Stages in the Development of Christian theology
(information gathered from *the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*; *From Jesus to Christt*; *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*)

Stage 1: from approximately 125 CE to 4th/5th century CE, the major ideas of Christian orthodoxy were established

Stage 2: the next major phase of new ideas in Christianity comes with the Protestant Reformation (begins with Martin Luther's 95 theses in 1517, given formal articulation as "protestantism" in a statement produced in 1529 by German political rulers)
- "protestant" thinking derives from "protest" against perceived "abuses" of the Catholic Church
- protestantism has not developed any radical new theology so much as radical ideas about independence of belief (as opposed to doctrine handed down by an infallible central authority), individual interpreta- tion of the Bible, and the forms of worship
- earliest forms of protestantism: **Lutheranism, Calvinism, Zwinglian- ism; Episcopalianism** not clear whether protestant or not—actually begins before the Lutheran movement when Henry VIII declares the English church independent of the Church in Rome in order to grant himself a divorce (forbidden by the Roman Church)
- **Congregationalism**: very early, based on a belief in the principle of democracy in church government; based on independence and autonomy of each local church—fundamental belief in Christ as the sole head of the Church (i.e., not the Pope)
  - Martin Luther had taught the priesthood of all believers, but never carried it to its logical conclusion
- **Baptist church** originates 1609 with John Smyth, a Separatist exile in Amsterdam, who reinstituted the Baptism of committed believers as the basis of fellowship of a gathered Church
- **Methodism** originates with John and Charles Wesley at Oxford, England, in 1729

The First Stage

Fathers of the Church: loose designation of a more or less clearly defined group of ecclesiastical authors whose authority on doctrinal matters carried special weight; includes Tertullian, Origen. These become the basis for claims to authority of teaching by later Bishops, such as Cyril of Alexandria and the Council of Ephesus.
-- 125 CE to fourth or fifth century, depending on whom you want to include

Responsible for ideas behind various formulations of Christian belief, which were often highly controversial and political

To what extent are the gospels behind the formulations? All sides believe they have gospel and/or apostolic support.

The Trinity: central dogma of Christian theology, that the one God exists in three Persons and one substance, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is one, yet self-differentiated; the God who reveals Himself to mankind is one God equally in three distinct modes of existence, yet remains one through all eternity.

This doctrine did not develop without considerable conflict and controversy, much heated argumentation—the "christological disputes"--and is still subject to reconsideration by modern theologians. One reason for working out the problem was criticism from non-Christian writers; another reason was the deep debate over Christ's nature: was he God, or was he a very special human? Problem raised by ambiguities of scripture.

- the word "trinity" doesn't appear in scripture; first used in Greek ("trias") by Theophilus of Antioch (c. 180 CE); nor does any developed concept of three coequal partners have any clear "evidence" within the canon
- Christian theologians have seen "adumbrations" of the doctrine in the following passages:
    a. in Hebrew Bible, where three men appear to Abraham (Gen. 18)—this held by Church Fathers to foreshadow the "revelation" of the threefold nature of God
    b. in Christian Bible, most influential text is the reference to the "three Persons" in the baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19
        - Jesus commands the disciples to go out and baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The phrasing probably reflects baptismal practice in churches in Matthew's time or later if the line is interpolated. Elsewhere, Matthew records a special connection between God the Father and Jesus the Son (e.g., 11:27) but falls short of claiming that Jesus is equal with God (cf. 24:36)
    c. Pauline benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:14 interpreted as having "Trinitarian overtones"
        - Paul's letter expresses a concluding wish that "the grace of the Lord Jesus, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit" be with the people of Corinth
        - possible that this passage added by later writers in recopying the letter (based on later liturgy)
        - but also possible that it is Paul's formulation—Jesus is refered to first, not as "Son," but as "Lord" and "Christ" amd connected with a central Pauline theme: grace. God is refered to as the source of love, not as father, and the Spirit promotes sharing within the community. The word "holy" does not appear before the word "spirit" in the earliest manuscript evidence for the passage

      d. Gospel According to John is the one that suggests the idea of equality
         between Jesus and God ("I and the Father are one": 10:30) Gospel
         begins with the affirmation that in the beginning Jesus the Word was
         "with God and was God (1:1). Ends with Thomas's confession of
         faith to Jesus, "My Lord and my God" (14:15-26)
      e. other texts refer to God, Jesus and the Spirit in the same passage
           (e.g., Jude 20-21; 1 Peter 1:1-2), but translation issues arise.
           The Peter passage, for example, is addressed to those who have
           Been chosen "according to the foreknowledge of God in
           Holiness of spirit." The reference may be to the holiness of the
           Believers, but translators have rendered it as "have been chosen
           And destined by God the Father and sactified by the Spirit"
           (NRSV) in order to complete the assumed trinitarian character
           of the verse. The translation imposes later trinitarian perspectives
           on the text . . .

- Trinitarian doctrine developed from the Biblical language concerning Father,
  Son (or Logos), and Spirit—as Church's expansion led to need for reflection,
  confession, and dialogue—especially "dialogue" with critics of the church, and
  among the various factions of believers who had different ideas about the
  essential natures of the three parts of the Trinity—these intellectual conflicts
  were often enough carried out in the streets by thug-like backers of the various
  bishops—the thugs attacked in gangs, beating up their opponents. Bishop
  Athanasius, who opposed the Arians, had to flee into the desert to keep from
  being deposed and banned from his bishopric in Alexandria
- one critic of the church: Pliny who claimed that Christians failed to continue
  the monotheistic tradition of the Israelites, and that they bi- or tri-theists
- positions of other followers of Jesus included the possibilities that a) Jesus was
  not divine at all and that b) there was no literal resurrection—that the "resurrec-
  tion" was a symbolic idea; also that either c) Jesus could not have been a god
  because a true god could not die on the cross or d) Jesus only appeared to die but
  was actually spirited off to heaven
- development of ideas that Jesus was the Son of God, and that he was literally
  resurrected necessitated a lot of explanation by the most able, creative, and
  literate believers, who had to develop answers to questions like:
        if God is omniscient and could foresee that His Son would have to
        be sacrificed as a human, why did He allow humans to disobey in
        the first place? There is no suggestion in Genesis that any such
        train of events is in store, or that there is a Son.

- evolution of various Trinitarian positions:
      a. "economic Trinity": the distinctions between the Persons depended
         solely on their distinct functions (or 'economies') toward the created
         universe
      b. Tertullian taught that the divine Word existed originally within the
         Father's mind, and first became a distinct Person when the world

was created: the Spirit's Personality was subsequent to that of the Word, therefore they were not strictly co-eternal with the Father (Tertullian: late second century)

c. Origen conceived the Word (or Son) as the offspring of the Father and the Spirit as coming into being through the Word; their respective roles were, accordingly, to control the universe and inspire the saints (This is "subordinationism.") Origen also taught that eternal generation of the Word from the Father, holding that the whole universe of created spirits had always existed in some form, so that the Word's co-eternity with the Father does not entail equality.

Old Roman Creed: from end of 2nd century CE the official baptismal creed of the Church of Rome

--first found in interrogatory form, in the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus (d. 235 CE)

--almost identical text, in declarative form, attested in 4th century

Nicene Creed (#1): issued in 325 CE by the Council of Nicaea

-- drawn up at the Council to defend the Orthodox Faith against the Arians (considered heretics by the branch of Christian belief that we know as Catholicism)

--basic issue: what does it mean to refer to Jesus as "Son of God"

-- is Jesus fully divine, partially divine, somehow subordinate to God—
if he's considered fully divine, the Church opens itself to accusations which were made by the pagan philosopher, Celsus, that Christianity is not monotheistic after all, but polytheistic, worshipping two gods—
the traditional Jewish God, and Jesus

ARIANISM: named for its author, Arius: denied the full divinity of Jesus—"Arius appears to have held that the Son of God was not eternal but created before the ages by the Father from nothing as an instrument for the creation of the world; He was therefore not God by Nature, but a creature, and so susceptible of change . . . His dignity as Son of God was bestowed on Him by the Father on account of his foreseen abiding righteousness.

Arianism spread widely, creating empire-wide disturbances until Constantine called the Council of Nicaea to settle the issue;

- the Council of Nicaea determined that Jesus was fully divine; but upon the death of Constantine, his son, Constantius, openly embraced Arianism, despite conflict with his brother (ruler of the Eastern Empire) Constans

- depending on which emperor was in power, either the Catholics or the Arian faction held sway, both sides persecuting each other

- attempts to find some middle ground were made, but couldn't hold "homoousios" was a key term because it was felt to express both the

similarty and the distinction between the first Two Persons of the
Trinity
- in the Western Church another approach to the issue was problematic:
"subordinationism"—that Jesus is "subordinate" to God
- orthodox belief—according to which Jesus was equal in divinity to God-
triumphed after all, with the death of the Emperor Valentian (who had
favored Arianism): expositions of the Nicene faith by St. Basil,
Gregory of Nazianzus, and St. Gregory of Nyssa prepared the way
for the final victory of orthodoxy under the Emperor Theodosius
at the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE.

-- includes the word "homoousios" concludes with the words "And in the Holy
Spirit." ("homoousios" is translated as "from the substance of the Father")
-- appended four anathemas against Arianism, which came to be regarded
as an integral part of the text
-- probably based on the Baptismal Creed of Jerusalem

Nicene Creed (#2): a more fully developed statement of belief that addresses once again
the issue of to what extent Jesus is divine, and if divine, whether his divinity is equal to
that of God;
-- has a longer section on the person of Christ
-- section on the status of the Holy Spirit
-- contains assertions of belief in the Church, Baptism, Resurrection of the
Dead, and Eternal Life
-- another faction, denying the divinity of the Holy Spirit, was the
"pneumatomachi": this faction, however, accepted the "consubstantiality"
of the Father and the Son (i.e., their being "of the same substance")
-- the pneumatomachi disappear after 383, victims of the anti-heresy laws

Between the two Nicene Creeds, the following affirmations are made about the Trinity:

-- affirms the real distinction of the divine Persons (against Sabellianism/
Monarchianism—2nd/3rd centuries CE—which tried to safeguard the
idea of monotheism by asserting that Jesus was a god only in the sense
that God's power or influence rested upon His human person; and that
in the Godhead the only differentiation as a mere succession of modes
or operations—the Modalist Sabellians)
-- affirms the equality and co-eternity of the Divine Persons (against Arianism
and Macedonianism); the Persons differ only in origin, in that the Father is
ungenerated, the Son is generated by the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds
from the Father
- - some Eastern Fathers (St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Cyril of Alexan-
dria) imderstppd the Spirit to proceed from the Father through the
Son; others are less explicit, or deny any "double procession"
Altogether
- - later the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father

alone became characteristic of Eastern theology
-- in the 7th century, the doctrine of the mutual indwelling of the Persons
   of the Trinity ("circumincession") developed
- - the the West, the doctrine of Trinity developed not from the difference
   of persons, as in the East, but from the unity of the Substance, readily
   safeguarding the co-equality of the Persons
      - the procession of the Holy Spirit was attributed to both the Father
        and the Son
      - St. Augustine the chief exponent of the teaching of the Latin
        Church; wrote *De Trinitate,* in which he compared the two
        Processes of the Divine life to the analogical processes of
        Human self-knowledge and self-love
            - based on Tertullian his idea that the generation of the
              Son is like the act of thinking
            - original conception: explained the Holy Spirit as the
              mutual love of the Father and the Son
            - refered to as a "psychological theory of the Trinity"
-- these ideas further developed in the Middle Ages by scholastic
   philosophers; Trinitarian doctrine has remained the central strand of
   Western theology, though modern theologians have tried to argue that
   The doctrine of the Trinity is outdated, though they continue to consider
   Christ a Divine being.

Apostles' Creed: title first found c. 390 CE (in St. Ambrose); used only in the Western church
         --legend surrounding composition: composed by original apostles, but
           historically not of apostolic origin
         --includes distinctive ideas of Christ's "descent into hell" and the "communion of
           saints
         -- first quoted in present form in 8th century CE
         --an elaboration of the shorter Old Roman Creed, which had evolved from earlier
           simpler texts based on the Lord's threefold baptismal command (Mt. 28:19)

"**False" gods: Hebrew Bible, Christian Bible**

The vilification of pagan gods as "false"—i.e., "demons" and "cohorts of Satan"--is certainly part of later Christian literature, but it does not appear in the Hebrew Bible.

The Hebrew Bible tends to treat other gods as actual gods, just "false" in the sense that they haven't Yahweh's supreme invincibility, and the Israelites are bound by their ancestor Abraham's covenant to worship Yahweh and no other god. Non-Yahwehs are not "demonized." It is not until the first century or so BCE that the idea of a cosmic battle between the forces of evil and the force of Good arises; at that point, and in early Christian literature, the pagan gods are not just other, forbidden gods, but "false" in the

sense that they are of "Satan's" party, and therefore demons, not gods at all. To regard "alien" gods as "false" in this sense is a reading back into the Hebrew Bible ideas from the Christian period. The Christian tradition depends on this—in fact, the practice began as a way of claiming Israel's heritage for itself--but such an approach is inherently ahistorical and treats the whole Bible as uniformly and consistently filled with what are essentially Christian meanings. This only makes sense to Christians. Jews, for example, would not read the "us" we ran across in God's speech from Genesis ("See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil") as a reference to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, which is not only a Christian formulation, but one that, as we saw above, was produced after a series of violent disagreements among Christian factions themselves and between Christians and pagan critics of Christianity (pagan critics more than once accused Christians of "atheism" because Christians refused to worship the Roman gods).

In fact, if the gods of the Hebrew Bible (besides Yahweh) were "false gods" in the sense of not being real gods, where would be Yahweh's greatness in triumphing over them? Reference after reference to other gods occurs in the context of Yahweh's triumph, his superior power in defense of the Israelites, his Chosen People. At this point in the development of Biblical literature, there is no "army of Satan," a formulation of writers outside the canon that is incorporated into the canon by Christian writers, especially in Revelations.

Some examples of references to other gods in the Hebrew Bible:

>Exodus 12:12:   . . . on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments; I am the Lord.
>
>Exodus 15: 11 (after the triumph over the Egyptians): Who is like you, O Lord, Among the gods?
>Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
>Awesome in splendor, doing wonders?
>You stretched out your right hand,
>The Earth swallowed them all.
>
>Exodus 20: 22: The Lord said to Moses: Thus you shall say to the Israelites: "You have seen for yourselves that I spoke to you from heaven. You shall not make gods of silver alongside me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold. . . . "
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>Exodus 34:11 ff: Take care not to make a convenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you are going [Canaan] or it shall become a snare among you . You shall tear down their altars, break their pillars, and cut down their sacred poles (for you shall worship no other god, because the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God). You shall not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, for when they prostitute themselves to their gods, someone among them will invite you, and you will eat of the sacrifice. And you will take wives from among their

daughters for your sons, and their daughters who prostitute themselves to their gods will make your sons also prostitute themselves to their gods.

Leviticus 18:21: You shall not give any of your offspring to sacrifice them to Molech [the Ammonite deity], and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.

Cf . Numbers 25, where an Israelite man brings a Moabite woman back to his Tent; Phinehas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest saw it, got up and left the congregation. Taking his spear in his hand, he went after the Israelite man into the tent, and pierced the two of them, the Israelite and the woman, through the belly. God praises Phinehas and grants a covenant of peace from His wrath. (a story from the Priestly authors)

Cf. Deuteronomy (the classic form of the Ten Commandments): 5:6 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. 5:7 you shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in the heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generations of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Judges 16:23: (story of Samson) Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon, and to rejoice; for they said, "Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand." When the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said, "Our god has given our enemy into our hand, the ravager of our country, who has killed many of us."

Cf. also in Kings, the destruction of the priests of Baal, Elijah's ability to produce fire.

Daniel (even in this late book—2nd century BCE—the point is that Yaweh's power is greater than any of Nebuchadnezzar's gods, which are not refered to as "demons" or "false gods." They are just power-less, and the point is to make the anti-Yaweh characters in the story realize that.)