



Good day Worthy Knights,

In this part 73, the role of Constantine the Great at the Council of Nicaea Wikipedia

Effects of the Council

The long-term effects of the Council of Nicaea were significant. For the first time, representatives of many of the bishops of the Church convened to agree on a doctrinal statement. Also, for the first time the Emperor played a role, by calling together the bishops under his authority, and using the power of the state to give effect to the Council's decisions. In the short-term, however, the Council did not completely solve the problems it was convened to discuss and a period of conflict and upheaval continued for some time.

Constantine himself was succeeded by two Arian Emperors in the Eastern Empire: his son, Constantius II, and Valens. Valens could not resolve the outstanding ecclesiastical issues, and unsuccessfully confronted St. Basil over the Nicene Creed.

Pagan powers within the Empire sought to maintain and at times re-establish paganism into the seat of the Emperor (see Julian the Apostate in Part 63). Arians and Meletians soon regained nearly all the rights they had lost, and consequently, Arianism continued to spread and be a subject of debate within the Church during the remainder of the fourth century.

Almost immediately, Eusebius of Nicomedia, an Arian bishop and cousin to Constantine I, used his influence at court to sway Constantine's favour from the proto-orthodox Nicene bishops to the Arians.

Note:

Proto-Orthodoxy refers to the period extended down to the first church council at Nicaea in 325, when the state church began to officially define orthodoxy and heresy.

Eustathius of Antioch was deposed and exiled in 330. Athanasius, who had succeeded Alexander as Bishop of Alexandria, was deposed by the First Synod of Tyre in 335 and Marcellus of Ancyra followed him in 336. Arius himself returned to Constantinople to be readmitted into the Church but died shortly before he could be received.

Role of Constantine

"Resplendent in purple and gold, Constantine made a ceremonial entrance at the opening of the Council, probably in early June, but respectfully seated the bishops ahead of himself." As Eusebius described, Constantine "himself proceeded through the midst of the assembly, like some heavenly messenger of God, clothed in raiment which glittered as it were with rays of light, reflecting the glowing radiance of a purple robe, and adorned with the brilliant splendour of gold and precious stones." The emperor was present as an overseer and presider, but did not cast any official vote.

Christianity was illegal in the empire until the emperors Constantine and Licinius agreed in 313 to what became known as the Edict of Milan. However, Nicene Christianity did not become the state religion of the Roman Empire until the Edict of Thessalonica in 380.

In the meantime, paganism remained legal and present in public affairs. Constantine's coinage and other official motifs, until the Council of Nicaea, had affiliated him with the pagan cult of Sol Invictus. At first, Constantine encouraged the construction of new

temples and tolerated traditional sacrifices. Later in his reign, he gave orders for the pillaging and the tearing down of Roman temples.

Constantine's role regarding Nicaea was that of supreme civil leader and authority in the empire. As Emperor, the responsibility for maintaining civil order was his, and he sought that the Church be of one mind and at peace.

When first informed of the unrest in Alexandria due to the Arian disputes, he was greatly troubled and rebuked both Arius and Bishop Alexander for originating the disturbance and allowing it to become public. Aware also of the diversity of opinion regarding the celebration of Easter and hoping to settle both issues, he sent the honoured Bishop Hosius of Cordova (Hispania) to form a local church council and reconcile those who were divided. When that embassy failed, he turned to summoning a synod at Nicaea, inviting the most eminent men of the churches in every country.

Constantine assisted in assembling the Council by arranging that travel expenses to and from the bishops' episcopal sees, as well as lodging at Nicaea, be covered out of public funds. He also provided and furnished a great hall in the palace as a place for discussion so that the attendees should be treated with becoming dignity.

In addressing the opening of the Council, he exhorted the Bishops to unanimity and concord and called on them to follow the Holy Scriptures with: "Let, then, all contentious disputation be discarded and let us seek in the divinely-inspired word the solution of the questions at issue."

Thereupon, the debate about Arius and church doctrine began. The emperor gave patient attention to the speeches of both parties and deferred to the decision of the bishops. The bishops first pronounced Arius' teachings to be anathema, formulating the creed as a statement of correct doctrine. When Arius and two followers refused to agree, the bishops pronounced clerical judgement by excommunicating them from the Church.

Respecting the clerical decision, and seeing the threat of continued unrest, Constantine also pronounced civil judgement, banishing them into exile. This was the beginning of the practice of using secular power to establish doctrinal orthodoxy within Christianity, an example followed by all later Christian emperors, which led to a circle of Christian violence, and of Christian resistance.

