

The Second
Period in
our study:

The Conciliar
of the
Age of the
Church
Councils

The NICENE
COUNCIL

Problems AFTER LEGALIZATION

- 1) What to do about heretics
- 2) Person of Christ - truly God or made God?
(~290) Arius of Alexandria

Edict
of
Toleration

311 AD
Eastern Church

Edict
of
Milan

313 AD
Constantine:
Joint East-West

Synod of
Arles.

314 AD

III. The CONCILIAR Period 325-1200 AD

A. The First Ecumenical Council: Nicaea: 325 AD

1. Background

a. Political Foundations

(1) By the time of Diocletian (ca 300) the majority of the Roman country population (or close to it) was nominally Christian. This emperor led a tremendous persecution to overturn this but was unable to do so and retired from the emperorship leaving Rome under the direction of his generals in a two major area division (east and west) with sub-divisions in each sector. The successors of Diocletian immediately engaged in warfare to see who would come out on top (we spare you the names of all these men in this course...they do become apparent in church history.) It became apparent that the large number of Christians would have much to do with the new ruler and it seemed likely that no man could emerge triumphant who did not have some measure of peace with the church. The ruler in the East, Galerius, had continued the persecution of church as sponsored by Diocletian....but with his health failing and his empire eroding, he gave, in 311, the Edict of Toleration which permitted Christians to be free from persecution. It was not all that was needed but was a step.

(2) Galerius soon fell victim to Licinius and he issued in 313, with Constantine, the Edict of Milan which reversed the attitude of the Empire towards the church. Constantine had become something of a Christian after the battle of the Mulvian Bridge in 312 where he had assumed the leadership of the western empire. (The tradition of the cross in the sky...the "in this sign conquer" etc.) He is popularly thought of as having made Christianity the religion of the Empire but it was actually a joint act by the regional emperors...a situation that would continue until Constantine eliminated Licinius in 324. But the Christianizing of the empire certainly had political overtones as these men vied for the popular support of the nation.

(3) Constantine's patience with the church was soon to be tried. Following the Diocletian purge, the church in North Africa had selected a bishop who was consecrated by a man suspect of being a "traitor" (one who handed over Scripture for destruction) during the persecution. The vote, etc. was a questionable thing from any viewpoint and many of the North African churches refused the new bishop and followed the leading of Majorinus and his