



Monothelism or Trinity



Disclaimer:

This is a controversial teaching about an argument that has never been truly settled unanimously. As with many of these kinds of teachings, this is not designed to create a crisis of faith. This is not an attempt to have anyone change their faith but only to consider the way we practice our faith in God and apply God's sacred Word to our lives so that we live the way He designed us to live.

The verses used in this teaching are from the King James Bible.

Hos 4:6, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children."

How Many Christian Denominations Are There?

We estimate that Christians are now found in nearly 45,000 denominations. These range in size from millions of members to fewer than 100 members and are listed for each of the world's 234 countries in our [World Christian Database](#). Why so many denominations? Throughout the history of Christianity, followers of Christ have struggled to express solidarity and unity. Jesus's prayer in John 17 was an indication that divisions might be a problem in the nascent community. While multiple expressions of Christianity have existed from the earliest days of the church, the most serious disagreements resulted in splits that propelled different traditions of Christianity in divergent directions. The earliest splits occurred over culture, doctrine, and ecclesiology. Later splits seemed to be based in the idea that each Christian should decide for themselves what "church" should look like. An anecdote of a man stranded on a deserted island illustrates one of the issues. After many years, a ship sails close by the island and the man is rescued. The ship's captain comes ashore, notices three huts that the man built, and asks, "Tell me about these huts." The man replies, "The first hut is my home, and the second hut is my church." The captain asks, "What is the third hut?" The man replies, "Oh, that is where I used to go to church." Studies from the [Pew Research Center](#) have shown a lot of switching between Christian denominations in the United States. By 2025, there will likely be 49,000 denominations. (Dr. Todd M. Johnson, Professor of Global Christianity, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary)

Where did the concept of a trinity begin?

According to a 2002 Barna Group survey 79% of the U.S. population affirmed the statement that:

“God is one being in three separate and equal persons”.

How did we get here?

The First Century Church

The First Century Church, did they believe in a trinity?

No, the first-century church did not believe in a formal doctrine of the Trinity, as the technical vocabulary and philosophical framework of the belief did not yet exist.

No trinitarian doctrine is taught in the Old Testament. Sophisticated trinitarians grant this, holding that the doctrine was revealed by God only later, in New Testament times (50 – 100 AD) and/or in the Patristic era (100 – 800 AD).

(<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/trinity/trinity-history.html?fbclid=IwAR1KQZT7KSVKD-TFo5DsrbE00sqApgoDjvNhp9mb1X-HjMewnhCxZhNP3GY#Up325CE>)

Theophilus of Antioch

Theophilus of Antioch - Theophilus of Antioch was Bishop of Antioch from 169 until 183 AD. The one undoubted extant work of Theophilus, is his Apology to Autolycus, a series of books defending Christianity written to a pagan friend.

Theophilus's apology is most notable for being the earliest extant Christian work to use the word "Trinity" (Greek: trias; English: three), although it does not use the common formula of "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" to describe the Trinity.

Theophilus of Antioch to Autolycus

Theophilus himself puts it as "God, his Word and his Wisdom" perhaps following the early Christian practice of **identifying the Holy Spirit as the Wisdom of God**, as he seems to demonstrate in his interpretation of Psalm 33:6, Theophilus, To Autolycus, 1.7 and which is also expressed in the works his contemporary, Irenaeus of Lyon, who commenting on that same verse writes:

"By the word of the Lord were the heavens established, and by his spirit all their power".

Since then, the Word establishes, that is to say, gives body and grants the reality of being, and the Spirit gives order and form to the diversity of the powers; rightly and fittingly is the Word called the Son, and the Spirit the Wisdom of God.

Tertullian of Carthage

Tertullian of Carthage - Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus; 155 – 220 AD) was a prolific early Christian author from Carthage in the Roman province of Africa. He was the first Christian author to produce an extensive corpus of Latin (Roman) Christian literature and was an early Christian apologist and a polemicist against what he viewed as heresy, including Gnosticism. Tertullian has been called "the father of Latin Christianity", as well as "the founder of Western [Christian] theology". He is perhaps most famous for being the first writer in Latin known to use the term trinity (Latin: trinitas).

The heresy that pushed Tertullian to coin the word Trinitas is known as Monarchianism, specifically a branch called Modalism (or Patripassianism founded by Noetus).

What Did Tertullian Believe?

Tertullian is often considered an early proponent of the Nicene doctrine, approaching the subject from the standpoint of the Logos doctrine, though he did not state the later doctrine of the immanent Trinity. He used the words "trinity", "economy" (used in reference to the three persons), "persons", and "substance", maintaining the distinction of the Son from the Father as the unoriginate God, and the Spirit from both the Father and the Son. At times, speaking of the Father and the Son, Tertullian refers to "**two gods**". (*Adversus Praxeam*, xxv; Tuggy, Dale (2016). "History of Trinitarian Doctrines". In Zalta, Edward N. (ed.). *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University. Retrieved 24 September 2016). He says that all things of the Father belong also to the Son, including his names, such as Almighty God, Most High, Lord of Hosts, or King of Israel. [*Adv. Prax.* 17.]

Gnosticism

Gnosticism is an umbrella term for a collection of ancient religious and philosophical ideas that flourished up through the 3rd century. Centered on the Greek word *gnosis* (meaning "knowledge"), it taught that salvation is achieved through acquiring secret, esoteric, or **mystical** knowledge of the divine rather than through faith or adherence to religious rules.



Modalism

Modalism is a Christian theological concept asserting that God is a single person who exists and reveals himself in **three different modes or roles** (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), rather than as **three distinct co-existing persons** as defined by the traditional Trinity.

What Did Modalists Believe

Modalists were deeply concerned with protecting the "Monarchy" (***the absolute oneness***) of God. To avoid the idea that Christians worshipped multiple gods, they claimed that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not distinct persons, but merely three different "modes" or masks worn by a single divine person.

The Mask Analogy: They argued that God acts as the Father in creation, the Son in redemption, and the Holy Spirit in sanctification. It is the exact same individual changing roles throughout history.

Patripassianism: The logical conclusion of this view was that the Father Himself was born of the virgin, suffered on the cross, and died. The word literally translates to "**the Father suffered.**"

Praxeas

Praxeas, in ancient Greek translates roughly to "**busybody**" or "action-man", was a late 2nd-century and early 3rd-century Christian priest and theologian from Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) who became the earliest champion of Modalism. Ironically, our entire historical knowledge of him comes strictly from the blistering polemic written by his bitter rival, Tertullian Against Praxeas. Praxeas was trying to defend radical monotheism.

He fiercely believed that any attempt to describe God as having three distinct individuals destroyed the absolute unity of the Godhead. He convinced many regular believers that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were simply different names or historical masks worn by a single divine person.

Many historians suspect Tertullian used this nickname "Praxeas" to attack a high-ranking Roman church official—possibly even **Pope Callixtus I** or the heretic **Noetus**—without explicitly naming them and causing an immediate ecclesiastical war.

Sabellius

A third-century priest named Sabellius began to emphasize in his church the oneness of God, as opposed to God's tri-unity. In fact, Sabellius went so far as to say that there are no distinctions between the "persons" of the Godhead—the one God manifests Himself at different times and for different purposes in three different "modes" or "aspects." This teaching, called "Sabellianism," grew out of earlier forms of Modalistic Monarchianism.

What we know of his teaching comes from the writings of those who refuted his errors. It seems that, according to Sabellianism, God manifested as the Father at creation, as the Son in redemption, and as the Spirit in sanctification. For years, Sabellianism was quite popular in some parts of the world, but it was finally declared a heresy, and Sabellius was excommunicated in 220 AD. Sabellianism remains active today in Oneness Pentecostalism (often called "Jesus Only" Pentecostalism), a modern movement that rejects standard Trinitarian baptism and teaches that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are merely titles belonging to a single divine individual named Jesus.

Origen of Alexandria

Origen (185 – 253 AD) was a Christian exegete and theologian, who made copious use of the allegorical method in his commentaries, and (**posthumously deemed a heretic**) laid the foundations of philosophical theology for the church.

Origen was the first Christian to speak of three “**hypostases**” in the Trinity and to use the term **homousios** (though only by analogy) of the relation between the second of these hypostases and the first. The Father, or first person, is nevertheless the only one who is **autotheos**, God in the fullest sense, whereas the Son is his **dunamis** or power and the Spirit a dependent being, operative only in the elect. All three are eternal and incorporeal, the Son being known as Wisdom in relation to the Father and Logos (reason, word) in relation to the world. (The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

Subordinationism

Subordinationism:

Origen's descriptions of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit implied that the **Son was inferior to the Father.**

For that he was posthumously declared a heretic by the Second Council of Constantinople in 553 AD.

Hypostasis v Homousios

The terms **hypostasis** and **homousios** are not opposing concepts, but rather complementary 4th-century theological terms used together to define the Trinity. In short: homousios, derived from **homos** meaning same and **ousia** meaning substance, explains *what* God is (one shared essence), while **hypostasis** explains *who* God is (three distinct persons).

Long before Christianity, the root word ousia (substance or being) was a foundational concept in Greek philosophy. **Platonic** Philosophers used the term homousios to describe material things made of the same physical "stuff" or sharing the same nature. For example, two copper coins or two human beings were considered homousios because they shared the same fundamental essence or species.

Paul of Samosata

Paul of Samosata (200 – 275 AD) was a 3rd-century bishop of Antioch whose non-trinitarian teachings and extravagant lifestyle made him one of the most controversial figures in early Christian history. Paul rejected the orthodox view that God became man. Instead, he taught that **Jesus was a mere mortal man who was "adopted" by God**. He believed the Holy Spirit (the *Logos*) lived inside Jesus, granting him divine power, rather than Jesus being God incarnate. A church council in Antioch deposed Paul in 268 AD. However, he was politically protected by Zenobia, the Queen of Palmyra, and refused to vacate the church premises.

Paul of Samosata...

After the Roman Emperor Aurelian defeated Zenobia in 272 AD, he ordered Paul to surrender the church property. This marked the very first recorded instance of a secular Roman emperor interfering in the internal affairs of the Christian Church. Paul's teachings, which paved the way for a later movement like **Arianism** condemned as the "**Paulianist heresy**".

Arius

Arius (250 – 336 AD) was an influential Libyan presbyter and ascetic in Alexandria whose teachings sparked one of the greatest theological crises in early Christianity. He is the namesake of **Arianism**, a doctrine proposing that **Jesus Christ was a created being, subordinate to and not coeternal with God the Father.** Arius argued: **if Jesus is the Son of God, there must have been a time when the Son did not exist.** To Arius, this preserved the absolute, unbegotten, and indivisible nature of God. This view heavily clashed with the orthodox (Roman) belief of the Trinity, which held that the **Father and the Son are of the exact same divine substance (consubstantial) and are equally eternal.**

Arius...

Because the controversy threatened to tear apart both the church and the Roman Empire, Emperor Constantine the Great convened the **First Council of Nicaea** in 325 AD.

Arius was deeply committed to defending the absolute oneness, uniqueness, and unchangeable nature of God the Father. To protect this monotheism, he rejected the idea that Jesus was co-eternal with God. His primary arguments were:

- **The Son Was Created:** Arius argued that if the Father "begat" the Son, then the Son must have a chronological beginning.
- **The Famous Catchphrase:** He famously argued, "*There was a time when the Son was not*". He taught that Jesus was the very first and highest of all God's creations—similar to a supreme archangel—but was still a created being made out of nothing.
- **Subordination:** Because Jesus was a creature, Arius argued he was inherently inferior and subordinate to God the Father in essence and nature.

Arius...

Around 318 AD, Arius's teachings brought him into direct conflict with his bishop, Alexander of Alexandria. Alexander argued that Jesus was co-eternal and of the exact same substance as the Father. When Arius refused to back down, Alexander excommunicated him.

Arius was exiled after the council but possessed powerful political allies, including Constantine's own sister. Over the next decade, they managed to convince the Emperor to order Arius's official reinstatement into the church.

In 336 AD, the day before he was scheduled to be officially readmitted to communion in Constantinople, Arius suffered a sudden, violent bowel evacuation while walking through the public square and died on the spot. His orthodox opponents viewed his dramatic death as divine judgment, while his supporters suspected he had been poisoned.

Where Did Homoousios Originate?

The term *homoousios* (from Greek *homós*, "same," and *ousía*, "being" or "essence") originated in pre-Christian Hellenistic and Gnostic (Platonic) philosophy before being formally adopted into Christian theology at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. [Encyclopedia Britannica]

Its historical timeline unfolds as follows:

Pagan and Gnostic Origins: The earliest recorded uses of the word appeared in Gnostic writings (such as those of Basilides and Ptolemy) in the 2nd century, and later within Hellenistic philosophy, to describe beings that shared the exact same spiritual or material essence. [Origins, Intentions, Aftermath - by Keegan Chandler]

Early Christian Suspicion: Because of its Gnostic associations and its use by heretics like Paul of Samosata, the term was highly controversial and was actually rejected by the Council of Antioch in 268 AD. [Origins, Intentions, Aftermath - by Keegan Chandler]

The Council of Nicaea (325 AD): Emperor Constantine and the assembled bishops adopted the word to formulate the Nicene Creed. It was used to declare that Jesus (God the Son) was "of the same being/substance" as God the Father, unequivocally condemning the Arian view that Christ was a created being. [Andrew Louth - Homoousios: The Making of a Key Theological Term]

Did the Early Church Fathers Learn Platonism?

Yes, most highly educated early Church Fathers actively learned, engaged with, or were deeply influenced by Platonism. In the Greco-Roman world, the standard advanced education system (paideia) heavily emphasized Greek philosophy, with Platonism being the dominant intellectual framework of the era.

How Early Church Fathers Engaged with Platonism

- **Philosophical Preparation:** Fathers like [Justin Martyr](#) and Clement of Alexandria viewed Platonism as a "schoolmaster" given by God to prepare the Gentile world for the Gospel, much like the Old Testament law prepared the Jewish world.
- **Theological Vocabulary:** Early Christian theologians adopted Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic terms to define abstract spiritual realities. Concepts such as the Logos (the Word), the immortality of the soul, divine simplicity, and the distinction between the physical and spiritual realms were framed using Platonic vocabulary to make them understandable to the educated public.
- **Formulating the Trinity:** During the ecumenical councils, fathers like [Gregory of Nyssa](#) and Augustine of Hippo used the tools of Neoplatonic metaphysics to logically articulate how God could be three distinct persons (hypostases) yet remain one unified essence (ousia).

Platonic Philosophy versus Formal Logic?

Platonic philosophy does not strictly contradict the rules of formal logic; rather, its metaphysical claims rely on premises that lie outside the scope of empirical verification. Critics argue that Plato's Theory of Forms is unfalsifiable and relies on deductive paradoxes, such as the famous Third Man Argument.

The friction between Platonic philosophy and logical inquiry primarily centers on these issues:

The Unfalsifiability of Forms:

Plato argued that reality is divided into the physical world (imperfect, changing) and the realm of Forms (perfect, eternal, abstract). Because the realm of Forms is entirely beyond sensory experience or measurement, critics from wordpress.com point out that these claims are logically unfalsifiable, making them difficult to verify using strict scientific or logical criteria.

Platonic Philosophy versus Formal Logic...

The Third Man Argument (Infinite Regress):

Plato's student, Aristotle, exposed a logical flaw in how physical objects relate to their Forms. If a particular object (e.g., a man) is a copy of a perfect Form (e.g., the Form of Man), then by Platonic logic, a third Form is needed to explain the similarity between the original object and the Form, leading to an infinite regress of explanations. When applied to the Trinity this results in the determination that the Trinity is a paradox or mystery.

The Problem of Participation:

Aristotle also criticized Plato's concept of "participation" (how physical things embody or share in the abstract Forms) as metaphorical and logically undefined. Without a clear mechanism, the relationship between abstract concepts and concrete reality can seem logically disjointed.

What is a Paradox

Paradox:

The term originates from the ancient Greek word *paradoxos*, which translates to "contrary to expectation" or "beyond belief". Paradoxes are widely used in philosophy, mathematics, and literature to challenge common sense and provoke deeper critical thinking.

How Aristotle Resolved Platonic Paradoxes

Aristotle resolved Platonic paradoxes by rejecting separate abstract realms and grounding logic in the physical world. He replaced Plato's transcendent mysticism with **immanent realism**, creating a structured system of categories and syllogisms to explain reality without infinite regresses.

Aristotle established the three classical Laws of Thought as the foundational rules for all valid reasoning. He argued that these principles are self-evident, undeniable, and necessary for language, communication, and reality to make sense.

1. The Law of Identity

The Principle: A thing is identical to itself.

Logical Formula: $(A = A)$ (or (A) is (A)).

Meaning: Everything that exists has a specific, fixed nature or essence. If a statement is true, then it is true.

Platonic Resolution: This countered the extreme Heraclitean view (which influenced Plato) that the physical world is in such a constant state of fluid change that you cannot even name a thing accurately.

How Aristotle Resolved Platonic Paradoxes...

2. The Law of Non-Contradiction

The Principle: Contradictory statements cannot both be true in the same sense at the same time.

Logical Formula: $\neg(A \text{ and } \neg A)$ (It is not the case that A and not- A).

Meaning: A property cannot both belong and not belong to the same object at the same time. For example, a leaf cannot be completely green and completely not-green simultaneously.

Platonic Resolution: Plato's dialogues often relied on paradoxes where things "are and are not" (e.g., a beautiful object is also ugly compared to the ideal Form of Beauty). Aristotle used this law to demand absolute consistency in definitions.

3. The Law of Excluded Middle

The Principle: For any proposition, it must be either true or false.

Logical Formula: $A \text{ or } \neg A$ (A or not- A).

Meaning: There is no middle ground or third option between a statement being true or its negation being true. A statement is either valid or invalid.

Platonic Resolution: This eliminated the ambiguous "gray areas" Plato used when describing the physical world as an intermediate state of existence suspended between "being" (the perfect Forms) and "non-being" (nothingness).

Athanasius of Alexandria

Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296–373 AD) is one of the most intense and dramatic biographies in early church history. If Arius was the catalyst for the Council of Nicaea, Athanasius was the brilliant, stubborn anchor that spent the next 45 years defending it. He was so relentlessly targeted by his enemies that history gave him the famous Latin title: **Athanasius Contra Mundum** ("Athanasius against the world").

For Athanasius, the fight against Arius wasn't just a petty debate over technical vocabulary; he believed the very concept of Christian salvation was on the line. He summarized his entire worldview in a famous, radical quote: "**God became man so that man might become god.**"

Athansius of Alexandria...

His logic was simple and devastating to the Arian view:

Only God Can Save: A mere created being (which is what Arius claimed Jesus was) does not have the power to redeem humanity from sin and death or bridge the gap between creation and the Creator.

Only Man Can Die: To pay the debt of humanity, the savior had to be truly human.

The Conclusion: Therefore, if Jesus Christ is not *both* fully God (sharing the exact same substance as the Father - homoousia) and fully man, Christian salvation is a total illusion, and Christians are guilty of worshipping a creature (idolatry).

The Controversy

Before Nicaea, the mainstream Christian church actually **condemned** the word *homoousios*. If the word was associated with Gnostics and condemned heretics, why did the Council of Nicaea use it?

To Corner the Arians: Arius taught that Jesus was a created being, lesser than the Father. The orthodox bishops needed a non-negotiable, un-ambiguous word that Arius could absolutely not sign off on. *Homoousios* was that word. Church historians like Eusebius note that **Emperor Constantine himself suggested inserting the word** into the creed.

The Controversy – The Arian Position

They could not accept that Jesus was "of the exact same substance" as the Father, they spent the next several decades trying to dilute, replace, or completely ban the word from Christian creeds.

Allegations of Heresy - The Arians immediately attacked the word *homoousios* on three distinct fronts:

1. **"It is unscriptural"**: The Arians argued that because the word *homoousios* does not appear anywhere in the Bible, it had no place in a foundational Christian creed.
2. **Materialism**: Arians claimed the word implied God was a physical material. If the Father and Son shared the same "substance," it implied the divine substance had been divided or split in two—like a block of gold cut into pieces. To them, this violated God's immaterial and indivisible nature.
3. **Sabellianism (Modalism)**: Remembering the condemnation of Paul of Samosata in 268 AD, the Arians argued that *homoousios* collapsed the Father and Son into a single person, completely erasing the distinct existence of Yeshua.

The Controversy – The Semantic Counter

To avoid using *homoousios*, the anti-Nicene forces fragmented into different factions, each offering their own alternative words to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son:

1. **The Homoiousians (The "Similar" Substance Faction):** Led by bishops like Basil of Ancyra, this moderate group proposed changing a single letter to create the word **homoiousion** (with an "i", the Greek letter iota). It meant "**of a similar substance.**" This became the root of the famous English idiom, "*not one iota of difference.*" They wanted to show Yeshua was uniquely like the Father, but not identical in essence.
2. **The Homoians (The "Like" Faction):** This politically powerful group argued that substance (*ousia*) shouldn't be discussed at all. They proposed the word **homoios**, meaning simply that the Son is "**like**" the Father "according to the Scriptures."
3. **The Anomoians (The "Unlike" Faction):** The radical Arians, led by Aetius and Eunomius, rejected any similarity. They argued that the Son was **anomoios**—"unlike" the Father—and that the Father's defining characteristic was being unbegotten, meaning a begotten Son could never share His nature.

Emperor Theodosius I

Emperor Theodosius I (347–395 AD), also known as **Theodosius the Great**, was the Roman Emperor who famously made **Nicene Trinitarian Christianity the official state religion of the Roman Empire**. He was a pivotal figure in world history, serving as the **last ruler to govern a fully unified Roman Empire** before it permanently fractured into separate Eastern and Western halves.

Before Theodosius, the Roman Empire tolerated various factions of Christianity, and many previous emperors actually favored Arianism.

The Edict of Thessalonica 380 AD

Theodosius along with his co-emperors, he issued the Edict of Thessalonica 380 AD.

This historic decree commanded all Roman citizens to follow the orthodox Nicene faith (the equal divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

It branded all other theological variations, such as Arianism, as illegal heresies, stripping non-conforming churches of their properties.

The Edict of Thessalonica 380 AD...

To officially codify this decree and resolve the lingering internal arguments regarding the Trinity, Theodosius summoned **150 orthodox bishops** to his capital along with **36 Non-Nicene Bishops** which walked out recognizing the orthodox bishops had the backing of the emperor. As detailed previously, he signed their finalized, expanded **Nicene Creed** into binding Imperial law, effectively weaponizing the state to enforce Trinitarian theology.

While he legally classified non-conforming, heretical Christian groups as illegal and used severe language against them, his actual punishments were strictly political and financial rather than violent.

The Edict of Thessalonica 380 AD - Enforcement

The historical details of how he dealt with religious dissidents included:

Intimidation Over Execution - Theodosius issued harsh decrees threatening severe consequences, but 5th-century church historians like Sozomen recorded that the Emperor did not actually carry out executions against Christian heretics. His goal was to frighten his subjects into theological unity rather than to kill them.

Destruction of Buildings, Not People - Theodosius did allow, authorize, or turn a blind eye to physical destruction, but it was targeted at structures rather than individuals. While zealous mobs destroyed famous pagan shrines, such as the Serapeum of Alexandria, there are no recorded instances of the state systematically rounding up and executing pagan priests or heretical Christian ministers.

The Edict of Thessalonica 380 AD – Enforcement...

The historical details of how he dealt with religious dissidents included:

Legal Disfranchisement - Instead of physical violence, the Edict and his subsequent imperial laws targeted non-conforming priests through systemic legal restrictions:

- **Eviction:** Non-conforming priests (such as the Arian Bishop Demophilus of Constantinople) were stripped of their positions and evicted from city churches.
- **Confiscation of Property:** Heretical sects were forbidden from meeting, and any private buildings or lands used for their gatherings were confiscated by the state.
- **Loss of Civil Rights:** Non-conforming clergy lost the right to pass down or receive inheritances, and they were legally barred from holding high-ranking governmental positions.

Theodosius did not just target Christian heretics; he aggressively dismantled traditional Roman paganism. Between 391 and 392 AD, he issued a series of drastic decrees known as the Theodosian Decrees.

The Exception

Priscillian - The only time a Christian heretic was executed by the state during this era was **Priscillian of Avila** in 385 AD. However, this execution was carried out in the Western Empire by a political usurper named **Magnus Maximus**, not Theodosius. Furthermore, prominent Trinitarian bishops like Saint Ambrose and Saint Martin of Tours loudly condemned the execution, arguing that the state had no right to kill someone over a theological dispute.

Magnus Maximus was not directly punished by the Church or a judicial system for the execution of Bishop Priscillian in 385 AD. However, he suffered severe political backlash, was condemned by prominent religious leaders, and ultimately lost his empire and his life in a civil war.

The Result of the Edict

For decades, major cities like Constantinople and Antioch effectively had two parallel Christian communities: the official Nicene state church operating out of the grand inner-city basilicas, and a displaced Arian population meeting in fields and makeshift structures right outside the walls.

Does Arian Theology still exist today?

Yes, Arian theology absolutely still exists today, though the people who hold these beliefs almost never use the word "Arian". While there is no direct, unbroken historical line connecting ancient Goths or Arius back to modern times. Instead, various groups over the last few centuries independently read the New Testament, reject the formal doctrine of the Trinity, and arrive at the exact same theological conclusions that Arius did in 325 AD.

Council of Constantinople Theology Summarized

Nicene theology is the Western Christian doctrine that defines God as a Trinity — **one God** in three distinct, ***co-eternal***, and ***co-equal persons***. (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

Summary of Historical Theology

	Father	Son	Spirit	Heresy
Tertullian	Eternal God	Different God	Proceeds from the Father through the Son	Yes
Modalism	Eternal God	Eternal God	Eternal God	Yes
Patripassianism	Eternal God	God Himself Crucified	Eternal God	Yes
Sabellianism	Eternal God	Eternal God	Eternal God	Yes
Pentecostalism	Jesus as God	Jesus as God	Jesus as God	Yes
Origen	Eternal God	Uncreated Image of God but lower	Divine but lower than the Father and the Son	Yes
Paul of Samosata	Eternal God	Born Human, adopted as Son of God	Eternal God	Yes
Arius	Eternal God	Highest of all creation	Created or brought forth by the Son	Yes
Nicaea	Eternal God	Begotten not created by God, co-equal, co-eternal	Separate and Divine	????
Council of Constantinople	Eternal God	Begotten not created by God, co-equal, co-eternal	Fully divine and co-equal, co-eternal	Yes
The Filioque Controversy	Eternal God	Begotten not created by God, co-equal, co-eternal	Disagreement with findings at Constantinople	Yes, split the Western and Eastern church. The Great Schism.



Let's look at some scriptures
and test the findings of the
Council at Constantinople.

Does God Lie?

Luke. 4:8, “And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, **Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.**”.

Hebrews. 6:18 says it is impossible for God to lie, “That by two immutable things, **in which it was impossible for God to lie**, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:”.

Isaiah. 45:5 says there is only one God, “I am the LORD, and there is none else, **there is no God beside me**: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me:”.

Are the Father and the Spirit Co-Equal?

Psalms. 139:7-8, “Whither shall I go from **thy spirit**? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.”.

Ezekiel. 36:27, “And I will put **my spirit** within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”.

Matthew. 10:20, “For it is not ye that speak, but **the Spirit of your Father** which speaketh in you.”. (Yeshua speaking to the Apostles)

Matthew. 12:28, “But if I cast out devils by **the Spirit of God**, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.”. (Yeshua speaking to the Pharisees)

Are the Father and the Spirit Co-Equal...

John. 14:10, “Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but **the Father that dwelleth in me**, he doeth the works.”.

1 Corinthians. 2:10-11, “But God hath revealed them unto us by **his Spirit**: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but **the Spirit of God**.”.

Ephesians. 4:30, “And grieve not **the holy Spirit of God**, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption”.

Are the Father and Son Co-Equal?

Isaiah. 42:1, “**Behold my servant**, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.”.

Matthew. 12:18, “**Behold my servant**, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles”.

Psalms. 110:4, “The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, **Thou art a priest for ever** after the order of Melchizedek.”. (see Hebrews 7:17)

John. 5:30, “**I can of mine own self do nothing***: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.”.

John. 8:28, “Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that **I do nothing of myself**; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.”.

Are the Father and Son Co-Equal?

John. 14:28, “Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me*, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for **my Father is greater than I.**”.

John. 17:3, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee **the only true God**, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”.

John. 20:17, “Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, **I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.**”.

1 Corinthians. 15:28, “And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall **the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.**”

1 Timothy. 1:17, “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, **the only wise God**, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.”.

The Importance of Yeshua

1 Peter. 1:16-21, “Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was **foreordained** before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him **do believe in God**, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.”.

How the Father Chooses Who He Gives to the Son

Ephesians. 1:4-7, “According as **He hath chosen us** in Him **before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: **Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself**, according to the good pleasure of His will, To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace; Wherein He hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; **Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to his good pleasure** which He hath purposed in himself: ”.