

held important political overtones as these men vied for the popular support of the citizenry.

Meanwhile, a problem arose in the newly legalized church that followed the older problem of the Novatian schism (255 AD). After the purges of Diocletian, the North African churches had elected a bishop who was consecrated in office by a man suspect of having been a "traitor." (This was a person who had yielded a Bible for destruction to the Roman authorities.) The vote had questionable political motives from the start and coupled with this tainted affirmation it made a number of North African churches from the territory of Nubia incensed. They refused to follow the new bishop and gave their allegiance to Majorinus and his successor, Donatus the Great. The division was keen and began moving into other parts of the church. Since Christianity was now legal it was possible to take such matters into a court of law and it was also possible to circularize the disruption. The "Donatists" asked for an opinion of the Bishop of Rome...were given one they did not like, and they, with many other Bishops, called for a wider meeting of the church. To this end they petitioned the government and Constantine (it was a western problem) granted the request and called for a meeting of the church leaders at Arles (France) in 314 AD. This paralleled a similar meeting held at Ancyra (Turkey) in the same year although the issues were different. Many bishops attended the Arles meeting and faced the problems directly.

The verdict was against the Donatists. They were told to conform or face governmental action. The result was a couple of hundred years of confusion in the African church for the Donatists would not conform. But out of this arose the background for the ecumenical council movement. It amounted to this:

The government, when it deemed it necessary for order, etc., could call a council of the church with the expectation that it would solve the pressing problems in a satisfactory way.

The decisions arrived at would be binding on all parties and those who would not assent would be subject to sanction in various forms

The support would be politically arranged and the government would be underwriter as well as enforcer of the decision.

You should not need great knowledge to see how this sort of arrangement tends to undermine Biblical opinion.

### (3) Theological Foundations

To this point in time, there was no machinery to make the decision of court/church thought stick.