

Nicaea Council of 325 A.D.

What Was It All About? - How Did It Change Christianity?

Read what the Catholic Church Says About Itself

Many people today, even Catholics, do not know the Holy Roman Catholic Church was already in business several hundred years **BEFORE Jesus**, peace be upon him, was even born. It was a pagan church established by the Roman government in an effort to control the subjects of Rome by having them all participate at least to some extent, along with other Roman citizens in some kind of common worship practices and beliefs.

The year was 325 A.D. according to the Roman calendar. A council was convened by order of Constantine, the Roman emperor. He had been a leader in the cult known as Sol Invictus (Invincible Sun) and now wanted to unite the Christian sects in the empire under his existing church; the Universal Church of Rome. Many changes to the religion of Christianity were about to take place at that council, including:

- Formulation for wording concerning the **Trinity** based on Athanasias (description of the formulation is mentioned below)
- Changing Verses of Bible
- Eliminating certain verses and books from the Bible
- Declaring Arian's "unitarian" (belief in the Unity of God) as *heresy*
- Changing the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday
- Changing the date of Jesus' birthday to December 25th
- Introduction of Easter (pagan worship called "Feast of Ishtar")
- Church of Roman "officially" became the "Universal Church of the Holy Roman Empire" (the word 'Catholic' means 'universal')

The Roman Catholic Church took on a new face.

What follows is a quote from the Roman Catholic Church. It is their explanation behind the many changes occurring during the Nicaea Council.

"Arian belief in One God - meant Jesus was not God or a part of God. Therefore, the Roman Catholic Church could not accept this.

Easter needed to be added as well.

[Begin Quote]

Council of Nicaea, First Ecumenical Council - 325 A.D. (Christian Era)

The Nicene Council is considered by all as the first Ecumenical Council of the Church (Roman Catholic Church). It was occasioned by the Arian heresy which in effect denied the divinity of Jesus Christ. The major product of this council was the Creed, the "Nicene Creed"; but it also addressed the date of Easter, and the place of the Patriarch of Alexandria.

"**Heresy**" was the term now being used to describe what many former priests and bishops had been teaching.

"God is One, without partners" seems to be the theme throughout the Old Testament. But now suddenly when the pagan Romans are about to make Christianity the official church of the Holy Empire, the need to

Occasion for the Council

The Arian *heresy* had infected parts of the Church all the way from Alexandria through Palestine, Syria, Asia minor to Greece. It was bad enough that it viciated the very heart of Christian doctrine from within, but there was also danger that it would weaken the Empire itself, and so Constantine, who was trying hard to consolidate the Empire, took an active part in trying to solve the matter. He called for a council of bishops of the Church. At first it appeared that he had in mind only the Eastern bishops since he first designated Ancyra in Galatia (Ankara in Turkey) as a place for the bishops to assemble. Arianism had particularly divided the Church there. But this would make it difficult for himself to attend, and besides it might be good for other bishops to attend, those not necessarily involved in the controversy. Hence Nicaea in Bithynia was finally selected; it was close to the sea making it easier for more bishops to attend, he had there a large palace compound, both to house the bishops

rethink the concept of God arises.

A God-Man and Man-God seem to fit right in with the "former pagan" concept of their 'gods on earth.'

Could this explain the source for "Trinity?"

"Trinity" does not appear anywhere in the Old Testament or the New Testament.

Even the phrase, "And these two are one" (First Epistle of John, Chapter 5, verse 7) is fabricated and based on the verse prior to it.
[see: *Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, 1952 and *History of Translations of Bible to the English Language*, F. F. Bruce)

and with a great hall in which they could assemble, and he could keep an eye on them from nearby Nicomedia.

Constantine himself was strongly influenced by certain Arian bishops, particularly by Bishop Eusebius of the capitol city of Nicomedia, and if he did not actually have Arian leanings himself, he had been informed by them that a council of the Church would show that the teaching of Arius was correct. It would be to Constantine's credit that when the bishops in council voted the opposite way, condemned Arianism and overwhelmingly affirmed the traditional doctrine, that he got behind them 100% and promulgated their decisions.

The Council Called

He announced the council (a command-performance for important bishops) by the imperial post, heretofore reserved for civil administration and urgent military matters. Of course the bishops wanted to settle matters too; the heresy and schism were tearing the Church apart, but Constantine's calling for a general council and the manner in which the council was conducted shows us to what great extent there was almost a union between church and state. Constantine put the imperial transportation system at the disposal of the bishops. This meant they could travel on his boats free, that they could go by cart or wagon, horse, whatever means the Empire had to offer, all under the protection of the Roman army (travel was not only difficult, but brigands made it dangerous). Constantine housed the bishops, fed them and provided his own palace as a place to meet.

The Council Assembled 300 bishops were present (Ambrose of Milan and Hilary of Poitiers report 318, but this may be a symbolic number representing the 318 servants of Abraham, Gen 14:14) most of them from the East. Not a few of the bishops attending were maimed or their predecessors had been killed by the very soldiery which now guarded them; they winced as they paraded into the council chamber, the soldiers with their swords and shining armor now forming an honor guard on either side of their procession. There is no doubt but what the bishops had every freedom of discussion and vote (at this council at least) because that was the rule of the Roman senate after which a council is patterned, and yet to these bishops at least so shortly out of persecution, the soldiers who stood guard inside the chamber, both to assure good order and prevent any intrusion from outside, must have been a symbol of imperial power and influence, formerly unleashed against them.

Constantine himself opened the council with an impassioned plea for unity and peace, and his good friend Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea (a suspected Arian or at least an Arian sympathizer) gave the opening address. According to the pattern of the Roman senate the council was actually presided over by another good friend of Constantine, Hosius, bishop of Cordoba, Spain, who had presided over a local council in Elvia, Spain, some 30 years before. Hosius was assisted by the delegates from Pope Sylvester, the simple priests, Vitus and Vicentius, all in true senatorial style. The history at the time does not explain why the delegates of the Bishop of Rome held such a prominent place in the Council. Catholics like to stress that it was because the pope has some position of authority or leadership over the other bishops. Others maintain it was because Rome was the seat of the civil government (but it had just been moved from there to Constantinople). Anyway this pattern would be followed at many succeeding councils.

The Nicene Creed

The big thing which happened was the Nicene Creed, but in this way:

Most held out at first for a Scriptural language and expression to make clear against the Arians what the catholic doctrine had been, but as the discussions progressed it became evident that there was no Scriptural vocabulary which would correctly express the orthodox teaching. They lighted on a philosophical term, *homoosios* (same substance as) to express what they meant and what had always been the catholic teaching, but there was still needed a formula to summarize and convey their meaning. Of all bishops, Eusebius of Caesarea, who had been clobbered by the synod at Antioch the year before, produced a creed he used in his church. As far as it went, it was acceptable to the rest of the bishops, but they made additions in order to make it very clear that Arius' position was not what they espoused. This creed would be further amended by the First Council of Constantinople, and hence is technically known as the "Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed", but maybe it should be known as the Caesarean-Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

Here it is beneficial to explain something councils do, almost as a byproduct. Primarily a council's purpose, at least a dogmatic council, is to proclaim with unmistakable clarity a doctrine already a part of the teaching of the Church. But at Nicaea there were not a few bishops, well-intentioned and open to the Spirit, who actually would have been hard pressed themselves to give a clear explanation of the relationship of the Son to the Father. But because they had humility and good will they learned from the discussions of the Council, at the same time that they were a part of the council process. Hence a council can also teach bishops. All of the bishops present signed the Creed, except two, Secundus of Ptolemais and Theonas of Marmarica. Constantine banished them along with Arius (whom he later recalled).

Date of Easter

Among other things they also settled (they thought) was the date of Easter. While most celebrated Easter on a Sunday to commemorate the resurrection, there were a few who celebrated on weekdays (even Good Friday) according to a Jewish reckoning (the Quartodeciman controversy addressed by Pope Victor, 189-198), and those who did observe Sunday did not all observe on the same Sunday. Constantine wanted, as did most bishops, a universal observance. To this very day it is disputed what the council fathers meant by their decision, and Easter is still observed variously, but the points of their decree supposed by most are: 1) Easter should be celebrated on the same day by all (a point all agree was contained in the decree); 2) Jewish custom was not the criterion to be followed (a point which is not cited by the Greeks, but strongly mentioned both in the writings which preceded the council and in Eusebius' report of it); and 3) that the practice of Rome and Alexandria (then West and Egypt) should remain in force, namely the Sunday after the first full moon of the vernal equinox (the Creeks do not cite the first half of this point, only the second). But even Alexandria and Rome did not agree for a long time, due to calculations (miscalculations) as to the date of the vernal equinox. Rome celebrated the equinox on March 18, and Alexandria on March 23. Since this is something scientific, that is, half way between the shortest and the longest day of the year, it could be and was eventually solved by the devising of various cycles, so that a fixed day in the lunar calendar (14th of Nisan) would occur according to a predetermined pattern in the Julian calendar. Today Greeks and other Orthodox maintain that the Roman date of Easter is wrong, saying that the Nicene Council stipulated that the Resurrection must

always be celebrated after the Jewish Passover.

Now it must be remembered that only incomplete records of canons and decrees exist from the Council at Nicaea. What we actually have is the Creed, the disciplinary action against the Arians, 20 disciplinary canons, a letter to the Alexandrian church, and a list of the bishops present (a list which varies from language to language).

The rest of the canons (if authentic at all) have been garnered from other sources, including *Arabic* writings. In thus citing Nicaea about Easter coming after the Jewish Passover, the Greeks must have sources which are not commonly known, and stronger sources than the west is aware. For example, Eusebius of Caesarea writing just after the Council quotes from the letter of Emperor Constantine to all who were not present at the Council,

". . .relative to the sacred festival of Easter. . . it was declared to be particularly unworthy for this holiest of all festivals to follow the custom of the Jews. We ought not therefore, to have anything in common with the Jews. We desire to separate ourselves from the detestable company of the Jews for it is surely shameful for us to hear the Jews boast that without their direction we could not keep this feast. In their blindness, they frequently celebrate two Passovers in the same year. . . How then could we follow these Jews. . . for to celebrate the Passover twice in one year is totally inadmissible ."

Alexandrian Patriarchate

Another important question (Canon 6) the council took up was the position of the ancient see of Alexandria because there were problems of jurisdiction down there due to the Melitian schism. The Council's purpose was to bring order to the Church in Alexandria, but in so doing they gave evidence to something which was developing in the Church, namely, listing the metropolitan centers of Christianity and putting them in order of their importance. Not a few have seen this as a sort of ambitious clamoring on the part of some sees to "lord it over" less important places. Perhaps there was some of this (later there certainly was), but it would seem that the intention of Nicaea was merely to establish order and place responsibility of keeping order and orthodoxy on strong and capable centers of Christian teaching. In brief, the council stated that Alexandria had under its jurisdiction the whole of Egypt, Libya, and Pentapolis. But in solving this problem with regard to Alexandria, almost as a byproduct and as if it went without saying, they mentioned that Alexandria was second only to Rome which had similar rights in the West. It mentions Antioch being in the third place but does not define its territory.

They remind all, however (Canon 7) of the importance of the See of Jerusalem but still left it under the jurisdiction of Caesarea. (Remember Jerusalem had been destroyed in the year 70 by Titus and it took a while for Christians there to make a come-back.) Of course there was no Constantinople yet. We speak nowadays of the "Patriarchates" of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, as being established or recognized by the Council of Nicaea, but it is important to stress that at this juncture Nicaea doesn't use this term at all. It does use the term "Metropolitan", but mostly it just refers to the "Bishop of Alexandria", or the "Bishop of Rome" etc. (Canon VI). Of the remaining canons, all interesting, none really apply to the question of East-West relations or the church-state problem we are addressing. Constantine himself (who apparently had attended many sessions, though neither he nor the Roman

presidents voted) brought the council to a close with another talk on unity but in it he calls himself a "*fellow bishop*", showing how closely he associated himself with the work of the Church.
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