



The Nicene Council, the Origins of “the Trinity,” and the Role of Political Power

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Outline

- The Simplistic Accounts
- Arius and 'Arianism'
- The Council of Nicea, 325 AD
- Anti-Nicene and Pro-Nicene Movements
- Athanasius' Strategy
- The Council of Constantinople, 381 AD
- Arianism After 381 AD

Simplistic Account

- Emperor Constantine (313 – 337 AD)
 - Favored Christianity
 - Forced the Nicene Council to happen
- Emperor Theodosius (379 – 393 AD)
 - Policed Nicene ‘Orthodoxy’
- ‘Orthodoxy’ is a political invention



Arius and 'Arianism'



Arius (c. 250-336 A.D.)

- Arius, born in Libya (Berber?)
 - Taught by Lucian of Antioch
 - Ordained as a presbyter in Antioch
 - Returned to Alexandria
 - Sided with Meletius
 - Excommunicated by bishop Peter in 311 AD
 - Reinstated by bishop Achillas in 313 AD, made an elder
 - 'Father-Son' relation: temporal origin *and* subordination
 - 'The Father is greater than I' (Jn.14:28)
 - 'The firstborn of all creation' (Col.1:15)
 - 'God brought me forth' (Pr.8:22 – 26)
 - Fighting Sabellius: Accused bishop Alexander of modalism

Arius and 'Arianism'

- Arius' Backdrop: Modalism
 - Sabellius
 - Excommunicated by pope Callixtus I, 220 AD
 - God is one substance (*ousia*) with three 'faces/masks' (*prosopa*)
 - FSSp are *perceived* by the believer (Trinity of manifestations), but are *not* God's true nature (Trinity of essence)
 - Implied Results
 - Salvation?
 - True Knowledge of God?

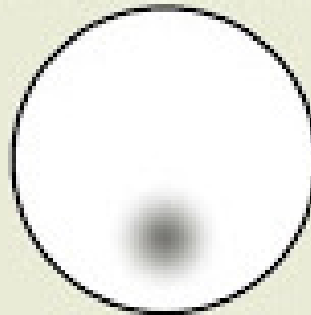
Arius and 'Arianism'

- Arius' Backdrop: Modalism
 - Paul of Samosata (deposed, 269 AD) said the Father and Son are *homoousios* (same substance)
 - Condemned at the Synods of Antioch (264 – 268 AD)
 - Which also condemned the use of 'homoousios' in the context of a semi-material portrayal of Father and Son

Docetism: Christ was a phantasm and was not actually a physical being, thus His death on the cross was an illusion too.



Monophysitism: Christ had only one nature (Divine) which subsumed the human nature

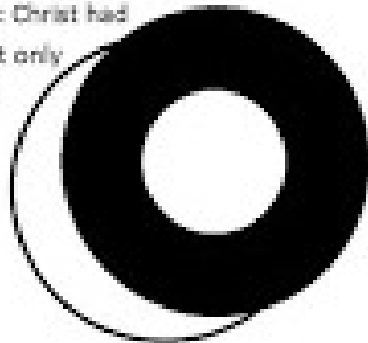


Modal Monarchianism: God is singular and wore the mask of humanity while appearing as Christ, also called Sabellianism

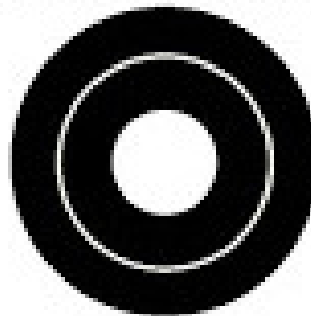


These 3 overemphasize the unity of the God-head

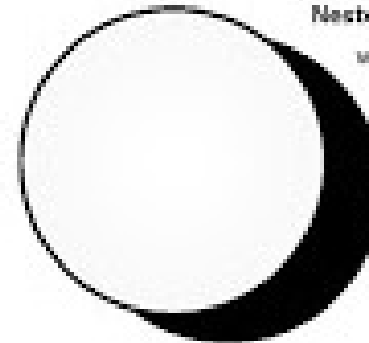
Monothelitism: Christ had two natures but only one Divine will.



Apollinarianism: Christ had a human body and human emotions, but he had the nous of God.



Nestorianism: Christ was two persons combined, not one person with two natures.



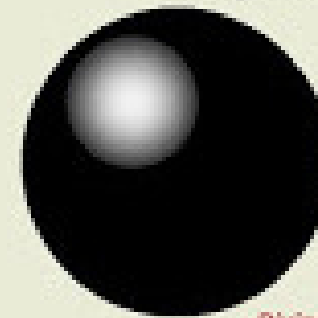
Adoptionism: Christ was human and chosen by God to become God at some point during his physical existence. Also known as Dynamic-Monarchianism



Pelagianism: Christ was merely a man, never divine.



Arianism: Christ was a created being, not of equal divinity with God the Father.



These 3 deny the true Divinity of Christ and are thus Subordinationist

Arius and 'Arianism'

- Arius' cosmology (*Thalia*, 3 Letters, quotations)
 - Creator
 - The Father, unbegotten
 - The Son, begotten from the Father's will, from nothing, made the world
 - Humans
 - Salvation
 - Union with the Son?
 - Moral exemplar atonement?
 - Implied Results
 - Protecting monotheism?
 - Salvation?
 - True knowledge of God?

The Council of Nicaea, 325 AD

- Emperor Constantine's role
 - Motivations
 - Funded travel
 - Attended but had no vote
 - Invited 1800 bishops (1000 'Eastern' and 800 'Western')
 - Later attempted to enforce by deposing bishops from office, but largely ineffective, and flipflopped

The Council of Nicaea, 325 AD

- Attendees: May 20 – June 19, 325 AD
 - 318 bishops (majority of sources)
 - ‘Western’ church: only 5
 - Outside the Roman Empire:
 - John from Persia/India
 - Theophilus from the Goths
 - Stratophilus of Georgia



The Council of Nicaea, 325 AD

- “Some 22 of the bishops at the council, led by Eusebius of Nicomedia, came as supporters of Arius. But when some of the more shocking passages from his writings were read, they were almost universally seen as blasphemous.”
 - Warren Carroll, *The Building of Christendom*, p.11



- Structured on Baptismal creeds (Mt.28:18 – 20; 1 Cor.12:4 – 6, 13) and “the Apostles’ Creed”
- Result: All but 2 bishops signed the Nicene Creed



HERETICS

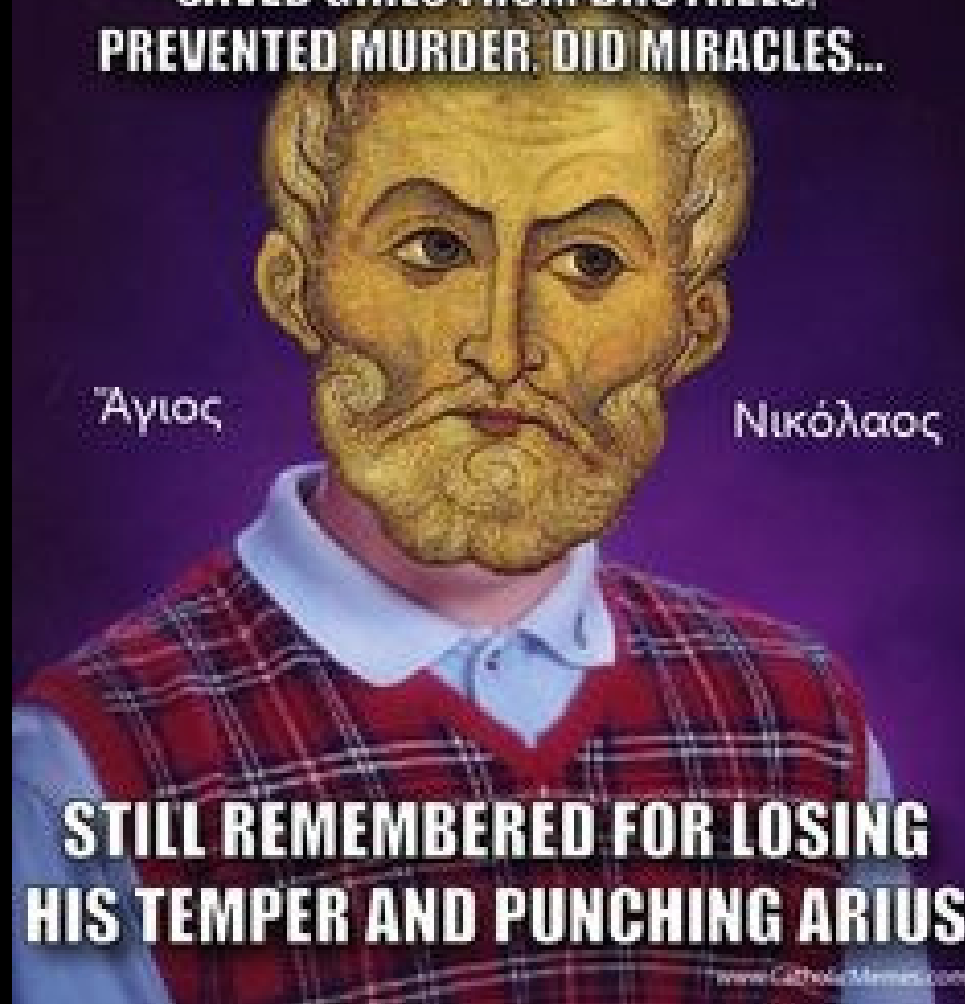
PUNCHING THEM WON'T STOP PEOPLE FROM BELIEVING THEIR LIES, BUT IT FEELS SO GOOD.

**HE SEES YOU WHEN YOU'RE SLEEPING,
HE KNOWS WHEN YOU'RE AWAKE**

**HE KNOWS IF YOU PROFESS THE
CONSUBSTANTIALITY OF THE SON WITH THE
FATHER**

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**GAVE TO THE POOR, SUFFERED FOR FAITH,
SAVED GIRLS FROM BROTHELS,
PREVENTED MURDER, DID MIRACLES...**



Άγιος

Νικόλαος

**STILL REMEMBERED FOR LOSING
HIS TEMPER AND PUNCHING ARIUS**

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Anti-Nicene and Pro-Nicene Movements

- Challenges to Nicaea
 - The First Ever ‘Creed’: So what?
 - Church: Very decentralized
 - Leadership: No ‘jurisdictions’
 - Multiple ‘Schools’





Anti-Nicene and Pro-Nicene Movements

- The 'Arian' Camp: Asterius the Sophist (d.341), Eusebius of Caesarea (d.340), Eusebius of Nicomedia (d.341)
 - Eusebius of Nicomedia
 - Student of Lucian of Antioch with Arius
 - 328: Persuaded Constantine to readmit Arius, rethink Nicea
 - Allied w Meletians in Egypt
 - 330, 335, 336: Gets opponents exiled (Eustathius, Athanasius, Marcellus)
 - 335/6: Patriarch of Constantinople
 - 337: Baptized Constantine



Anti-Nicene and Pro-Nicene Movements

- The Homoiousian Camp: Basil of Caesarea (d.379), Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386), etc.
 - Basil of Caesarea, initially
 - The Son is of a similar substance as the Father, in essence
 - ‘...regarding *homoousios* itself, because of which I think they are getting up their affair, slandering *ousia* deeply, in order to leave no room for *homoousios*...’ (Basil of Caesarea, *Epistle 361* to Apollinaris of Laodicea)



Anti-Nicene and Pro-Nicene Movements

- The Homoean (Acacian) Camp: Acacius of Caesarea (d.366), etc.
 - Avoid all use of *ousia* words
 - *ousia* is not in Scripture
 - *homoousious* was condemned at the synods of Antioch
 - It confuses people!
 - Perhaps the Son is *like* the Father (*homoiousios*) *in will* but not *in nature*, because the Father's essence is inexpressible and unknowable
 - Ultimately, using 'ousia' is impertinent speculation



Anti-Nicene and Pro-Nicene Movements

- The Marcellans: Marcellus of Ancyra (d. 374), Photinus of Sirmium (d. 376)
 - God was originally one *hypostasis* (?)
 - Creation: Logos and Spirit went forth from God the Father
 - Christ: 'a mere man' combined with the Logos in some way
 - Eschaton: Jesus and Spirit will merge back (?) with the Father
 - After being deposed, he appealed to Julius of Rome
 - Council of Serdica (343 AD) defends him
 - Condemned later

Anti-Nicene and Pro-Nicene Movements

- The Homoian (Anomean and Eunomian) Camp: Aetius (fl. 350) and Eunomius (d.393), etc.
 - The Son is *not* like the Father in nature (not *homoiousios*)
 - Eunomius
 - Studied under Aetius in Alexandria
 - Became bishop of Cyzicus, 360 AD
 - Was deposed by the populace for his extreme Arianism 361 AD
 - Pushed the Homoiousians to embrace Nicaea
 - Basil of Caesarea's *Against the Eunomians*
 - Gregory of Nazianzus' *First Theological Oration: Against the Eunomians*

Anti-Nicene and Pro-Nicene Movements

- The Macedonians, or Pneumatomachians (Spirit fighters)
Camp: Macedonius (d. after 360)
 - The Son is *homoousious* with the Father
 - The Spirit is a created angel
 - Subscribed to the Nicene Creed of 325 because of its sparse description of the Holy Spirit

Anti-Nicene and Pro-Nicene Movements

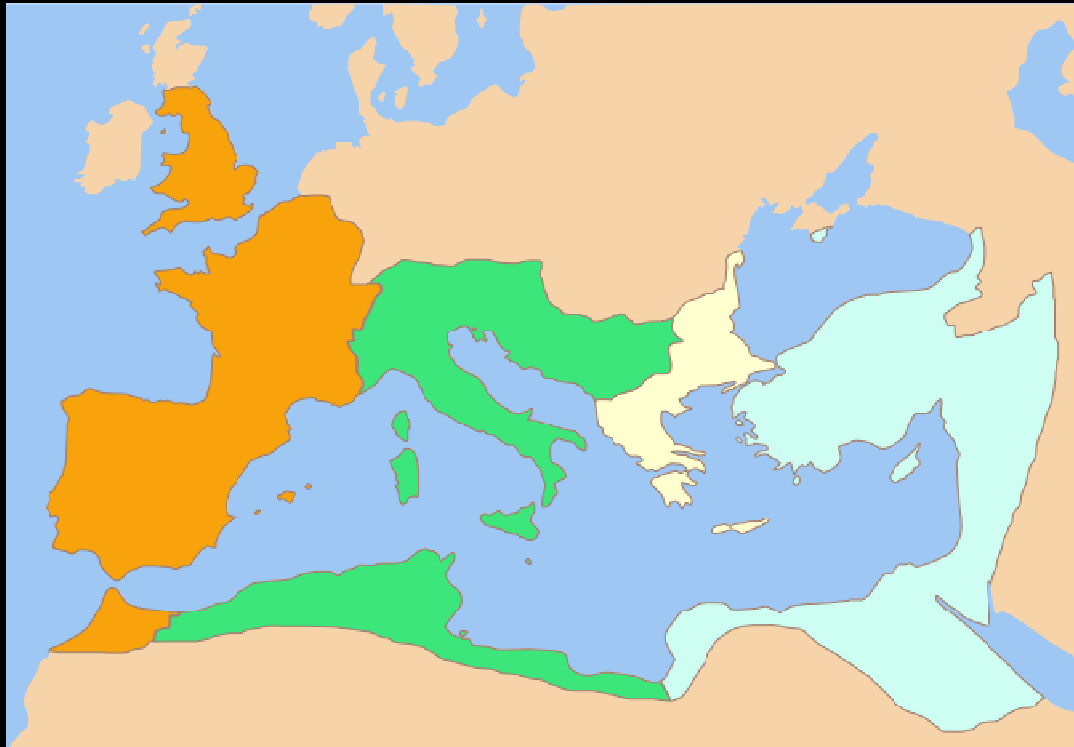
- The Meletians: Meletius of Antioch (d. 381)
 - Precise beliefs unknown
 - Pro-Nicene
 - Firm opponent of Arianism
 - But strangely opposed to other bishops known to be Nicene, including the bishop of Antioch

Anti-Nicene and Pro-Nicene Movements

- The Apollinarians: Apollinarius of Laodicea (d. 390)
 - Jesus did not have a human mind
 - Pro-Nicene
 - Jesus only had a divine mind
 - Considered an over-reaction to Arian teaching
 - His teaching condemned by a synod in Alexandria under Athanasius in 362
 - Declared a heresy at the Council of Constantinople in 381

Anti-Nicene and Pro-Nicene Movements

- The Emperors: Territories of Constantine II, Constans I, Dalmatius and Constantius II (L to R)



- Dalmatius killed by his own soldiers (Sep 337)
- Constans and Constantius divided his territory

Anti-Nicene and Pro-Nicene Movements

Western Emperors

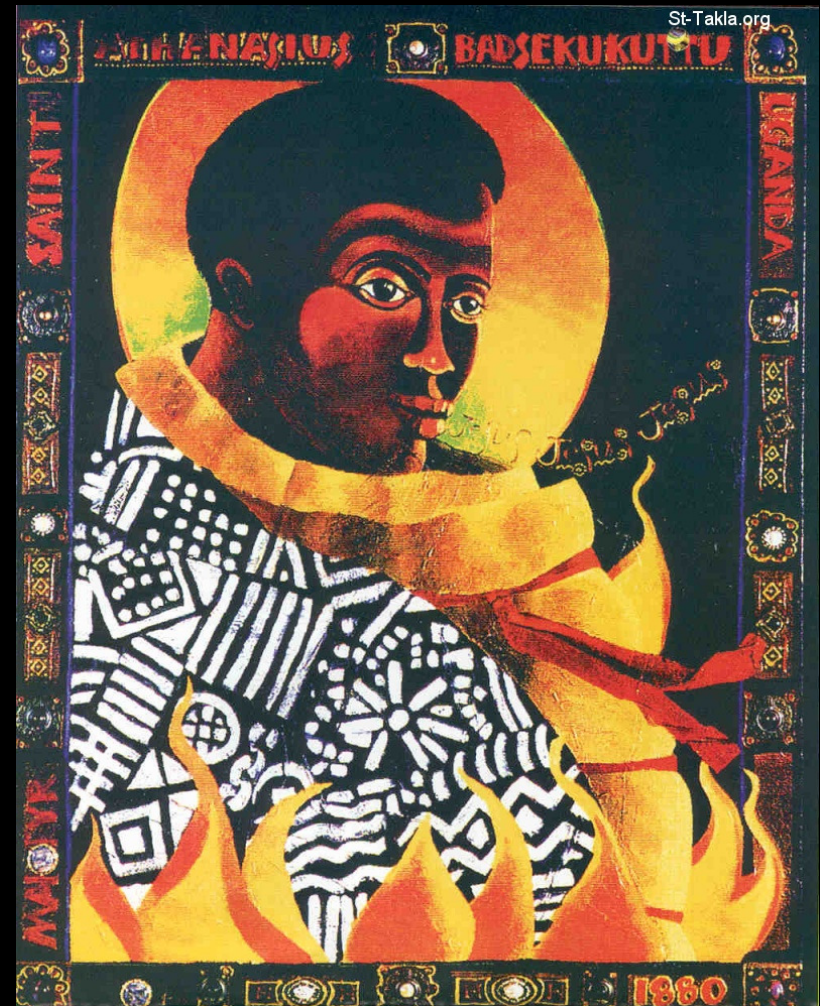
- Constantine II (337 – 340): Nicene
- Julian ‘the Apostate’ (360 – 363): not Christian
- Jovian (363 – 364): Either?
- Valentinian (364 – 375): Nicene
- Gratian (367 – 383): Nicene
- Valentinian II (375 – 392): Arian
- Honorius (393 – 423): Nicene

Eastern Emperors

- Constans (337 – 350): Nicene
- Constantius (337 – 361): Arian
- Jovian (363 – 364): Either?
- Valens (364 – 378): Arian
- Theodosius (379 – 395): Nicene

Anti-Nicene and Pro-Nicene Movements

- Athanasius of Alexandria (298 – 373 AD)



Anti-Nicene and Pro-Nicene Movements

- Athanasius of Alexandria (298 – 373 AD)
 - Deacon, secretary to bishop Alexander at Nicaea, 325 AD
 - Already authored *Against the Gentiles* and *On the Incarnation of the Word*
 - Named bishop of Alexandria in May 9, 328 AD
 - First exile to Trier, Germany in 335 – 337 AD (Constantine)
 - First Synod of Tyre, led by Eusebius in 335
 - Accused of mistreating Meletians and Arians
 - Charged with threatening to cut off Egyptian grain to Rome
 - Second exile to Rome in 339 – 346 AD (Constantius)
 - Met with Hosius of Cordoba in Gaul in 343 AD, summoned Council of Serdica (the 'Eastern' bishops left)
 - Serdica vindicated Athanasius and the Nicene Creed

Anti-Nicene and Pro-Nicene Movements

- Athanasius of Alexandria (298 – 373 AD)
 - Third exile to Egyptian desert in 356 – 362 AD (Constantius)
 - Stayed with monks, maintained contacts
 - Wrote *Apology to Constantius*, *Apology for His Flight*, *Letter to the Monks*, *History of the Arians*, *Four Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*, *On the Councils of Ariminus and Seleucia*
 - Fourth exile to Egyptian desert in 362 – 363 AD (Julian)
 - Fifth exile in Egypt in 364 – 366 (Valens)

Athanasius' Strategy

- Athanasius' manner of influence
 - Educated the Church, did not rely on the Emperors
 - Foresee the cultural pull to Hellenism
 - Deploy the term 'Arian' against all opponents
 - Built or strengthened Latin agreement with Nicaea, conceptually and terminologically
 - Hosius of Cordoba
 - Julius of Rome
 - Hilary of Poitiers (Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, p.182)
 - The Latin West had struggled against the combination of Monarchianism and Adoptionist Christology

Athanasius' Strategy

- Athanasius' manner of influence
 - Recognized conceptual (though not terminological) agreement in the Greek East
 - *On the Councils* 12 (Seleucia) written 360 AD (Ayres, p.171 – 172)
 - Basil of Caesarea (Ayres, p.172 – 173)
 - Collaboration (?)
 - Marcellus of Ancyra
 - Egyptian Desert Monks, e.g. Antony of the Desert

The Council of Constantinople, 381 AD

- Called by Emperor Theodosius, May 381
- Attended by 150 Nicene bishops and 36 Arian bishops



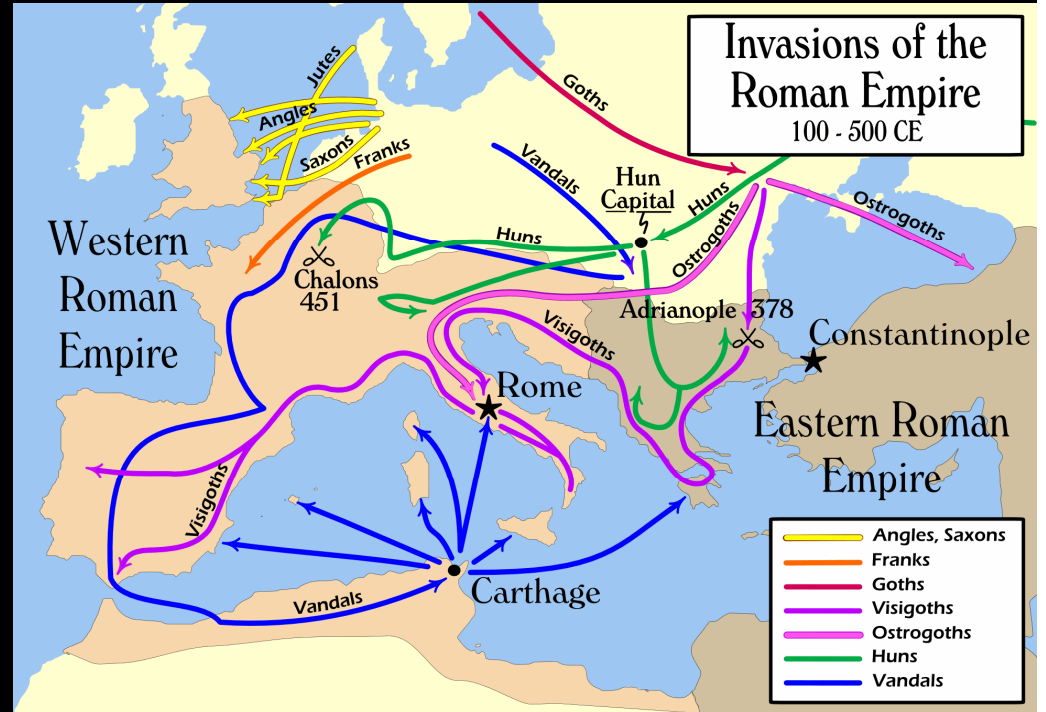
Arianism After 381 AD

- ‘The emperor enacted a law, prohibiting heretics from holding churches, from giving public instructions in the faith, and from conferring ordination on bishops or others. Some of the heterodox were expelled from the cities and villages, while others were disgraced and deprived of the privileges enjoyed by other subjects of the empire. Great as were the punishments adjudged by the laws against heretics, they were not always carried into execution, for the emperor had no desire to persecute his subjects; he only desired to enforce uniformity of view about God through the medium of intimidation.’ (Sozomen, *Histories*, Book 7, chapter 7)
- On July 30, 381, Theodosius gave all the confiscated Arian property to Gregory of Nazianzus, a Nicene theologian at the time bishop of Constantinople



Arianism After 381 AD

- Arianism among the Goths
 - Ulfilas (311 – 383 AD) ordained a bishop to the Goths by Eusebius of Nicomedia
 - Devised Gothic alphabet, translated Bible from Greek into Gothic
 - Arian Christianity lasted among the Visigoths until ~600 AD
 - Goths as migrants, soldiers



Arianism After 381 AD

- Arianism lasted in Roman North Africa, Hispania, and Italy
 - Until converted or suppressed in the 700 – 800's AD
 - 671 AD: Last Arian kings in Europe
 - Grimwald, King of the Lombards (662 – 671) and his son Garibald (671)

