



KATOOMBA

— BAPTIST CHURCH —

CHRIST'S CHURCH THROUGH THE AGES

LESSON 19: THE FIRST COUNCIL OF NICAEA (PART 1)



THE ARIAN CONTROVERSY – REVIEW

- Named after its' heresiarch (arch-heretic): Arius
- The controversy arose at the beginning of the 4th Century.
- The 5th Century church historian, Socrates Scholasticus of Constantinople, explains that Arius first became a controversial figure during the patriarchate of Bishop Alexander of Alexandria.

Arianism's foundational principles:

1. The Word (*Logos*) and Father were not of the same essence (*ousia*).
2. The universe was created through the Son; thus, He must have existed before the universe, and time itself.
3. Yet, there was a 'once' in which the Son did not exist, before He was begotten of the Father.
4. The Son was the first and highest created being (*ksima* or *poiema*).

INTRUCTION TO THE COUNCIL

- Considered the first 'Ecumenical Council' in the history of the Church.
- οἰκουμένη (*oikuménē*) – 'the inhabited world'/'worldwide'
- It drew 318 bishops from around the Roman Empire.
- Each bishop was able to bring two presbyters and three deacons; the total attendance may have been approx. 1,800
- Churches from Sassanid Empire also sent delegates.
- Despite the unprecedented representations from around Christendom, the council was overwhelmingly made up of bishops and officials from the Eastern provinces of the Empire.
- This was largely due to the fact that at this time, the Arian heresy was predominantly spreading through Churches in the East.
- Arianism would spread to West over coming centuries.

THE ROLE OF CONSTANTINE THE GREAT

- Officially legalised Christianity in A.D. 313 across the Roman Empire, by issue of the Edict of Milan.
- As the Arian controversy unfolded over the following decade, Emperor Constantine sought to resolve the conflict between Arius and Archbishop Alexander.
- Upon becoming the unified Emperor in 324, he wrote a letter to the men, imploring them to resolve what he (at the time) thought was an insignificant matter.

“For as long as you continue to contend about the small and very insignificant questions, I believe it indeed to be not merely unbecoming, but positively evil, that so large a portion of God’s people which belong to your jurisdiction should be thus divided.”

- A number of Bishops from around (particularly) the Eastern provinces consulted with the Emperor, informing him of how serious this matter actually was.
- Failing to unite the disputing factions, he convened a worldwide council to resolve the matter.

“Constantine himself summoned the bishops to end this dispute. The council was not called by a church official.” (Ayres, 2004)

- This established an historic precedent for a number of important ecclesiastical & legal principles; specifically:
 1. That the King has a legal responsibility to combat heresy within his realm.
 2. That the King is the one who holds the authority to convene a church council within his realm.



FIGURE 1: LOCATION OF NICAEA WITHIN THE ROMAN EMPIRE