

However the church as a body politic now has means of establishing its theology and freedom to study. It can deal with its problems openly at least as far as the public knowledge is concerned. It is no longer a hidden light of truth but a public spectacle, so to speak, and men soon take sides within it in the hope of great public recognition. Many of its greatest men rise during this period but with them is the suggestion of a body politic that is losing its spiritual viability and preparing itself inadequately for the long night of deprivation coming with the dark ages.

The student must remember that one cannot well judge the church and its conduct on the basis of what he now knows. The Scriptures are the authoritative voice and even they must be understood in the light of the historical context of their time. But beyond the inspired records, the ability to understand history requires a lot of imagination and a willingness to try to assume judgment making without the sophistication of many years study. The period must be studied in the light of what it suggests to us about the development of problems and trials in the church and for what it teaches us with regard to the necessary response of each believer when such trials arise. It cannot be studied as if the items about to be seen happened yesterday.

IV.2.a
Church
Struggles:
The Great
Councils.

Church Struggles: the Great Councils

The Council Idea

Councils were not new in the life of the church nor the idea of using them to resolve ecclesiastic difference a novel notion. There was an application of the idea in Acts 15 in order to resolve the "problems" introduced by the Pauline preaching. In the past two centuries there had been many clandestine councils and many local synods as situations allowed. Essentially the concept was that if the believers could meet and consider the concepts in the light of the Word and tradition, they could solve such problems as met their perview. This is what was done at Arles and Ancyra, although at the former the actual success might pose questions as in the case of the continuing Donatist issue. So it seemed that such strategy might continue to help relieve the church in hard places. A problem would