

But with its new legal stature, the church became a more influential force in the life of the nations and its people. This rise in authority was aided by its agreement with the state and subsidization by same. We trace the development along several lines:

2. The Church Councils

Earlier we have discussed how the church councils became a force in the diminution of Biblical authority. (It was not intended this way...just fell out to that end). We now discover that the councils became a foundational plank in the growth of ecclesiastical authority. Some of this grew from the prestige that went with them and some from the actual products of their sessions. But the overall idea was fairly standard...that the body politic could study and decree and the fruit of the decree would become the established position of the church. The following councils and edicts are interesting in this line.

a. Nicaea...325

The big issue at Nicaea was Arianism which does not interest us now. But with it there were a number of church affairs that tended to demonstrate the authority concept.

(1) The Date of Easter

This was an ancestral argument as to whether Easter should be celebrated on the 14th of Nisan--the Passover date--or a fixed Sunday in the course of the year. It had been in dispute since the earliest times of discussion known to us. The Eastern clergy predominantly argued for the Nisan date...the western clergy argued heavily for the fixed date. Although the western teachers were enormously outnumbered at the council, their view prevailed and a fixed date for Easter was accepted...fixed in that it would always fall on Sunday. This decision became the law of the church and required subscription in all parts of the Empire.

(2) The celibacy of the Clergy

Strongly favored in the west and championed by Hosius, Moderator of the council, the view was defeated and the ideal of the Eastern church allowed to prevail: ministers might well marry...archbishops, etc., should think twice about it.

(3) The responsibility of Bishops

The council became a forerunner of many pieces of legislation that were intended to keep every bishop happy with his own territory. Jurisdictional lines were to be carefully observed and there was to be no "interference" from one parish to another. The parity of bishops was very much in evidence and no priority role was given whereby one bishop might have a judgment against another.