctrine of the Trinity, as it were—that the "one God in Jesus Christ confronts the world, and the one Lord Jesus Christ confronts his church in the power of the Spirit" (P. Meyer).<sup>2</sup> At the baptism of Jesus, both the Father and the Holy Spirit reveal themselves. The Father confesses the Son, and the Holy Spirit is the constant companion of the Man Jesus. The close relationship between Jesus Christ and the Paraclete, who is the personal presence of the exalted Lord among His own, can also be seen as a reference to the mystery of the Trinity: the Son and the Spirit are in unity with the Father, such that that the word and will of the Father is at the same time the word and will of the Son and the Spirit (John 16: 13–15). Beyond that, the self-address of God in Genesis 1: 26 can already be understood as an indication that the dimensions of "I" and "you" are present within God Himself. The triadic constructs in 1 Corinthians 12: 4–6 and the blessing formula in 2 Corinthians 13: 14 can also be understood as important references to the Trinity of God and point to the necessity of a doctrine of the Trinity.

---

<sup>2</sup> Trinität II [Trinity II]. In the New Testament. In RGG Volume VI. Third edition. Tübingen 1962, Col. 1024.



## 2.2 Theological positions preceding the Doctrine of the Trinity

Although the authors of the New Testament at times refer to Jesus Christ as God, accord Him divine attributes, and point out the divine aspects of His activity and nature, they do not give any further theological explanations on the subject. The New Testament does not address or even develop the question of how the divinity of the *Logos* and the Spirit relate to the divinity of the Father. And so it was that it became necessary to work through this problem theologically over the ensuing centuries.

In the second and third centuries AD, there were many attempts to express the divinity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in theological terms—naturally without arriving at a generally accepted result, however.

Perhaps the two most important theological concepts that sought to clarify the mystery of God—that is, of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—in an insightful manner are the models of Subordinationism and Modalism.

**Subordinationism** takes the position that the *Logos*, or the Son, is a being created by God, who is similar in essence to—but not of the same essence as—God the Father. The *Logos* and even the Holy Spirit were created by God. Therefore they are secondary or subordinate to the true God.

Subordinationism runs the risk of relativising monotheism and attributing secondary or subordinate deities of a creaturely character to God the Father. The prominent theologian Origen (AD 185-253/4) and his distinguished student Dionysius of Alexandria (AD 200-264/5) were important advocates of this position.

In the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, **modalism** refers to a position that regards the divine persons within the Godhead as mere manifestations of God, and thus fails to demonstrate any real differences between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Proponents of modalism took the position that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one and the same. According to this theory, God took alternate forms throughout His activity in salvation history, first appearing as the Father, then as the Son, and up to the present day as the Holy Spirit. This, however, creates the impression of a Trinity that is of no significance for the internal being of God, since God is one within Himself.

Modalism emphasises the unity and uniqueness of God. It strives to emphasise the unity of God within Himself and thereby prevent monotheism from being relativised. One prominent representative of this school of thought was the theologian Noet of Smyrna (circa AD 190).<sup>3</sup>

## 2.3 The Council of Nicaea

The different theological models that emerged in the early decades of the third century are linked to the names of two individuals who both worked in the Egyptian city of Alexandria, namely Arius (AD 260 – circa 328) and Athanasius (circa AD 300 to 373), who was himself a theological advisor to Bishop Alexander, a participant in the Council.

---

<sup>3</sup> In his *Dogmengeschichte* [history of dogma], (eighth edition. Tübingen 1991, pp 162 et seq.) Adolf von Harnack notes: “Noet gives us the simplest form of modalism [...]: Christ is the Father Himself, who was born and died. If Christ is not the Father, He is not God.”



The theological concepts of Arius,<sup>4</sup> which were largely identical with those of subordinationism, were well received by many clergymen of the early third century. As early as AD 318, there were disputes between Arius and the Alexandrian Bishop Alexander over the nature of the Son. In AD 321, Alexander even convened a synod in Alexandria in which the positions of Arius were condemned as heresy. The letter containing this condemnation was presumably written by the then Deacon Athanasius. But this did not resolve the dispute. If anything, it only further aggravated the situation.

Emperor Constantine eventually became aware of this dispute. Although Constantine viewed dogmatic questions as secondary and placed greater emphasis on worship and ethics, he intervened in the dispute and convened a general council in AD 325, which was to take place in the city of Nicaea in Asia Minor. Nicaea was only 80 kilometres east of Constantinople—the seat of Emperor Constantine’s government—and was easily accessible for him, allowing him to participate in the meetings at any time. The assembly of bishops was convened in a great hall of the imperial summer palace. It appears that a certain bishop by the name of Hosius of Corduba presided over the meetings. This, of course, was all done in close collaboration with the emperor.

The Council began on 20 May 325, but the exact date of its conclusion can no longer be ascertained. It likely lasted for one or two months. The Council was said to have been attended by some 300 participants, most of whom had come from the east, while only a few western clergymen were present. Among other things, the Council settled the dispute over the date of Easter, but the central and outstanding subject of importance in church history was the debate on the positions of Arius and the resolutions resulting from them.

The church historian Adolf von Harnack drew a parallel between Emperor Constantine and Athanasius, who ultimately became Patriarch of Alexandria in AD 328. According to Harnack, the emperor had “saved the church, which was deeply threatened by internal strife and external persecution,” and Athanasius had “protected the church from the complete secularisation of its foundations of faith.”<sup>5</sup> He diminished the overwhelming influence of Greek philosophy on the doctrine of God and oriented himself by the events of salvation history as attested in the New Testament. For Athanasius, the most important thing was “the idea of redemption through the God-Man.” “It is only from the certainty that the divine, which appeared in Christ, has the very nature of the Godhead and is only for this reason capable of raising us to divine life, that faith should receive its strength, life its law, and theology its direction.”<sup>6</sup> Only the true God, who becomes Man, is capable of imparting salvation to humanity. A creature cannot be the source of salvation. The beliefs and theological positions of Athanasius ultimately had the greatest influence on the positions taken by the Council of Nicaea.

The Council ultimately came to the following conclusion: The Son is “*very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.*” Although Arius also referred to the Son as God, he considered the only true God to be the Father, in whose divinity the Son and the Holy Spirit—who were created by the Father—only shared.

---

<sup>4</sup> Schatz, Klaus: *Allgemeine Konzilien – Brennpunkte der Kirchengeschichte* [General Councils—focal points of church history]. Paderborn, Munich *inter alia* 1997, pp 32 et seq.

<sup>5</sup> Harnack, Adolf v.: *Dogmengeschichte* [History of dogma]. Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>6</sup> Harnack, Adolf v.: *Dogmengeschichte* [History of dogma]. Ibid., p. 177.



The Creed of Nicaea makes it clear that there is no difference between the divinity of the Father and the divinity of the Son. Father and Son share the same divine substance. When it states that the Son is "begotten, not created," this first of all refutes the notion that the Son is a creature. The statement that the Son is "begotten" of the Father refers to his substantial identity (equality of substance or coessentiality) with the Father. The Son is God of the same substance as the Father and not a creature.

In the ensuing decades, the term "coessentiality" (*homoousios*) became one of the "key concepts in the struggle against the Arians,"<sup>7</sup> who continued to insist on the concepts of "similarity of substance" (essential similarity) and "creatureliness".

## 2.4 The Creed of Nicaea (AD 325)

The Creed of Nicaea states the following:

*"We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; by whom all things were made both in heaven and on earth; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; He suffered, and the third day He rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead, and in the Holy Ghost.*

*But those who say: 'There was a time when He [the Son] was not;' and 'He was not before He was made;' and 'He was made out of nothing,' or 'He is of another substance' or 'essence,' or 'The Son of God is created,' or 'changeable,' or 'alterable'— they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church."*<sup>8</sup>

This text contains the profession of faith that the Father and the Son are true God. While the Holy Spirit is mentioned, nothing is said yet concerning the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Father and the Son. This only occurs over fifty years later at the first Council of Constantinople.

## 3 The Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople (AD 381)

The debate over the creatureliness of the Son was not resolved with the Council of Nicaea, and Arianism remained a constant within Christianity for a long time. In AD 381, Emperor Theodosius I (AD 347-395) convened a general council in Constantinople. From May to July of the year AD 381, bishops—primarily from the East—assembled there. This council reaffirmed the profession that the Son is true God and of the same substance as the Father. It was also then that the role of the Holy Spirit was more clearly specified: "[We believe] in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son." The Nicene Creed was accordingly

<sup>7</sup> Schatz, Klaus: *Allgemeine Konzilien – Brennpunkte der Kirchengeschichte* [General Councils—focal points of church history]. Paderborn Munich *inter alia* 1997, pp 33 et seq.

<sup>8</sup> Cited from the Declaration of the General Assembly of the Association of Christian Churches in Germany (ACC) on the 1,700-year anniversary of the Council of Nicaea in the year 2025, p. 7.



expanded, and belief in the triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, was now definitively professed.

The Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople states the following (CNAC 2.2.2):

*“We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (aeons), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the virgin Mary, and was made man; He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father, from thence He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.*

*And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son<sup>9</sup> who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. In one holy universal [catholic] and apostolic church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.”*

### 3.1 The ecumenical significance of the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople

The expanded Creed of Nicaea—in other words, the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople—ultimately became the true ecumenical creed that unites Christians of the most diverse traditions. It professes that Christian faith is always accompanied by belief in the triune God. The doctrine of the Trinity is an essential touchstone for assessing the Christian character of a particular community.

Accordingly, the “Declaration of the General Assembly of the Association of Christian Churches in Germany (ACC) on the 1,700-year anniversary of the Council of Nicaea in 2025” states: “The guiding motives for the emergence of the dogma of the Trinity are still fundamental today for Christian faith, Christian devotion, and theological reflection. It is therefore appropriate that the World Council of Churches has identified the profession of the triune God as the common foundation of all of its member churches in its basic regulations. Of course, the task of translating this explication of monotheism into the diverse cultural contexts of contemporary Christianity remains.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The statement that the Holy Spirit also proceeds “from the Son” (*filioque*) is not part of the original text of the Creed. This formulation was adopted by the Western Church in the eighth century. This led to a dispute with the Eastern Church, which has not accepted this insertion to this day. This dispute was one of the reasons for the division of the church into the Eastern and Western Churches in the year 1054. The Roman Catholic Church, the Old Catholic Churches, and the churches of the Reformation emerged from the Western Church, while the Orthodox national churches emerged from the Eastern Church.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 11.



### 3.2 The position of the New Apostolic Church to the creeds of the early church

“The doctrine of the New Apostolic Church is based on Holy Scripture. The early church creeds [that is, the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople and the Apostolicum] express the fundamentals of the Christian faith as attested in the Old and New Testaments. The early church creeds do not extend beyond that which is attested in Holy Scripture, but rather summarise its content in concise and binding terms. As such, they stretch beyond confessional borders and—like Holy Baptism with water—represent a unifying link between all Christians.

The New Apostolic Church professes belief in the triune God, in Jesus Christ as true God and true Man, in His birth by the virgin Mary, in the sending of the Holy Spirit, in the church, in the sacraments, in the expectation of the return of Christ, and in the resurrection of the dead, as formulated in the two early church creeds” (CNAC 2.3 “The early church creeds and their significance for the New Apostolic Church”).

### 3.3 Statements of the Catechism of the New Apostolic Church concerning the Trinity

Together with all other Christian churches, the New Apostolic Church professes faith in the triune God. The following are key statements from the New Apostolic Catechism concerning the Trinity:

“God has revealed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus God can be recognised as the triune God. This self-revelation of God constitutes the basis for the doctrine of the Trinity. God’s actions in history and creation are executed as the respective works of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God reveals Himself as Creator, Redeemer, Reconciler, and Maker of the new creation. God reveals His triune nature in Jesus’ life—at His baptism, transfiguration, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension into heaven—as well as at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost: He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The mystery of the divine Trinity comes to expression in various ways in the Old and New Testaments. However, Holy Scripture does not mention the term or provide any doctrine on the Trinity. This doctrine was recognised and formulated in the early church on the basis of biblical evidence” (CNAC 3.2 “God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”).

“The recognition of God’s triune nature and its doctrinal presentation already began shortly after the New Testament Scriptures had been written. To express these interrelations linguistically, ancient philosophical terms like “person” or “hypostasis”, as well as “substance”, were used. Formulating the doctrine of the Trinity served, on one hand, to put into words the understanding gained through faith, and on the other, to protect the faith against heretics who sought to convey an image of God which did not correspond to the testimony of the New Testament. The doctrine of the Trinity was formulated during the first councils of the fourth and fifth centuries.

The term “Trinity” was coined by Theophile of Antioch, who lived in the second half of the second century, but it was the church leader Tertullian (ca. AD 160–220) who made it popular. Tertullian emphasised the oneness of God: “one [divine] substance in three persons” (Latin: *una substantia tres personae*). He was also the first to apply the term “person” to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Council of Nicaea (AD 325) explicitly enshrined the divine oneness of substance of the Father and Son. The direct reason behind this was the doctrine of Arius (died AD 336), who argued that the pre-existent Son was created by the Father from nothing, which therefore



constituted God's first act of creation. In opposition to this view, the Council insisted that the Son was not created, but has been, from all eternity, part of the triune God.

This dispute, known as the "Arian controversy", did not come to an end with the Council of Nicaea, but went on until the Council of Constantinople in AD 381. This council brought to expression that the Holy Spirit is as much a divine person—and true God—as the Father and the Son.

In the following years, the doctrine of the Trinity was, with few exceptions, generally accepted by Christendom. The deliberations over the doctrine of the Trinity had, however, not been concluded. Particularly under the influence of the Church Father Augustine (AD 354–430), the Western Church later emphasised that the Holy Spirit emanates equally from both the Father and the Son. In contrast, the Eastern Church maintained an older version of the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople, which states that the Holy Spirit emanates from the Father through the Son.

The Reformers adopted the belief in the Trinity of God from the early church (second to sixth century). With the exception of the aforementioned divergent interpretation concerning the Holy Spirit, the doctrine of the Trinity is common to all Christian churches. It is among the most fundamental statements of the Christian faith and is an essential feature that distinguishes it from the two other Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Islam.

At the eleventh church synod of Toledo (AD 675) it was proclaimed: "The Father is the same as the Son, the Son the same as the Father, the Father and the Son the same as the Holy Spirit, namely by nature one God" (CNAC 3.2.3 "The development of the doctrine of the Trinity").

"Christians profess the one triune God. Each of the divine persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is true God. The Christian faith states that God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—has always existed, namely from eternity.

Accordingly, "Father", "Son", and "Holy Spirit" are not merely names that designate various modes of being and revelation of God. Rather the three names stand for divine persons who are different from one another in their being. The Father is actually not the same as the Son, and the Son not the same as the Father. The Holy Spirit is not the same as the Father or the Son. This is because the "Father" is the begetter, the "Son" the begotten one, and the "Holy Spirit" the one emanating from both.

The three divine persons are continually interrelated and are eternally one. The distinctiveness of the three divine persons does not dissolve God's oneness, for they are one nature, or substance. In them there is no contradiction of will. The Father is entirely in the Son, entirely in the Holy Spirit. The Son is entirely in the Father, entirely in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is entirely in the Father, entirely in the Son.

Christians profess that all acts of God in creation, salvation, and new creation are acts of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. While all divine acts are, at the same time, acts of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, they are not always carried out in the same manner. Whereas creation was an act of God the Father and God the Son, it was neither God the Father nor God the Holy Spirit, but God the Son alone, who became incarnate. It was neither the Father nor the Son, but rather the Holy Spirit alone, who was poured out. In Christian tradition, the three divine persons are each assigned a point of emphasis (appropriation): God the Father is Creator,





the Son is Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit is the Maker of the new creation” (CNAC 3.2.4 “The unity of the three divine persons”).

#### 4 Remarks on the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople

As has already been mentioned, the doctrine of the Trinity, the foundations of which are clearly stated in the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople, has a biblical starting point. The God who reveals himself in the Old Covenant is not an inherently silent and solitary God who speaks only to humanity, but rather a God who is inherently dialogical and oriented toward an internal counterpart.

Thus the categories of “I” and “you”, of speaking and of being addressed, already exist within the one, eternal, almighty, and omniscient God. The formulation “Let Us make man in Our image” (Genesis 1: 26) can therefore be understood as a reference to this internal relationship, as can the following excerpt from Psalms: “The Lord said to my Lord [...]” (Psalm 110: 1). This passage is also cited in the New Testament in reference to Jesus Christ and His unique state: “How then, does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord’, saying: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool”’? If David then calls Him ‘Lord’, how is He his Son?” (Matthew 22: 43–45). However, the presence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit at the baptism of Jesus can also be understood as a reference to the triune God, who reveals Himself in this situation. The voice from heaven is not only speaking to the people who are present, but is also a reference to the inner dialogue within the Godhead. It becomes clear here that life is impossible without relationship. This is also very important for understanding human beings, because human beings, having been created in the image of God, are always geared towards dialogue.

The Doctrine of the Trinity distinguishes between two central categories, namely the *immanent Trinity* (God within Himself, the eternal relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) and the *economic Trinity* (God’s external actions, that is, in salvation history).

The term ‘immanent Trinity’ refers to the internal nature of God—in other words, the way in which God exists within Himself, independent of the creation or of His salvific activity in the world. This has to do primarily with the eternal relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Immanent Trinity refers to the relationships within God, which constitute the personhood of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (the Father begets, the Son is begotten, and the Spirit proceeds forth). Here the following principle applies: The internal works of the Trinity are divisible (*opera trinitatis ad intra sunt divisa*).

The term ‘economic Trinity’ applies to God, who acts upon history, particularly within the creation and salvation history. The word ‘economic’ (from the Greek *oikonomia* = “order of salvation”) is a reference to the way in which God reveals Himself in history and creates salvation. *Economic Trinity* describes the external works of God, that is, in nature and in history. Here the following principle applies: The external works of the Trinity are indivisible (*opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*). Nevertheless, there are certain appropriations here, which are not to be seen in absolute terms: the Father is known primarily as the Creator, the Son as the Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit as the Helper and Maker of the new creation.



However, both aspects—immanent and economic Trinity—are closely related, as the events occurring within God do not remain hidden in God's activity in salvation history. Rather, they are revealed in history and salvation history. The event unfolding within the Trinity is reflected, as it were, in God's historical self-revelation (the incarnation, the sending of the Holy Spirit). The theologian Gerhard Ebeling points to these interconnections when he notes: "The revelation of the living God does not occur through the announcement of a Doctrine of the Trinity or by opening up a direct view of the inner life of God. The revelation of the living God occurs as a communication of the life of God Himself through the event of creation, through the Christ event, and through the event of the [outpouring of the] Spirit. We would have no idea of what is meant by Father, Son, and Spirit in the Trinitarian sense without the tangible experience that is revealed to us through the reality of creation, through the appearing of Jesus Christ, and through the activity of the Holy Spirit."<sup>11</sup>

#### 4.1 The one God is Father and Creator

The beginning of the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople is reminiscent of the Apostolicum<sup>12</sup> (CNAC 2.2.1), which derives from a Roman baptismal vow from the second century AD: "*We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.*" What is professed here is the belief in the one God, who is described as Father and said to be almighty. So what we find at the beginning is the clear profession of the one God, of monotheism, which cannot be relativised by anything. The church thus follows in the faith of Israel, as it comes to expression in Deuteronomy 6: 4: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!" What is made clear here is that monotheism and the doctrine of the Trinity are not mutually exclusive, but belong together. The *Father* is that person, hypostasis, or relation from whom the Trinitarian nature of God can be inferred.<sup>13</sup>

The creative activity of God, which constitutes all of reality, is the starting point for any discourse about God: He creates "*heaven and earth, and [...] all things visible and invisible.*" The material world—that is, the world that is visible or becomes visible in any form—was created by God, just as was the invisible, non-material, and concealed world.<sup>14</sup> "Both the material and the spiritual exist on the basis of God's act of creation: God is the author of all reality, and it testifies of Him" (CNAC 2.4.1). Creation thus exists in a constant relationship of reference to God and his nature. God does not remain hidden, but reveals Himself in His creation. God's creative activity is connected to His personhood. When God the Father is described here as Creator, this is not to deny the creative power and creative action of the Son and the Spirit.

<sup>11</sup> Ebeling, Gerhard: *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens Bd. III* [Dogmatics of the Christian faith, Volume III]. Second edition. Tübingen 1982, p. 543.

<sup>12</sup> The Apostolicum states: "I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day He rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy universal [catholic] church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen."

<sup>13</sup> Concerning the terms 'person', 'hypostasis', and 'relation' see pp 16–17 and Footnote 19.

<sup>14</sup> CNAC 3.3.1.1 explains the invisible creation or invisible world.



After this brief profession of monotheism and the Creatorship of God, which at the same time emphasises the value of the creation and clearly identifies its role for recognising God<sup>15</sup>, the Creed goes on to talk about “*Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God*”, once again in a manner analogous to the Apostolicum.

## 4.2 The one God is the “only begotten Son” and the Redeemer

In contrast to the Apostolicum, the profession of belief in Jesus Christ—that is, in the Son—begins not with His incarnation, but with His pre-existent being. Right at the start, reference is made to the divinity of Jesus by use of the majestic title “Lord” (*Kyrios*). The term ‘only begotten Son’<sup>16</sup> (*monogenes hyios*), which can be found in John 1: 14, 18; 3: 16–18, *inter alia*, and which is also used by the Apostolicum without any further explanation, is more broadly developed in the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople. This broader elaboration is of central theological significance and existential importance for faith, as it strikes at the very heart of the Christian understanding of God. The Trinitarian doctrine arises from the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit. The dogma thus always has a Christological and pneumatological aspect, and is based on the historical self-revelation of God.

### 4.2.1 Very God of very God

*“We believe in [...] one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (Aeons), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made.”*

The following lines express how the relationship between the Father and the Son is constituted: the Son is *begotten of the Father before all worlds (aeons)*, and is *begotten, not made*. The position of the Arians, which is specifically rejected here, is that the Son was “created” before all time. The term ‘created’ is replaced here by ‘begotten’ and ‘only-begotten,’ terms that can be biblically placed.

The terms ‘begotten’ and ‘only-begotten’ normally pertain to biological realities, which, if taken literally, would express the inner-Trinitarian event as a biological or mythological phenomenon. The idea of “begetting” suggests an event that happens chronologically, in other words, that something begins and also ends. If one were to understand the processions within the Trinity in this way, then they would be subject to temporality. Such an interpretation would fail to acknowledge that God is the Creator and Lord of time, before whom past, present, and future are one and the same. God is not dependent on time or on its chronological succession, but is rather its Lord, the very prerequisite for time.<sup>17</sup>

The processions internal to the Trinity (being begotten, emanating from) are characterised above all by the fact that they must not be understood in terms of a chronological sequence, but as a complete (that is, perfect) “now”—a present that neither begins nor ends. The Son’s begottenness is a beginningless and never-ending process within the Godhead. These

<sup>15</sup> Cf. concerning this the comments on the self-revelation of God in nature and history, as well as the natural knowledge of God (CNAC 1.1).

<sup>16</sup> The term was coined by Luther.

<sup>17</sup> “God is the Creator and Lord of time. Unlike the material world, which is subject to time, God defines time in a sovereign manner. He grants time and can also take it away. The eternal nature of God transcends the horizon of human experience. It is infinite, however, it is not timeless. Rather, the past, present, and future are all equally current to God” (CNAC 3.1.5).



processions denote relationships that exist eternally between the three divine persons or hypostases. In this respect, it is correct to say: "The category of relationship has thus become the most important means of expressing the interrelated unity of the persons within the living God."<sup>18</sup>

When we speak of divine "persons" in this context, we do not mean individual entities that could emerge and eventually lead a life of their own.<sup>19</sup> When we talk about the Father and Son (and then also of the Holy Spirit) we are not referring to an independent existence of the persons for their own sakes, but the exact opposite: the reality of the "persons" results solely from the aforementioned relationships. Concerning this, the Church Father Augustine remarked: "He [God] is called Father, not in reference to Himself, but only through His relationship to the Son. Seen for Himself, He is simply God."<sup>20</sup> It is thus of great importance to understand the term 'person' or 'hypostasis' as a relationship within the Godhead. The Father becomes the Father through the Son, just as the Son becomes the Son through the Father. None of the three persons of the Trinity exist in isolation, but rather exist in a state of substantial unity. The relation of having been "begotten" makes the Son "*God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God*". Light is a common metaphor for God. The formulation "*very God of very God*" reinforces the earlier statement "*God of God*" and is, at the same time, a decisive rejection of the Arian position, namely that—while the Son can be described as God—His divinity is derived from that of the Father, who alone is the true God. The Council of Nicaea makes it clear here that there is no "attenuated derivativeness"<sup>21</sup> in God, that there is no event within the Godhead that does not contain the "whole" of God within itself. If God the Son were a "created being", then the cause of salvation would no longer be the true God, but a created authority. A created entity would thus be the cause of salvation. In that case, human beings would not encounter the true God at all if they expected and received salvation from Jesus Christ, but would always be dependent on a subordinate authority.

#### 4.2.2 The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ

The following segment: "[...] *who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the virgin Mary, and was made man*" explains that the Son, who is true God, has become human.

The reason for the incarnation of God is a reality of the human condition, namely remoteness from God—in other words, an event rooted in *us*, and therefore also in everyone who professes faith. Replacing this distance from God with closeness to God is only possible through the

<sup>18</sup> Breuning, Wilhelm: *Gott/Trinität*. In: Eicher, Peter (Hrsg.): *Neues Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe* [God/Trinity. In: Eicher, Peter (publishers): *New handbook of fundamental theological terms*]. Volume 2. Munich 1992, p. 297.

<sup>19</sup> The term "person" can be misunderstood in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity because our current understanding of person no longer corresponds to what was originally intended in the theology of the Church Fathers. At the Council of Constantinople in 381—as explained above—it was established that there is one God/one essence of God in three hypostases or persons. *Hypostasis* is the Greek term, which in English is translated by the word "person." The term *hypostasis* is still used by theologians today to describe the individual instances of the Trinity as closely as possible to the original language of the councils. This is because the concept of 'person' in modern everyday language has characteristics that the Greek term did not have at that time (for example, the characterisation of persons by self-awareness and freedom). Despite these possible misunderstandings, the term 'person' is important because it helps express the relationship within the Trinity (the Father loves the Son, the Spirit unites). The term demonstrates that God is not "an impersonal force," but a God in relationship. The concept of 'person' in the Trinity should therefore not be understood in the sense of modern individuality, but rather as a self-sufficient mode of existence in divine relationship within the one God.

<sup>20</sup> Cited from Ratzinger, Joseph: *Einführung in das Christentum* [Introduction to Christianity]. Eleventh edition, Munich 1968, pp 143 et seq.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Breuning, Wilhelm: *Gott/Trinität* [God/Trinity]. Ibid., p. 296.



incarnate God (John 1: 9–13), who comes down to us from the sphere of perfect divine life (Philippians 2: 6 et seq.).

The Son came down from heaven and “*was incarnate*” by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Creator of the Man Jesus, both of His soul and of His body.<sup>22</sup> The Apostolicum merely states that Jesus is “conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit,” without going into the pre-existence of the Son. Here it becomes evident that the Council of Nicaea was interested in sharpening this theological statement. The passage concludes with a reference to the virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus, and a profession of faith in the virgin birth. The Man Jesus does not owe His existence to a human act of procreation, but is rather the creation of the Holy Spirit. The fact that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary refers, on the one hand, to His true humanity and, on the other hand, to His exceptional position within humanity. As a real human being, Jesus is part of the human race and can therefore be understood in tangible, empirical terms, but at the same time, He is an object of faith and is therefore impossible to grasp empirically.

#### 4.2.3 The Crucified and Risen One

The third paragraph states: “*He [Jesus] was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven [...]*”

This section likewise has a parallel in the Apostolicum. There it says the following concerning Jesus: “He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day He rose again. He ascended into heaven” (CNAC 2.1)<sup>23</sup>.

Part of the humanity of the incarnate God is that He enters into the earthly dimension and lives His life within it. The existence of the incarnate God, like that of every human being, is thus shaped by historicity. The event within the Trinity transpires beyond the limits of temporality and its categories, but the life of the God-Man transpires within time and space: Jesus appears as a small child, as an adolescent, and as a grown man.

A word that signals the historical context in which Jesus Christ lives and dies is “Pilate”: “*He [Jesus] was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate.*”

The Synoptic Gospels already go to great lengths to tell the story of Jesus in the context of real history—one need only think of the mention of Emperor Augustus or the governor Quirinius (Luke 2: 2). The historicity of Jesus is clearly referenced by the mention of “*Pontius Pilate*.” The latter was the Roman governor of Palestine from AD 26 to 36, which means that Jesus' sufferings occurred during his reign (John 18: 28 et seq.). The crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth is therefore also an event within secular history. The suffering mentioned in the Creed is a reference to the true humanity of Jesus. The statement that He was crucified for us points to a dimension that extends far beyond the dreadful events themselves. The death that Jesus dies is a death for others—for us. In 1 Corinthians 1: 18–37 Paul addresses the outstanding significance of death on the cross, an event which was offensive to the ancient world. The cross is a paradox: on the one hand, it is a reference to the death of Jesus, but at the same time it is a reference to the salvation

<sup>22</sup> The Apostolicum states this in significantly more general terms: Jesus Christ is “conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit”.

<sup>23</sup> This passage of the Apostolicum is also part of the Second Article of Faith of the New Apostolic Creed. The text of this creed, along with a brief explanation on the subject, can be found in CNAC 2.4.2.



that has its source in His death. The cross changes from a symbol of disaster and ruin into a symbol of life and salvation, and is thus a contradiction to human expectations and ideas. Paul even goes so far as to describe the preaching of the gospel as the “message of the cross”. This is a very radical notion. It is for this reason that Gerhard Ebeling’s reference to the relationship between the cross and the doctrine of the Trinity is quite legitimate: “The path from the cross of Jesus to the Trinitarian dogma may appear long, but that is undoubtedly where it began. The Trinitarian attestation of God emerged from belief in the Crucified One.”<sup>24</sup>

The fact that Jesus suffered is abundantly attested in the gospels. The path to the cross is a path of suffering. At the same time, the figure of the “Suffering Servant” of God (Isaiah 53: 4, 5), mentioned in the book of Isaiah and identified with Jesus Christ even in early Christian times, comes into focus. Another figure, namely that of the “Son of Man”, familiar from Old Testament apocalypticism, expected by many of Jesus’ contemporaries as a Messianic figure and meant to bring about a radical change in history, is likewise associated with suffering, and is understood in Christological terms: “The Son of Man must suffer many things...” (Mark 8: 31). The image of the Son of Man, who is a Messianic judge in the apocalyptic imagination (Matthew 16: 27), undergoes a considerable transformation through His association with Jesus, who suffered, was persecuted, and died.

The statement in the Creed of Nicaea: “[...] *the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures*” refers to a central event of salvation history that had already been announced in “*the Scriptures*”—that is, in the holy writings of Israel. Behind this formulation is an early Christian confessional formula recorded in 1 Corinthians 15: 3–4: “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”

The resurrection is an event that transcends human experience and can only be explained and understood through faith. The message of Jesus’ resurrection is fundamental to the emergence of the early church and the Christian faith: “And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty” (1 Corinthians 15: 14). The resurrection is God’s affirmation of Jesus and, at the same time, the key to understanding the activity, words, and person of Jesus. It is from the perspective of the Easter event that Jesus can be understood and attested as Lord and God.

The third section concludes with the statement that Jesus “*ascended into heaven*”. The Man Jesus is the firstfruits of the resurrected. He has a resurrection body, which is the prerequisite for the perfect fellowship between humankind and God. At the same time, the ascension of the risen Jesus constitutes His exaltation into the glory of God.

#### **4.2.4 The exalted and returning Lord**

The statements concerning God, the Son, who has become Man in Jesus Christ, are concluded with the following words: “[*He*] *sitteth on the right hand of the Father, from thence He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.*” There is also a parallel for this section of the Creed in the Apostolicum. There it says: “[*He*] is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.”

---

<sup>24</sup> Ebeling, Gerhard: *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens* [Dogmatics of the Christian faith]. Volume III. Ibid., p. 529.



The exaltation of the Risen One, which occurs through His Ascension—that is, His entry into transcendence—has as its immediate consequence that the Risen One *is seated at the right hand* of the Father. This formulation is found several times in the New Testament (for example, Mark 16: 19; Luke 22: 69; Acts 7: 55; Romans 8: 34). In 1 Peter 3: 22 we find the Christological profession that Jesus Christ “has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.” The risen Christ has divine power. He is Lord over the angels and all other spiritual forces (“authorities”, “powers”). The first epistle of Peter and other New Testament writings “make reference to Psalm 109: 1—a passage already understood by the rabbis in Messianic terms—in which the Messiah is accorded a place of honour at the right hand of God.”<sup>25</sup>

The statement that Jesus “*shall come again, with glory*” is a reference to statements of the New Testament and to the belief of the early church, which awaited the return of Christ. A crucial aspect of the New Apostolic faith, which has a strong eschatological component, is addressed here. The New Apostolic Church has its origins in the certainty of faith that Jesus Christ will soon return, and that the modern apostolate has been assigned the task of preparing for this event.

The Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople and the Apostolicum are content with the statement that the risen and glorified Lord will return. The teaching of the New Apostolic Church goes further than that, however, incorporating other New Testament statements, and speaking of the return of Jesus to take home the bridal congregation (CNAC 10.2), as well as His return “with power and great glory” (CNAC 10.4) to establish the kingdom of peace, which will last a thousand years.

Like the Apostolicum, the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople speaks only of the judgement. The New Apostolic doctrine holds that a judgement already occurs when the bridal congregation is caught up to God, and that the Last Judgement will only occur after the kingdom of peace (CNAC 10.6).

The second part of the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople ends with the promise: “[*His*] kingdom shall have no end.” The reign of Christ guarantees a life rooted in the everlasting grace of God, which is accompanied by peace between humankind and God. This peace results in peace for all human beings among one another. For New Apostolic Christians, all of these things are hallmarks of a new creation (1 Peter 3: 13; Revelation 21: 3).

#### **4.3 The Holy Spirit—Lord and Giver of life**

The Creed of Nicaea, which—much like the Apostolicum—merely mentions the Holy Spirit, is supplemented by statements about the Holy Spirit as a result of the Council of Constantinople.

##### **4.3.1 The Holy Spirit is true God**

*“[We believe] in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets.”*

Belief in the Holy Spirit is linked to the statement that He—like the Father and the Son—is “Lord”, and thus true God. The title “Lord” is also an indication that He is a person. The Holy Spirit is Lord

---

<sup>25</sup> Schelke, Karl Hermann: *Die Petrusbriefe. Der Judasbrief. (Ungekürzte Sonderausgabe)* [The epistles of Peter. The epistle of Jude. (Unabridged special edition)]. Freiburg, Basel, Vienna 2002, p.109.



of life because He *gives life*. He is the Creator of the new being within humankind and grants life to this being through the sacraments. He is therefore the foundation of the new creation within a human being.

The First Council of Constantinople then goes on to name the relationship that exists between the Holy Spirit and the Father and the Son. The relation of the Spirit to the Father and the Son is not that of being begotten, as is the case with the Son, but that of “emanation” or “spiration”. The Holy Spirit exists in the same relationship to the Father as to the Son. He is the Spirit of the Father (Romans 8: 14) and of the Son (Romans 8: 9). It is for this reason that Jesus can also say: “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me” (John 15: 26). The sending of the Spirit into the world is an event that is part of the economic Trinity and at the same time attests to the unity of substance of Father, Son, and Spirit.

God the Holy Spirit is “[*worshipped and glorified*] with the Father and the Son together.” The worship and glorification of the one God applies to all three divine persons, regardless of whether they are specifically named or not. If the Holy Spirit is worshipped, this is an indication of His divinity, because only God—and not any created being—can be worshipped. Glorifying God includes highlighting the power and honour of God and praising Him for His works, namely creation, redemption, and new creation. In this respect, the Holy Spirit, like the Father and the Son, is the one God who loves, gives life, sanctifies, grants mercy, commands, and judges.

The end of this section states that the Holy Spirit “*spoke by the prophets*”. The proclamation and disclosure of the divine will occurs through the Spirit. The prophets of the old covenant were inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Old Testament Scriptures that announce the will of God and point the way to Jesus Christ are a work of the Holy Spirit. In the gospel of John, Jesus mentions that the Holy Spirit will remind the disciples of everything that Jesus said and did (John 14: 26). The Holy Spirit is therefore the source of the preservation of the gospel and its proper proclamation.

#### **4.3.2 The Holy Spirit and church, baptism, and eschatological hope**

Much like the end of the Apostolicum, the end of the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople contains a list of further essential objects of faith. The objects of faith mentioned here are clearly related to the Holy Spirit, His presence in the era of the church, and His significance for the eschatological future.

The final portion states: “[*We believe*] in one holy universal [*catholic*] and apostolic church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.”

##### **4.3.2.1 The church**

As stated in the Apostolicum and the New Apostolic Creed, the church of Christ is also an object of faith in the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople. The church can only be a church because it testifies that Jesus Christ is Lord. This profession is only possible through the activity of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12: 3: “[...] and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit”).

The formula: *one, holy, universal [catholic], and apostolic church* defines the nature of the church (*notae ecclesiae*). All churches and Christian communities share in this nature. Ever since the ascension of Jesus, the Holy Spirit—the “other” Helper or Comforter—has been at work in the





church (John 16: 14). The identifying characteristics of the church are known as the “*notae ecclesiae*”. A more detailed understanding of the *notae ecclesiae* can be found in CNAC 6.4.1.1 et seq.<sup>26</sup>

**The church is one:** “The profession of the one church arises from the belief in the one God. The triune God has founded and preserved the one church through the Father who sent the Son, through Jesus Christ who—as the head of the body—is enduringly united with the congregation, and through the Holy Spirit who is active in the church of Christ. The church of Christ therefore attests to the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (CNAC 6.4.1.1).

**The church is holy:** “The church of Christ is holy on account of the sanctifying activity of God in Christ’s sacrifice and through the activity of the Holy Spirit in word and sacrament. This sanctifying activity takes its effect upon believers in divine service. The holiness of the church of Christ is founded solely upon the triune God, not the human beings who belong to it” (CNAC 6.4.1.2).

**The church is universal:** “In its historical context, ‘universal’ (‘catholic’) means that there are no boundaries for the preaching of the gospel. This comes to expression in the commission the Risen One gave to His Apostles (Matthew 28: 19; Mark 16: 15; Acts 1: 8). Jesus Christ and His church are there for the people of all nations, for both the living and the dead (Romans 14: 9). God’s universal will to save thereby takes on a directly perceptible form within the church. The church of Jesus Christ is all-encompassing and universal: it is both of this world and of the next, both present and future. While it is at present perceived as an institution for imparting salvation and fellowship with God, the concealed nature of the church will be revealed when it is complete: it will have a life in perfect salvation and in direct fellowship with God” (CNAC 6.4.1.3).

**The church is apostolic:** “The church of Christ is apostolic in two respects: in it the apostolic doctrine is proclaimed and in it the apostolic ministry is active. The apostolic doctrine is the unadulterated message of the death, resurrection, and return of Christ, according to the teaching of the early Christian Apostles, as attested in the New Testament, and as believed and practised by the early Christians (Acts 2: 42). The apostolic ministry is the Apostle ministry given by Christ and led by the Holy Spirit, with all its powers, namely to proclaim the gospel, administer the sacraments, and forgive sins (Matthew 28: 19; John 20: 23)” (CNAC 6.4.1.3).

#### 4.3.2.2 Baptism

While the Apostolicum does not mention the sacraments, the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople states: “*We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins.*” Baptism is the sacrament that incorporates a human being into Jesus Christ and His church. The fact that baptism is a work of the triune God is suggested by the Trinitarian baptismal formula. In the gospels and the book of Acts, the formulation “*baptism for the remission of sins*” is often used in reference to the baptism of John (Mark 1: 4). The baptism of John is a human expression of repentance and the desire for forgiveness of sins. The Christian baptism is a sacrament, a sign of God’s real and actual care, and serves to impart salvation. Those who are baptised have “died with Christ” (Romans 6: 8). The forgiveness of sins is directly linked to the sacrifice of Christ. Anyone who is baptised will experience the grace of God. The forgiveness of sins mentioned in the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople is also reminiscent of the fundamental act of the forgiveness of original sin, which

---

<sup>26</sup> They are also found in the Third Article of Faith of the New Apostolic Creed.



is effected by baptism, whereby a human being is delivered from the rule of the evil one and can from then on lead a life in the Spirit under the dominion of Jesus Christ. Through baptism, God “has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1: 13–14).<sup>27</sup>

#### 4.3.2.3 The eschatological hope for the future

Much like the Apostolicum, the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople likewise ends with some statements on some key eschatological events: “*We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.*”

The hope in the resurrection of the dead can already be found in the Old Testament (Daniel 12: 2). Both Pharisaic Judaism and the early Christian community shared this belief (Acts 23: 8). The belief in the resurrection of the dead, which has its foundation in the resurrection of Jesus, is an essential part of the Christian faith (1 Corinthians 15: 13 et seq.). The New Apostolic doctrine of the resurrection of the dead is developed in CNAC 10.5.

Resurrection does not refer to the restoration of the body that has died, but rather the receiving of a spiritual body: “It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15: 44). In this spiritual body, the material body is sheltered, as it were, such that both exist in a relationship of continuity and discontinuity.

The hope in the resurrection makes it clear that the notion of an immortal soul is not sufficient. The ability to see God and have eternal fellowship with Him requires the new spiritual body, which resembles the resurrection body of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15: 20). In this context, the Holy Spirit also comes into view as a Creator of new things, for now the requirement to live a life in the Spirit, as called for in Galatians 5: 25, becomes a perfect reality. The “*life in the world to come*” is therefore nothing other than the eschatological realisation of a life in the Spirit.

The “*Amen*” that concludes the Creed signals agreement with the Creed and the acknowledgement of its authoritativeness for faith. However, the “*Amen*” also calls upon us to incorporate this creed into our life of faith and put it into concrete action.

## 5 Summary

The Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople derives from the Council of Nicaea (AD 325) and the First Council of Constantinople (AD 381).

The Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople brings to expression the foundations of the Christian faith, as they are attested in the Old and New Testaments, in concise and authoritative terms.

The Creed expresses that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit together constitute the one and true God. The three divine persons are defined by their relationship to one another: the Father is the Begetter, the Son is the Begotten, and the Holy Spirit is the one who emanates forth (or

---

<sup>27</sup> Baptism is a “change of destiny”, because the baptised person has been “snatched from the power of darkness”. Gnllka, Joachim: *Der Kolosserbrief* [The letter to the Colossians]. Freiburg/Br., Basel *inter alia* 2002, pp 48 et seq.



proceeds) from the Father and the Son. The inward works of the Trinity (known as “*immanent Trinity*”) are therefore distinguishable or divisible.

Although with respect to *economic Trinity*, the principle applies that the outward works of the Trinity are indivisible, there are certain points of emphasis that are applied to each of the three divine persons: the Father is known as the Creator, the Son as the incarnate Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit as the Maker of the new creation.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit reveal themselves in the course of history. They are all worshipped equally.

Another object of faith is the church, which is described as the one, holy, universal, and apostolic church.

The Creed also emphasises baptism with water, in which forgiveness of sins is imparted. The forgiveness of original sin is of decisive significance here, because it is through this act that a human being is delivered from a state of remoteness from God to a state of nearness to Him.

The Creed also contains some key eschatological statements: it speaks of the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal life in the world to come, the new creation.

In addition to the Apostolicum and the New Apostolic Creed, the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople is among the authoritative confessional texts of the New Apostolic Church.