

## “THE THIRD TIME’S A CHARM”: SLOW LEARNERS IN THE CHURCH

Last week’s column discussed how a single letter in an esoteric Greek word made all the difference in defining Catholic dogma about Jesus. By all accounts, Nicaea was a **success**. And yet, as is so often the case, people were slow—very slow—to assimilate its decrees. In fact, the Arian crisis continued to brew even after the priest’s teaching was declared heretical. So, we jump ahead for a moment to the **Council of Ephesus** in 431 A.D. (the 3rd council) which **forbade any changes** to the Creed promulgated at Nicaea under pain of condemnation. Now, fast forward to **Chalcedon in 451 A.D.**, when an impasse of sorts was reached. In view of the fixed nature of the creed according to Ephesus, bishops felt that to add or change the Creed would violate an earlier council and were extremely hesitant to do so. And yet it was inadequate.

Ephesus (431) had decreed: “It is **not permitted** to produce ... **any other creed** except the one which was defined by the holy fathers who were gathered together in the Holy Spirit at Nicaea. Any who dare to compose... another creed.” They weren’t joking! In the nick of time, an archdeacon in Constantinople rose, and proposed a brilliant way forward. An earlier Council held at **Constantinople in 381 A.D.** had largely gone unnoticed to the wider Church. This is not unsurprising in its day. It’s not as if the Council decrees were broadcast on EWTN! This is part of the problem in **reconstructing** historical events accurately. After all, the oldest surviving copy of the Nicene Creed dates to the 6th century. We have only **copies**, albeit ancient ones in museums! The deacon related that an **addition** was added to the Nicene creed defending the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Call it Nicaea “part 2”! Chalcedon was **not** disobeying a decree; rather, the **third council after** Nicaea **finally** cemented our Sunday creed.

Nicaea had rather abruptly ended its creed. In professing our belief that Jesus was “coming to judge the living and the dead,” it simply added, “And in the Holy Spirit.” Sorry, but to abruptly end with “and in the Holy Spirit” is **odd**. What about the Holy Spirit? The Council Constantinople **added** an entire section (a full 1/3 of our present Creed) and we recite this today. Thus, technically speaking, what we pray at Sunday Mass is the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.” Whew— that’s a mouthful! But the assembled bishops were skeptical, knowing nothing about such a creed from 381 A.D. According to the research of Fr. Leo Davis, S.J., Church officials then produced the creed from the episcopal archives of Constantinople. The council accepted it “not as supplying any omission but as an **authentic interpretation** of the faith of Nicaea.”

Here we see evidence of a **development of doctrine**. In other words, the addition was seen as an extension of Nicaea, and thus an example of development, not rupture. Development of dogma is a critical piece to the puzzle of how the Holy Spirit guides the Church. In 325 A.D. the **burning question** surrounded how the Church understood the person of Jesus, his humanity and divinity. However, in 381 A.D. the issue was different. About 150 bishops gathered at the imperial palace in Constantinople, including several future saints, I might add! There was a theological current of the day that had **denied the true divinity** of the Holy Spirit. St. Athanasius was among the first to detect their error. Briefly, they saw the Holy Spirit more along the lines of an interpreter, angel, inferior in dignity to the Son. Considering the creed’s **abrupt ending**, this should not be surprising.

Quite frankly, the Holy Spirit was treated as an **afterthought** in the Nicene creed. Those who denied its divinity were initially known as *Pneumatamachi*, (*pneuma*, spirit + *machē*, battle). It was **not** a compliment! They were thus **adversaries** of those recognizing the divinity of the Holy Spirit. And it was a knockdown, drag out **battle**! Later, they became called Macedonians, after the bishop who spread the heresy, denying the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Think about it, though. One reason why the Catholic Charismatic movement blossomed in the 1970’s was a belief in some quarters that Catholics were **undervaluing** the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. While I never felt that way personally, the movement has highlighted the vital role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Constantinople did just that. “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who **with the Father** and the **Son** is **adored** and **glorified**, who has spoken through the prophets.”

Recall, the bishops did not necessarily have the mindset that a particular synod would be listed as one of the ecumenical councils. But surely, the fact that this **expanded creed** from Constantinople was so **universally accepted** contributed greatly to **elevating the status** of Constantinople. It is rightly seen as the 2nd of the Church's 21 ecumenical councils. The period between Nicaea and Constantinople was as **contentious** as it was **complicated**. Only **rarely** does the aftermath of a council go off without a hitch. People hardened in their beliefs did not readily change their views after a decree was passed. Confusion continued until Constantinople settled it once for all. We take these doctrinal teachings for granted— but we shouldn't. There was no shortage of exiles and condemnations as communities took different sides of complicated theological issues. Yet again, the Holy Spirit triumphed!

- Just married? I learned in school that in 79 A.D. the eruption of Mount Vesuvius destroyed **Pompeii**. Well, it did not quite wipe out everything. Recently, a fully **intact chariot** was found on the grounds of an ancient villa, with sweeping views of the Italian Mediterranean. Archaeologists believe this four-wheeled chariot was protected because a building collapsed around it, sparing its own demise. It was likely used for parades and quite likely to **transport newlyweds** to their new homes!
- Weary of your Lenten penances? Take heart. We have a special treat for you on **Laetare Sunday**. Join us at **3:00 pm** for a special organ recital by **Dr. Christopher Ganza**. He will be performing Charles-Marie Widor's 6th symphony for organ. Dr. Ganza describes it as an epic journey from darkness into light. Quite appropriate as we are noticeably gaining precious minutes of daylight each day. In fact, don't forget that next weekend, we **spring ahead** an hour with the beginning of Daylight Saving Time.
- **Spring** (training) is in the air, as are many questions about the upcoming baseball season. Will there be fans in the stands, and if so, how many? With games starting this past week, it is wonderful to see action once again on the field. Initially at least, clubs mostly play schedules within geographically demarcated pods. A season-ending **injury** to top prospect and Catholic school grad **Royce Lewis** (JSerra HS in CA), makes me nervous. I am anxious to return to Target Field!
- The Apostolic Visit of Pope Francis to **Iraq** continues today. Given security issues and the pandemic, I'm a bit surprised. The Holy Father is close to the struggles of Iraqi Catholics who have suffered persecution. He also visited **Ur**, birthplace of **Abraham**.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector