

This is, so to speak, only the tip of the iceberg in the matter of social factors undermining biblical authority but it is enough to get us started and to warn us about some factors that will operate exactly in the same pattern today if we are so foolish as to allow them footroom.

2. The Church Councils...a strange paradox...

(strange in that the tool devised to strengthen Biblical statement and understanding should actually become a force in diminishing the absolute truth)

a. The Idea and Nature of Church Councils

(1) The general concept was the if the church could put its collective mind together it could come up with solutions that would solve problems, end heresies, etc. It is true that throughout its history the church had convened synods, conventions, etc., but there were done under the threat of illegality and the body politic had never enjoyed much freedom in mass gatherings. But the granting of legal status and then the giving of governmental subsidy did a lot to bring the church together and give it the concept of problem solving in an acclamation sort of way.

(2) Historical Foundations

As noted before, by the time of Diocletian there was a large percentage of the Roman population professing to be Christian (300 AD). This emperor led a vigorous persecution to overturn this situation but was unable to do so and retired from the emperorship leaving Rome under the direction of his generals in a two-major area divisions with sub-sectors for each. The successors of Diocletian immediately engaged in a furious warfare to see who would come out on top. 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 Christian community. The ruler in the east, Galerius, had continued the persecution of 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 it was a big step.

Galerius soon fell victim to Licinius, an eastern rival, and he with Constantine in 313 issued the Edict of Milan that reversed the attitude of the empire towards the church. Constantine had become something of a Christian after the battle of the Mulvian bridge (312) where he had assumed the leadership of the western empire. (You will recall his experience...the cross in the sky...the call "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