

important successor, Donatus the Great. These parties led such a stir as to divide the church and, since Christianity was now legal, to take the matter to the courts. They appealed to the bishop of Rome for a judgment and it went against them...they with other bishops then called for a mass meeting of the church. This was convened at the call of Constantine in 314 at Arles (France). It was largely attended by western bishops and so was not "ecumenical" but it was well attended and the issues were laid on the line.

The verdict went against the ⁷Donatists. They were told to conform or face governmental action. The result was a couple of hundred years of confusion in the African churches. But out of it arose certain procedures that are noteworthy:

(a) The government could call a church council with the expectation that it could solve a theological matter.

(b) The decisions derived at such a council would be binding on all parties, those not assenting would be subject to persecution.

(c) The government would carry out the decree and "pick up the tab."

And, naturally, there would be a good deal of seeking the favor of constituted authorities for privilege, etc.

We should note that many other things derived from Arles but we must leave them for church history. It was established that the church was a privileged class and as such had the endorsement (and would need the endorsement) of governmental parties. In just a few years the matters had changed from the fact of it being dangerous to be a Christian to the obvious position that it was dangerous not to be a Christian.

b. Theological Foundations

(1) So far matters of theology had been argued and either loosely agreed upon or loosely condemned. There was no machinery for making a total condemnation and having it stick. Erroneous opinion could and did flourish even though the fathers might write or speak against it. Consequently new or novel ideas emerged with great frequency and if it was sparked by a popular or gifted teacher it could last a long time and have considerable influence. But with the coming of legal status and with the demonstration of effect in a council situation, there existed a method of dealing with poor or novel teachers that promised unity to the church.

Theological
foundations
for Nicaea.