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## **For the Good of the Empire: The Basis of Decisional Thought at The Council of Niceae**

*"In hoc signo vinces,"* In this sign you will conquer.<sup>1</sup> It is this infamous phrase that Emperor Constantine heard God say to him before the Battle of Milvian Bridge where Constantine defeated his rival with an army a fraction of the size of his opponent to become ruler of the Roman Empire. This "sign" that Constantine saw, a combination of the Greek letters Chi (X) and Rho (P), was an ancient Christian symbol that combined the first two letters in the name Christ<sup>2</sup>. The legend continues, that after being spoken to by God, Constantine was inspired to convert to Christianity, end the persecution of Christians, and make Christianity the legal religion of the Empire<sup>3</sup>. As the new Christian leader of Rome, Constantine called for and presided over the First Council of Niceae, a

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<sup>1</sup> "In Hoc Signo Vinces." *Merriam-Webster.Com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius. *The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine: From AD 306 to AD 337*. Merchantville, NJ: Evolution Pub., 2009. Print. 25

<sup>3</sup> Speidel, M. P. "Maxentius and His "Equites Singulares" in the Battle at the Milvian Bridge." *Classical Antiquity* 5.2 (1986): 253-62. *JSTOR*. Web. 24 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25010851>>.

divinely inspired Council that unified all sects of Christianity in the Roman Empire<sup>4</sup>.

It is impossible to prove whether or not Constantine actually saw the Chi Rho in the sky, nor can it be said with certainty that the decisions that he and the bishops of the Council of Niceae made were influenced by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Yet, while we will never fully know the role that celestial beings played in the decisions made by Constantine and the Council of Niceae, we can look at the historical and political factors that affected the decision makers at the Council and can argue that Constantine's political motivations impacted the decisions that were made at the Council of Niceae. From historical and political knowledge and perspective we can argue that the decisions involving Christianity that Emperor Constantine made, from the Battle of Milvian Bridge through the First Council of Niceae, were made to increase the stability and security of the Roman Empire, an Empire that had been plagued by civil wars and competing emperors. However, before we can examine why Constantine made the decisions he did at the Council of Niceae, we have to look at the state of the Roman Empire before Constantine came to power, as well as explore the decisions he made regarding Christianity while he was vying for sole power of the Roman Empire.

In 285 CE, Roman Emperor Diocletian appointed his associate Maximian as Caesar, or Junior Emperor, and a year later promoted him to Co-Emperor,

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<sup>4</sup> Rubenstein, Richard E. *When Jesus Became God: The Struggle to Define Christianity during the Last Days of Rome*. New York: Harcourt, 2000. Print. 69

giving Maximian control of the Western portion of the Empire<sup>5</sup>. While officially the Empire was still a single, unified empire, both Augustans would control separate administrative offices and run separate militaries, effectively splitting the Roman Empire into two different administrative states<sup>6</sup>. In 293 Diocletian further expanded the Imperial regime by creating the Tetrarchy<sup>7</sup>, instituting a political system where two senior rulers, the Augustans, were assisted by two junior rulers, the Caesars<sup>8</sup>. Both Diocletian and Maximian appointed new Caesars on March 1<sup>st</sup> 293, Constantius under Maximian in the West, and Galerius under Diocletian in the East. The Tetrarchy did not formally split the empire, as all official legislation was pronounced by all four of the emperors, but each emperor ruled from his own separate capital city. The Tetrarchy was created to help create peaceful, joint succession to imperial offices<sup>9</sup>. At first this worked fairly well. In 305 Emperors Diocletian and Maximian abdicated their thrones, making Constantius and Galerius the Augustines of the Empire. Severus was appointed Caesar of the West under Constantine and Maximinus was appointed Caesar of the East under Galerius<sup>10</sup>.

In 306 Emperor Constantius died in York while fighting to expand the empire. Instead of Severus replacing the departed Constantius, Constantius' soldiers pronounced his son, Constantine, to the title of Augustine. Constantine

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<sup>5</sup> Grant, Michael. *The Roman Emperors: A Biographical Guide to the Rulers of Imperial Rome, 31 BC-AD 476*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1997. Print. 209

<sup>6</sup> Ibid 210

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 203

<sup>8</sup> Gagarin, Michael, ed. "Tetrarchy." *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome*. Oxford University Press. Web. 24 Apr. 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Grant. 203

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 212

then asked Galerius, Emperor of the East, to validate his appointment. Galerius refused to do this, believing Severus to be the rightful Emperor, but agreed to pronounce Constantine Caesar of the West<sup>11</sup>.

Constantine's attempt to overrule the Tetrarchy and become Emperor of the West inspired Maxentius, son of Maximian to pronounce himself the Emperor of Rome. Emperor Severus and his army marched to Rome to quell Maxentius' uprising. However, Maxentius offered his father the position of Co-Emperor if he agreed to fight with him against Severus. Maximian agreed and many of Severus' troops deserted him, returning instead to fight with their former commander Maximian. Galerius, then attempted to defeat Maxentius and Maximian, the father and son rulers, by marching into Rome in the summer of 307. However, many of Galerius' soldiers deserted his army and joined Maximian effectively defeating Galerius<sup>12</sup>. After his defeat, Galerius returned to the Eastern Empire and appointed Licinius as Augustus of the West. That made it so Maximian, Maxentius, Licinius, and Constantine all considered themselves legitimate Emperors of the Western Roman Empire. While the father and son duo had control of Italy and Northern Africa, Constantine still held control over the Northwest portion of the Empire. In order to make peace with Constantine, Maximian allowed Constantine to marry his daughter, Fausta and gave him the title of Augustus, creating an alliance between Constantine and Maximian. In 308 Maximian attempted to overthrow his son and become sole emperor of the West. This coup failed and Maximian was forced to seek protection under Constantine.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 223

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 225

Two years later Maximian attempted to rebel against Constantine and failed. After Maximian's failed rebellion, Constantine strongly suggested that Maximian kill himself, which he did in July of 310<sup>13</sup>. Maximian's death left Maxentius, Constantine, and Licinius fighting for the title of Augustus of the West, with Galerius still holding the title of Augustus of the East with Maximinus as his Caesar.

In 311, Emperor Galerius, Augustus of the East, the one emperor who held the most legitimate power, died<sup>14</sup>. With Galerius dead, and with Licinius and Maximinus distracted over which one of them was to become Galerius' successor in the East, Maxentius declared war on Constantine. Constantine's army quickly progressed through Maxentius' section of the Empire and was soon outside of Maxentius' strong hold in Rome by October 29<sup>th</sup> 312. At the battle of Milvian Bridge, Maxentius' last defense of Rome, Constantine attacked with an army less than half the size of Maxentius<sup>15</sup>. While Constantine's army was much smaller than Maxentius, "Constantine experienced a "Vision of the cross that foretold his victory."<sup>16</sup> By October 29<sup>th</sup> Constantine had defeated his rival and marched into Rome, the sole Augustus of the Western Empire<sup>17</sup>.

It is at the battle of Milvian Bridge where we first see Constantine turn to Christianity. While Constantine's victory may have been divinely inspired, there were also political advantages to entering Rome under the banner of Christianity.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 212

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 222

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 226

<sup>16</sup> Stephenson, Paul. *Constantine: Roman Emperor, Christian Victor*. New York: Overlook, 2010. Print. 135

<sup>17</sup> Grant. 228

While the Persecution of Christians had ended in 311 with a proclamation by Galerius on his deathbed<sup>18</sup>, Maxentius had allowed Christians to elect their own bishop and had even returned land that was taken from Christians during the Diocletian Persecutions<sup>19</sup>. For the past several centuries Christianity had been growing as a religion in the Empire, growing by around forty percent each decade<sup>20</sup>. Entering Rome under the banner of Christ gave the Christians of Rome more reason to support Constantine as their new Emperor

As Constantine was taking control over the Western Empire, the Eastern portion of the Empire had also sprung into warfare by August of 213. In an attempt to gain support from Christians in the Eastern Empire, Licinius co-mandated the Edict of Milan with Emperor Constantine. The Edict of Milan stated that the persecution of Christians must end<sup>21</sup>. While both Licinius and Constantine had stopped persecuting Christians in their respective portions of the Empire several years earlier, Maximinus was still vehemently persecuting Christians<sup>22</sup>. While the Edict of Milan gained support from Christians in the Eastern Empire, agreeing on the Edict showed Emperor Constantine's support of Licinius (Licinius also married Constantine's sister at the same time in Milan<sup>23</sup>) and shunned Maximinus attempts to become Augustus. Soon after the signing of the Edict of Milan,

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 221

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 226

<sup>20</sup> Ehrman, Bart D. *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*. New York: Oxford UP, 2008. Print. 501

<sup>21</sup> Grant. 235

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 239

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 235

Maximinus died after being forced into exile by Licinius<sup>24</sup>, giving the Roman Empire two Emperors: Constantine in the West and Licinius in the East. However, this peace between Licinius and Constantine did not last long and the two Augusti engaged in battle on and off for over a decade. In 324 at the Battle of Chrysopolis Constantine defeated Licinius becoming the first solo Emperor of the Roman Empire in almost forty years<sup>25</sup>.

In order to maintain the Roman Empire under his singular rule, Constantine believed that he would have to settle the religious differences that plagued the Empire's newest and rapidly growing religion, Christianity. To maintain unity of the Empire, Constantine believed that he must maintain unity of the Christian Church. It was with that goal in mind that Constantine called the bishops to meet at the first Council of Niceae. Constantine's goal at the council was to solve the major issues causing dissent among the different Christian leaders throughout the Empire and create a universal, or Catholic, Christian church<sup>26</sup>. This paper will first look at the major issues facing the Council. The latter part of the paper will explore the implications of those decisions and look at why Constantine made the decisions he did, in his quest for a unified Church and Empire.

One of the most divisive issues that the Council of Niceae dealt with was the Arian divide<sup>27</sup>. While there were many different sects of the early Christian church the largest divide was between the nature of the relationship between

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 240

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 229

<sup>26</sup> Rubenstein. 69

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 64



Jesus and God. One group of Christians believed that Jesus and God were two separate beings. They believed that, while Jesus was divine, he was not an equal to God the father<sup>28</sup>. They believed he had a *homoiousios* relationship with God, which means that he was of similar substance to God, but not the same substance as God. They saw Jesus as more human and was a distinct and separate entity from God, the Father. Those who believed that Jesus and God had a *homoiousios* relationship were called the Arians, after their leader Arius<sup>29</sup>. Arius was a priest who lived and preached in Alexandria, Egypt during the early fourth century. Arius may have been ordained a deacon under Meletius of Lycopolis<sup>30</sup> (whose importance at the Council of Niceae will be discussed later in this paper). When the Bishop of Alexandria, Peter, fled Alexandria during Christian persecution, Arius stayed in Alexandria risking his life to help other Christians. He was named a deacon when Peter came back from his exile, and was promoted to presbyter in 311 by Bishop Achillas, Peter's successor<sup>31</sup>.

Opposing Arius and the Arians were those who believed that Jesus was both completely human and also completely divine, meaning that God and Jesus were *homoousios*. As they believed that Jesus and God were of the same substance, this made Jesus and God the Father divine equals<sup>32</sup>. The main

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<sup>28</sup> Jenkins, Philip. *Jesus Wars: How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens, and Two Emperors Decided What Christians Would Believe for the next 1,500 Years*. New York: HarperOne, 2010. Print. 35

<sup>29</sup> "Homoiousian." *Oxford Dictionaries*. Oxford University, n.d. Web. 27 Mar. 2013

<sup>30</sup> Rubenstein. 37

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 52

<sup>32</sup> "Homoousian." *Oxford Reference*. Oxford University, n.d. Web. 27 Mar. 2013

proponent of the *homoousios* viewpoint was the Bishop of Alexandria, Alexander<sup>33</sup>, who replaced Bishop Achillas of Alexandria.

The conflict between Alexander and Arius began after Alexander was named Bishop of Alexandria. Shortly after Alexander's appointment as Bishop of Alexandria, he himself gave Arius control over the Baucalis Church<sup>34</sup>, one of the oldest and most prestigious parishes in Alexandria<sup>35</sup>. This gave Arius tremendous power in Alexandria. Alexander, as a newly appointed bishop, gave a sermon on how Jesus Christ and God, the Father were divine equals. Arius refuted this sermon believing that Alexander was preaching Sabellianism, a heretical branch of Christology that believed that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are different modes, or faces, of God. Arius condemned Alexander's sermon stating

“If’ said he, ‘the Father begat the Son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence: and from this it is evident, that there was a time when the Son was not in being. It therefore necessarily follows, that he had his existence from nothing.’<sup>36”</sup>

Here we see Arius explaining what he saw as a fatal flaw in Alexander's sermon on Homoousian. Arius explains that if God had begotten Jesus, then there was a time when Jesus did not exist, so clearly Jesus is a subordinate entity to God, the Father.

Alexander originally ignored Arius' message. However, Arianism quickly spread throughout Egypt and much of North Africa. When Alexander learned of

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<sup>33</sup> “St. Alexander.” *Oxford Reference*. Oxford University, n.d. Web. 27 Mar. 2013

<sup>34</sup> Rubenstein. Print. 52

<sup>35</sup> McKenzie, Judith. *The Architecture of Alexandria and Egypt, C. 300 B.C. to A.D. 700*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2007. Print.

<sup>36</sup> Scholasticus, Socrates. *The Ecclesiastical History*. [Sl.]: NuVision Publications, LLC, 2007. Print. 6.

the spread of Arianism, he formally excommunicated Arius<sup>37</sup>. Though Arius was excommunicated from the church, Arianism had already spread past Alexander's diocese, and simply excommunicating Arius could not, and did not, stop the further spread of Arianism<sup>38</sup>.

Emperor Constantine, who had passed the Edict of Milan in 313, making Christianity a legal religion of the Empire, wanted to keep peace between the two sects of Christianity. Constantine, originally did not understanding the gravity of the dispute was between Arius and Alexandria as he himself did not believe that there was a big difference between the homoousian and homoousios theories. Constantine, believing that the conflict between Arius and Alexander could quickly be solved, sent Bishop Hosius of Cordova to deliver a letter to both Alexander and Arius telling them to come to an agreement on the nature of Christ<sup>39</sup>. However, after hearing from Bishop Hosius as to the depth of the divide between Alexander and Arius, Constantine realized that the two men could not simply settle their theological differences. With this knowledge, and with Constantine's overwhelming desire to create a unified Church, which he saw as a way to strengthen his power, Emperor Constantine called for a Council to meet in Niceae to settle this dispute<sup>40</sup>.

In early May of 325 bishops from around the Roman Empire started to arrive at Constantine's summer residence in Niceae.<sup>41</sup> The council was held in

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid 6

<sup>38</sup> Rubenstein. 46

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 50

<sup>40</sup> Vasiliev, Alexander A. *History of the Byzantine Empire: Vol 1&2, 324-1453, Unabridged*. CreateSpace Independent Platform, 2012. Print. 19

<sup>41</sup> Rubenstein. 72

the Constantine's Judgment Hall, the largest hall of the palace with rows of benches running through the length of the hall for all the bishops to sit<sup>42</sup>. By early June over two hundred and fifty bishops (the symbolic number of three hundred and eighteen bishops was the official count of how many bishops were present) had made it to Niceae and the Great Council began their deliberations marking the start of the first universal, or Ecumenical, Christian council<sup>43</sup>.

The first order of business covered by the Council was the Arian crisis. While Arius was at the council, because of his status as an excommunicated priest, and not a bishop, he could not speak in the council chamber. However many of the bishops present at the council supported Arius' position and argued for him on his behalf<sup>44</sup>. Leading the Pro-Arian bishops was Eusebius of Palestinian Caesarea, who gave the opening Panegyric of the Council<sup>45</sup>. The first steps in creating a unified church were to create a unified creed in which all members of the church could agree. Both Arian supporters and anti-Arians attempted to influence the creed to the exclusion of the other group. The first creed that went in front of the Council was that of Eusebius of Caesarea. This was the creed that Eusebius used in his own Parish<sup>46</sup>

We Believe in one God, the Father All-Sovereign, the maker of things visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, God of God, Light of Light, Life of Life, Son only-begotten, Firstborn of all creation, begotten of the Father before all the ages, through whom also all things were made; who was made flesh for our salvation and lived among men, and suffered, and rose again

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 76

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 75

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 77

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 76

<sup>46</sup> Bettenson, Henry Scowcroft., and Chris Maunder. *Documents of the Christian Church*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011. Print. 27

on the third day, and ascended to the Father, and shall come again in glory to judge the living and dead; We believe also in one Holy Spirit<sup>47</sup>.

This was a creed that, while all members on the council could sign and agree on, as it didn't exclude the beliefs of either faction. Both the Arians and the anti-Arians could agree that Jesus was begotten from the father with the Arians believing that begotten meant that, Jesus came from God and therefore was lesser than him. The anti-Arians took the word begotten to mean that because Jesus came from God then they were the same<sup>48</sup>. Before any bishop could critique or change this creed, Emperor Constantine commended the Creed, and said that the Creed reflected his own beliefs, but "suggested" that the Creed include that Jesus and God were *homoousios*<sup>49</sup>. The council then revised the creed to look like this (changes to the first creed in italics):

We believe in one God the Father All-sovereign, maker of all things visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, *begotten of the Father, only-begotten, that is, of the substance of the father, [Homoousios] God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made, things in heaven and things on the earth; who for us men and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, and became man, suffered, and rose on the third day, ascended into the heavens, is coming to judge living and dead. And the Holy Spirit. And those that say 'There was when he was not,' and, 'Before he was begotten he was not,' and that, 'He came into being from what-is-not,' or those that allege, that the son of God is 'Of another substance or essence' or 'created,' or 'changeable' or 'alterable,' these the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes*<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 27

<sup>48</sup> Davis, Leo Donald. *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1990. Print. 60

<sup>49</sup> Rubenstein. 78

<sup>50</sup> Bettenson. 27

This creed clearly excluded the Arians by adding that Jesus and God are clearly of the same substance making it so that Arians could in no way interpret this creed in an Arian way. The final blow to the Arians at the Council was the addition of an Anathema to the ending of the creed, formally excommunicating those who believe in the Arian doctrine. The Council finalized the creed around June nineteenth with about eighteen bishops opposed to the creed. Constantine then threatened all who would not sign the creed to exile, resulting in all of the opposing bishops at the council signing the creed, except for Arius, and two bishops from Libya, Secundus of Ptolemais and Theonas of Marmarica, who were promptly stripped of their titles and exiled<sup>51</sup>.

While the Arian crisis was the major reason why the Council of Niceae was called, it was not the only issue that plaguing the fourth century church. Another issue in dispute regarded the date Easter should be celebrated. This conflict began as early as the second century. Easter is the festival that celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ<sup>52</sup>. Problems arose among early Christians in determining how and when to celebrate Easter. The Synoptic Gospels state that the Last Supper was a Passover Seder<sup>53</sup>, which is on the fifteenth of Nisan in the Hebrew Calendar<sup>54</sup>. After dinner was had Judas betrayed Jesus where he was put on Trial, and crucified on Preparation day (Friday), the day before the Sabbath<sup>55</sup>. The Gospel of John gives a different date of Jesus' crucifixion, and therefore a different day for Jesus' resurrection. The Gospel of

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<sup>51</sup> Davis. 63

<sup>52</sup> "Easter." *Oxford Dictionaries*. OxfordDictionaries.com, n.d. Web. 3 Apr. 2013.

<sup>53</sup> *Matthew. The Harper Collins Study Bible*. New York: Harper Collins, 2006. Print.

<sup>54</sup> *Leviticus. The Harper Collins Study Bible*. New Work: Harper Collins, 2006. Print.

<sup>55</sup> *Matthew. The Harper Collins Study Bible*. New York: Harper Collins, 2006. Print.

John states that Jesus was crucified on the day before Passover when the rabbis would slaughter the sacrificial lamb<sup>56</sup>. This would put the day of Jesus' crucifixion on the fourteenth of Nisan with Jesus rising on the Preparation Day. Those who believed that the Christian Passover should be celebrated on the fourteenth of Nisan, no matter what day it fell on, were called Quartodecimanists<sup>57</sup>. This sect believed that Jesus, like the Passover lamb, was sacrificed for mankind<sup>58</sup> and the fast of lent should end on the day that he was sacrificed<sup>59</sup>. This practice was done in the Eastern section of the empire but differed from the practice in the Western section. Those in the western section of the church believed that the fast should be ended only on Sunday, the day the lord was resurrected, this tradition having been passed down from the Apostles<sup>60</sup>. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lugdunum, became the peacemaker in this dispute and was able to convince the bishops in the Eastern part of the empire to follow the Apostolic Tradition that the fasting shall only be broken on the Lords day<sup>61</sup>.

Now that the church had decided that they were going to celebrate Jesus' Resurrection, instead of Crucifixion, the church had to decide which Sunday they should celebrate Easter on. It had been decided at an earlier council, held in 314 C.E. in Arles<sup>62</sup> (located in modern day France), that all the churches in the Empire should celebrate Easter on the same day, on a date decided by the Bishop of

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<sup>56</sup> *John. The Harper Collins Study Bible*. New York: Harper Collins, 2006. Print.

<sup>57</sup> "Quartodecimanism." : *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford University n.d. Web. 09 Apr. 2013.

<sup>58</sup> *First Corinthian. The Harper Collins Study Bible*. New York: Harper Collins, 2006 Print.

<sup>59</sup> Eusebius, and Arthur Cushman McGiffert. *The History of the Church*. Stilwell, Ks.: Digireads.com Pub., 2005. Print. 113

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* 114

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 115

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 228

Rome and sent out to all the other churches in the Empire<sup>63</sup>. While the official ruling was that the Bishop of Rome was to send out when Easter was to be celebrated, it was never done in practice, and the day that Easter was celebrated in Rome still differed from when Easter was celebrated in Alexandria.<sup>64</sup> Several groups of Christians in the Empire were determining the date of Easter, by celebrating Easter on the Sunday after the Jews celebrated Passover, making them dependant on the Jews for knowing when to celebrate Easter. Other Christians were determining Easter on their own without consulting Jewish doctrine<sup>65</sup>. Thus, with the date of Easter still unresolved, it was agreed that the dating of Easter would be decided at the Council of Niceae. While it had earlier been determined that Easter would be celebrated on a Sunday the church still needed to figure out the particular Sunday that all Christians would celebrate Easter.

With the dating of Easter a major issue facing the Council, the bishops reaffirmed the decision made at the Council of Arles that all churches in the Empire should celebrate Easter on the same day. They elaborated on this decision by stating that all churches that had formally determined the date of Easter based on the Jewish date of Passover, must change their custom to that of Alexandria and Rome who followed their own, non-Jewish based calendar for determining Easter as the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring

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<sup>63</sup> "Canons of the Council of Arles." Trans. GLT. Catholic University, n.d. Web. 10 Apr. 2013.

<sup>64</sup> Davis. 68

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 68



equinox<sup>66</sup> (unknown to the council, Alexandria and Rome, while calculating Easter on a non-Jewish based calendar, the two centers of the church were attempting to compute the first full moon after the spring equinox, however, because astronomy wasn't as exact as it is today Easter was still celebrated on different days in the Empire and it took several centuries for the entire church to have a unified date for Easter)<sup>67</sup>.

A third major controversy discussed at the council of Niceae was the Melitius Schism. This Schism began during the Diocletianic Persecution of 303 when Christians were forced to worship traditional Roman Gods or be executed<sup>68</sup>. Bishop Peter of Alexandria fled the city to avoid persecution,<sup>69</sup> While Peter was out of Alexandria there was no one to fulfill the duties of a metropolitan bishop in North Africa. Melitius, the Bishop of Lycopolis, used this opportunity to usurp the patriarch of Alexandria<sup>70</sup>. During this period while Bishop Peter was in exile, Melitius preformed all the duties of Metropolitan Bishop including, baptizing converts, ordaining priests, and disciplining lesser clergy<sup>71</sup>. In the spring of 306 Bishop Peter returned from his exile and formally excommunicated Melitius. Around the same time Melitius was imprisoned by the Empire and sentenced to hard labor in Palestine<sup>72</sup>. While in Palestine Melitius didn't hide his religion or

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<sup>66</sup> Bradshaw, Paul F., and Lawrence A. Hoffman. *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern times*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1999. Print. 99

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 92

<sup>68</sup> Frend, W. H. C. *The Rise of Christianity*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984. Print. 319

<sup>69</sup> Rubenstein. 36

<sup>70</sup> Telfer, W. "Meletius of Lycopolis and Episcopal Succession in Egypt." *The Harvard Theological Review* 48.4 (1955): 227-37. *JSTOR*. Web. 27 Jan. 2013.

<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1508406>>. 228

<sup>71</sup> Rubenstein. 37

<sup>72</sup> Telfer. 229

repent, but acted bravely as a prison priest, giving communion to other prisoners in Palestine. Several years later, around 311, Melitius was released from prison. Meanwhile, Bishop Peter had been arrested, and was soon to be martyred<sup>73</sup>. On his return from prison many in Alexandria treated Melitius as a hero. Those whom he had ordained when he had usurped the Patriarch were still loyal to Melitius. These Melitians were vehemently against the power and wealth of the Alexandrian church, and were against giving power to those who had lapses of faith during the persecution. By the time of the Council of Niceae, over a decade after Melitius had returned from Palestine, the Melitians were still fighting to have their leader return as Bishop of Alexandria, and have his acts, and those he ordained recognized as legitimate by the Church<sup>74</sup>.

Thus the Melitius schism was an important issue the agenda for the bishops at the Council of Niceae. Between the start of the schism and the Council of Niceae, Melitius and his “Church of Martyrs” in Alexandria, had grown to about twenty-eight bishops, who were fighting with bishops that were appointed by Bishop Alexander, for control of parishes in Alexandria. The Council voted to allow members of the Church of Martyrs to return to the church and also agreed to recognize the ordinations that Meletius made. However, while the church would recognize Meletius’ ordinations, the Council said that they must cease exercising bishop functions in favor of those bishops who had been

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<sup>73</sup> Rubenstein.37

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 40

consecrated by Bishop Alexander. Bishop Meletius was told that he must return to his seat of Lycopolis and couldn't ordain outside of his jurisdiction<sup>75</sup>.

After the church finished dealing with the major conflicts plaguing the Empire They turned to creating a list of code of canon law that all members of the newly created Catholic Church would follow. These canons dealt with the orderly administration of ecclesiastical affairs. While the twenty canons are in no particular order, they can be broken down into five different categories: Church structures, the dignity of the clergy, the reconciliation of the lapsed, the readmission to the Church of heretics and schismatics, and liturgical practice<sup>76</sup>. Dealing with Church structures were the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Fifteenth, and Sixteenth Cannons produced by the Council<sup>77</sup>. Canon Four went over the proper way for bishops to ordain new bishops, stating that all the bishops in the area should be present for the ordination of the new bishop, however if that is not possible, than a minimum of three bishops must be present, and the other bishops must send a letter affirming their approval of the new bishop. Furthermore, in every region the ordination of the new bishop must be ratified by the metropolitan bishop of the area<sup>78</sup> (the Council later produced canons that further defined the roll of the metropolitan bishop). This helped unify the Church so that all leaders of the Church would be in agreement on the new bishop who was to be appointed and gave further power to the metropolitan bishops. The fifth

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<sup>75</sup> Davis. 68

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 63

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 64

<sup>78</sup> Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wace. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*. New York: The Christian literature company; 1890. Print. 11

cannon states that bishops from one see are not allowed to accept or give communion to laypeople or priests who have been excommunicated from other sees. So that bishops could do their due diligence on why someone was excommunicated, the metropolitan bishop shall host a bi-annual synod where matters of excommunication could be discussed with all the regional bishops present<sup>79</sup>. This canon was most likely put into the creed with Arius and the Arians in mind, so that Arius couldn't secretly enter a holy see and continue preaching his heretical doctrine. The Sixth Canon defines the role of the metropolitan bishop saying:

“Let the ancient customs in Egypt, Libya, Pentapolis prevail, that the Bishop of Alexandria has jurisdiction over them all, since a similar arrangement is the custom for the Bishop of Rome. Likewise let the churches in Antioch and the other provinces retain their privileges<sup>80</sup>.”

This canon, officially gives the Bishops of Alexandria, Rome, and Antioch dominion over the other bishops located in their regions. This canon also elaborated on the Fourth Canon agreed upon by the by the Council, stating that the metropolitan bishop has veto power over the ordination of lesser bishops in the region and if any bishop is ordained without the consent of the metropolitan bishop than the bishop who does the ordination shall be excommunicated. Furthermore the canon states that if several bishops oppose the ordination of a new bishop than the choice of the majority vote will triumph. The Seventh Canon recognized the status of the Bishop of Aelia (Roman Jerusalem). While the Bishop of Aelia was still subordinate to his regional Metropolitan Bishop of

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 13

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 15

Casesarea, he was given a title of honor, recognizing the importance of Jerusalem as the city where Jesus Christ was crucified<sup>81</sup>. The Fifteenth Canon disallowed deacons, priests, and bishops from transferring to different regions and churches, thereby forcing them to stay attached to the Church in which they were ordained. If a priest or bishop attempted to move to a different region, than his actions in that region (giving the Eucharist, ordaining priests, etc.) were not to be recognized by the Catholic Church<sup>82</sup>. The Sixteenth Cannn forbids bishops and priests from receiving other priests who have left their parishes. If those who have left their original parishes refuse to return, then they must be excommunicated. Canon Sixteen also states that a bishop will be excommunicated and his ordination void if he is found ordaining a man who belongs to a different parish, without obtaining the permission of the bishop from his home parish<sup>8384</sup>.

In these six canons we see the beginning of the organization and power structure of the early Catholic Church. Priests and deacons controlled local churches where the laypeople would go to worship. Presiding over these churches was the local bishop who could not leave his church, nor take other clergy from other bishops, nor receive those who had been excommunicated by other bishops. Ranking above the bishops were the metropolitan bishops who controlled diocese in the major cities of the Empire. These metropolitan bishops approved the elections of their subordinate bishops and hosted the biannual

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 17

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 32

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 35

<sup>84</sup> Davis 63

regional councils. Finally, ranking above the metropolitan bishops were the three bishops from the major Christian centers of Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch, who previously had power over other dioceses by tradition, were formally given canonical power over the other dioceses in the Empire<sup>85</sup>.

Canons One, Two, Three, Nine, Ten, and Seventeen dealt with the dignity of the Clergy<sup>86</sup>. The First canon forbids those who had voluntarily castrated themselves to remain or become members of the clergy. Those who had been castrated because of health reasons or had had his genitals removed during violence were allowed to stay in the church or be admitted to the clergy<sup>87</sup>. Eunuchs, commonplace during antiquity, “had a bad reputation around the empire for immorality and political intrigue.”<sup>88</sup> The second canon regulated the ordination of those who had recently converted to Christianity. In several areas of the empire converts were baptized and then quickly, sometimes immediately, ordained to the priesthood. The council determined that a convert needs to have a longer trial after their baptism before they could be ordained to the priesthood. Those who had been quickly promoted to the priesthood, if found unworthy of their title, were to be removed from the Church<sup>89</sup>. The Third Canon disallowed members of the clergy from living with a woman, with the exception of their mother, sister, aunt or other females who were “above suspicion.”<sup>90</sup> This only applied to those bishops who had committed themselves to celibacy. At the

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 64

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 65

<sup>87</sup> Schaff. 8

<sup>88</sup> Davis. 65

<sup>89</sup> Schaff. 10

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 11

Council of Elvira around 305 C.E. (located in current day Granada, Spain) the Western segment of the Church had decreed that all:

“Bishops, presbyters, deacons, and others with a position in the ministry are to abstain completely from sexual intercourse with their wives and from the procreation of children. If anyone disobeys, he shall be removed from the clerical office.<sup>91</sup>”

In the Eastern segment of the Church at the Council of Ankara (Modern day Turkey) in 314 CE the Council created a canon stating that:

“They who have been made deacons, declaring when they were ordained that they must marry, because they were not able to abide so, and who afterwards have married, shall continue in their ministry, because it was conceded to them by the bishop. But if any were silent on this matter, undertaking at their ordination to abide as they were, and afterwards proceeded to marriage, these shall cease from the diaconate.<sup>92</sup>”

The Third Canon produced by the Council of Niceae only applied to those priests located in the Western Empire, and those priests in the Eastern Empire who had agreed to celibacy at their ordination. This canon did not apply to those clergymen in the Eastern Empire who had forewarned their consecrating bishops of their intent to marry. The Ninth canon dealt with the examinations of those wishing to be ordained priests. The Church, believing that its priests must be held to a higher standard, decreed that all who are to become priests must go through proper examination, and if crimes and sins are discovered during their examination than that person shall not be ordained<sup>93</sup>. The Tenth Canon decreed that those who had lapses in faith during the persecution must be removed from

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<sup>91</sup> "Canons of the Council of Elvira." Trans. GLT. Catholic University, n.d. Web. 10 Apr. 2013.

<sup>92</sup> Wace, Henry. "Council of Ancyra (A.D. 314)." *Newadvent.com*. Trans. Henry Percival. Ed. Philip Schaff. Web. 24 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3802.htm>>

<sup>93</sup> Schaff. 23

their positions<sup>94</sup>. The Seventeenth Canon forbids members of the clergy from committing usury<sup>95</sup>.

While the Tenth Canon decreed that those in the clergy who lapsed in faith during the persecution must be removed from clerical office, the Council also created four canons dealing with laypeople that had had lapses of faith during the persecution. The Eleventh Canon of the Council gave instructions as to how someone who had lapsed in faith, without having his life threatened, could return to the Church. Those who truly wished to repent would first need to spend three years with the hearers, (those who were allowed to listen to the church service, but only from outside of the assembly) and then spend ten years as a prostrator, (one who was allowed into the confines of the church but had to leave before the Canon of the Mass). Finally those who had lapsed would be required to attend the entire liturgy for two years without the benefit of receiving the Eucharist. After the lapses had gone through the above steps, only then they were to be re-admitted to the Church<sup>96</sup>.

Canon Twelve is in response to the members of the Roman military who had left the military, but then returned and fought under Licinius, against Constantine. Those who rejoined the military were required to spend three years as hearers and ten years as prostrators before readmission. However, if the local bishop believed that the soldier was truly repentant, then the bishop could shorten the soldier's period of repentance to just the three years as a hearer

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 24

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 36

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 24



before readmitting them to the church. The Thirteenth Canon stated that those who were in a period of repentance, but were on their deathbed, were allowed to receive the Eucharist. However Canon Thirteen notes that if the person were to make a recovery, they could not receive the Eucharist in Church<sup>97</sup>. The Fourteenth Canon regarded the catechumens (those who were studying to be baptized) who lapsed in faith. The lapsed catechumens were required to spend three years as hearers before being allowed to return to their status of catechumens<sup>98</sup>.

While the canons listed above were used to give guidelines for those who had had lapses in faith, the Council was also charged with how to properly readmit those who followed heretical branches of Christianity into the apostolic church. In the Eighth Canon, the Council explains how the Novatianists, or Cathari, are to be readmitted to the church. The Novatianists were a schismatic group of the early Christian Church that was founded in the middle of the third century. The Novatianists believed that those who had lapses of faith during the persecution by the Roman Empire were not to be administered the Eucharist, believing that those who lapsed were not worthy of the sacraments. The Novatianists believed that the lapsed should show repentance but should not expect re-admittance from the priests, as God was the only one able to forgive sins<sup>99</sup>. The church was able to accept the Novatianists back into the Catholic Church fairly easily because the Novatianists didn't have any theological

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 27

<sup>98</sup> Ibid 31

<sup>99</sup> Scholasticus, 32.

differences from the Apostolic Church<sup>100</sup>. The clergy of the Novatianists were to be readmitted to the Church and were to be allowed to remain in the clergy if they acknowledged the teachings of the Catholic Church, specifically Canons Eleven through Fourteen, which focused on re-admitting the lapsed to the church. The Novatianists were allowed to keep the clerical rank that they held as long there was no Catholic bishop who already held claim to their see. In areas where both a Catholic and Novatianists bishop existed, the Catholic bishop would keep his rank and the Novatianist would take the title of “Chorepiscopus,” a rural auxiliary bishop<sup>101</sup>. The Nineteenth Canon of the Council dealt with the Paulianists, a heretical group that followed Paul of Samosata. The Paulianists believed in adoptionism, meaning that Jesus was not divine, but a human being who had been adopted, at his baptism, to be God’s son<sup>102</sup>. Paul of Samosata taught his followers that:

“...The Union between Jesus and the Logos [God the Father] was not an ontological one, but was analogous to the union between the Christian and the ‘inner man’ or between the prophets of the Old Testament and the inspiring Spirit<sup>103</sup> .

Because the Paulanists held a different view on the nature of Jesus Christ than did the Catholic Church, the Council determined that the baptisms of the Paulanists were invalid and all Paulanists must be re-baptized. As the baptisms of the Paulanists were invalid, the ordination of their clergy was also invalid. The Council determined all Paulanist clergy members shall be examined by a

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<sup>100</sup> Davis. 66

<sup>101</sup> Schaff. 19

<sup>102</sup> Ehrman. 501

<sup>103</sup> Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. Chicago. University of Chicago, 1971. Print. 176

Catholic bishop, and if deemed acceptable, will be allowed to join the Catholic clergy<sup>104105</sup>.

Finally, Canons Eighteen and Twenty dealt with liturgical matters. “The Eighteenth Canon states that deacons are subordinate to both priests and bishops, and therefore cannot receive the Eucharist before the bishop or priest, and certainly cannot administer the Eucharist to someone ranking higher than them. Furthermore, the Canon decreed that deacons are not allowed to sit with the priests during the service. Any deacon who refused to follow this decree was to have his rank of deacon stripped from him<sup>106</sup>. The Twentieth Canon stated that between Easter and the Pentecost those in the service should pray while standing, as opposed to praying while kneeling<sup>107</sup>.

On Around August twenty-fifth 325 C.E. the Council of Niceae finished its work. The Council had created one unified Church creed, had found solutions to the Easter debate, had solved the Meletian schism, and had created twenty canons for the newly created universal Catholic church for the newly Christian Empire<sup>108</sup>.

“For that which has commended itself to the judgment of Three hundred bishops cannot be other than the doctrine of God; seeing that the Holy Spirit dwelling in the minds of so many dignified persons has effectually enlightened them respecting the Divine Will,<sup>109</sup>”

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<sup>104</sup> Schaff. 31

<sup>105</sup> Davis. 67

<sup>106</sup> Schaff. 38

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 42

<sup>108</sup> Davis. 69

<sup>109</sup> Scholasticus. 26.

The quote above is an excerpt from a letter that Emperor Constantine sent the Church of Alexandria after the Council of Niceae had concluded, informing the community about the decisions made at the Council, that so gravely affected the city. At the end of the letter we see Constantine claiming that the Holy Spirit entered the minds of all three hundred bishops present at the Council and imposed God's will at the Council. While Constantine can claim that the decisions made at the Council were divinely inspired, all the decisions made at the Council held major political implications for Constantine, as well as for many of the bishops that had been present at the Council. Most of the motivation behind the decision-making at the First Council of Niceae was made for political gain, not divine inspiration.

Even before the bishops came together in Niceae, political motives were at play. The Council was originally to be held in Ankara, however at the last minute Emperor Constantine changed the location of the Council from Ankara to Niceae<sup>110</sup>. While the official reasoning for changing the location of the Council was the fresh air, beautiful lake, and large meeting space at the Imperial Palace, more thought went into decision to change the location than just how idyllic the setting was. The Bishop of Ankara was Marcellus, a well-known bishop who was considered even by his fellow anti-Arians to hold extreme views. If Constantine were to host the Council in Marcellus' diocese it would seem as if the decisions of the Council were predetermined in the anti-Arians favor. Constantine, who was playing host to the Council of Bishops, decided that it was his right to hold the

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<sup>110</sup> Rubenstein. 68

Council at his summer home without the threat of favoring one religious faction over another<sup>111</sup>. Furthermore Theognis, Bishop of Niceae, while being moderately Arian, was not influential throughout the empire and would not be able to use hosting the Council in his jurisdiction to his advantage<sup>112</sup>.

As previously stated, the largest conflict that the Council of Niceae faced was the Arian Crisis. The Arian Crisis was the primary reason that Constantine called for the Council to meet. Constantine personally didn't have an opinion on the Arian Crisis and didn't fully understand the issue between the two theologies<sup>113</sup>. However, what Constantine hoped, was for the Council to create an agreement among the fighting bishops that would lead to a unified Church, a unified Empire, and a new era of Peace<sup>114</sup>.

As noted earlier, the first attempt to create a unified church creed was presented by Eusebius of Caesarea, who offered his own church's creed as one for the entire Church. Eusebius' creed had loose enough language that both Arians and anti-Arians could agree to it. However, Constantine believed that if the bishops were left to their own devices, Eusebius' creed most likely would be struck down<sup>115</sup>. Constantine feared that because Eusebius' creed lacked clear language favoring either the Arians or anti-Arians, it was too weak to pass in a vote by the bishops and too weak to unify a divided empire. Thus before it was

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid. 69

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. 69

<sup>113</sup> "The Council of Nicea." *The Council of Nicea*. Columbia University, n.d. Web. 18 Apr. 2013.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. 69 78

<sup>115</sup> Grant, Robert M. "Religion and Politics at the Council at Nicaea." *The Journal of Religion* 55.1 (1975): 1-12. *JSTOR*. Web. 27 Jan. 2013. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1202069>>.

put to a vote, Emperor Constantine intervened. While praising the creed and saying that it reflected his own beliefs, Constantine urged the bishops to agree to Eusebius' creed with just one change added. Constantine asked that the word *homoousios* be added to the creed, effectively defeating the Arians at the Council.

Why would Constantine, who personally didn't care or understand the difference between *homoousios* and *homoiousios* announce so forwardly that he supported one side of the argument over the other? Before, and during the Council, Emperor Constantine was being advised by Bishop Hosius of Cordova (of the Western Roman Empire). While between two hundred fifty and three hundred bishops attended the Council, less than ten bishops from the Western Empire attended the Council of Niceae. This was primarily because Arius' influence did not reach the Western part of the Empire. The Western Empire already followed an anti-Arian belief<sup>116</sup>. Constantine himself had just gained control of the entire Roman Empire after defeating his joint Emperor Licinius at the Battle of Chrysopolis in 324 C.E.<sup>117</sup> The East and West Roman Empire had been at war for eighteen years and Constantine, as the first sole Emperor of Rome in nearly forty years, wanted to make sure he could keep peace between the Eastern and Western Empires, having a unified religion and doctrine would help keep the peace between east and west. Constantine came to understand that with the Western Empire already holding an anti-Arian belief, it would be in his best political interest to lean towards an anti-Arian stance.

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<sup>116</sup> Rubenstein. 64

<sup>117</sup> Grant. 237

Furthermore, the christology of the anti-Arian position gave more power to the church's clergy and put the clergy in a better position to help maintain the peace in the empire.

“If Jesus' life and character were supposed to serve ordinary Christians as a usable model of behavior, the principal mission of the clergy would be to help people transform themselves, not maintain theological and political unity throughout the empire...The Church he [Constantine] Needed was one that would help him keep order among ordinary folk: people who would never become immortal unless God decided for reasons of His own to save them.<sup>118</sup>”

Making Jesus *homoousios* with God put Jesus at a level that the followers couldn't reach on their own without the clergy's ability to give them the sacraments. With the Church able to control access to Jesus and salvation, Constantine would be able to trade the commoners of the Empire eternal salvation for stability and peace. If he went with the Arian view, making Jesus lesser than god, this would have made Jesus accessible to the commoner without the help of the church, removing the church's ability to control the laypeople. If people did not need the church for salvation but could reach salvation on their own, the clergy lose the ability to police the commoners. While Constantine had no theological basis for his desire for the bishops to add *homoousios* to Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea's creed, he believed that the addition of the word *homoousios* to the theological doctrine would help unify his newly reunited Roman Empire, and would allow the clergy to better assist him in controlling the Roman masses.

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<sup>118</sup> Rubenstein. 64

After creating the Nicean Creed, and deeming Arianism heretical, the Council then moved to the topic of Easter, determining that all of Christendom should celebrate Easter on the same day, a date calculated separately from the Jewish calendar.

“Relative to the most holy day of Easter, it was determined by common consent that it should be proper that all should celebrate it on one and the same day everywhere. For what can be more appropriate, or what more solemn, than that this feast from which we have received an obvious reason among all?”<sup>119</sup>”

Constantine in his letter to all the churches of the Empire continues to strive for consistency and unity throughout the Catholic Church. As with the question of Jesus’ divinity, Constantine believed that having a unified date for Easter throughout the Empire would help keep peace in the Church.

While part of Constantine’s reason for wanting a unified date for Easter was to help unify the Eastern and Western Christians in the Empire, his, and the Councils decision on the Subject of the Dating of Easter was also done to distance the Christians from a different group, the Jews. Throughout the existence of the Roman Empire, the Jews and Romans had had an uneasy relationship. Between 66 C.E. and 135 C.E. The Jews of the Judea province had held three separate revolts against their Roman conquerors. While Judaism was tolerated, many leaders of the Roman Empire saw Judaism as problematic to the Empire saying it was incompatible with civic cult<sup>120</sup>. Because of this Emperors, such as Hadrian, dealt with the Jews harsher than other conquered

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<sup>119</sup> Scholasticus. 28.

<sup>120</sup> Digeser, Elizabeth DePalma. *The Making of a Christian Empire: Lactantius & Rome*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2000. Print. 120



territories<sup>121</sup>. After Constantine's conversion to Christianity the Jews were the only religious group that he publicly opposed<sup>122</sup> most likely because he, like many Christians of his time saw the Jews as the murderers of the savior<sup>123</sup>.

Constantine's goal was to distance his new unified religion from Judaism<sup>124</sup>, a religion that had been stigmatized throughout the Empire for centuries. Splitting Christianity from the stigmatized Judaism would help improve the image of Christianity throughout the Empire as not just a sub sect of Judaism but its own religion.

At the root of the Melitius Schism is a political power struggle for who rightfully held the title of Metropolitan Bishop of Alexandria, and all the privileges that came with being the leader of one of the three major metropolitan dioceses. Melitius's coming from small town diocese of Lycopolis usurped the Patriarch during the exile of Bishop Peter, performing the duties of metropolitan bishop while Peter was not there to do them. However, Melitius refused to give up his power of "Bishop of Alexandria," both when Bishop Peter returned from his exile and later when Bishop Alexander was named the New Bishop of Alexandria. It is evident that Melitius was not just attempting to help a Christian community in need, but rather wanted the political powers that came with being a metropolitan bishop. Likewise, Bishop Alexander, the rightfully appointed Bishop of Alexandria

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<sup>121</sup> Grant, 79

<sup>122</sup> Digeser. 122

<sup>123</sup> Scholasticus. 28

<sup>124</sup> Bradshaw, Paul F., and Lawrence A. Hoffman. *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern times*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1999. Print. 92

wanted the political prestige that came with his title, and that he considered was rightfully his.

Constantine himself had fought for several years against Maxentius, an emperor who like Melitius attempted to usurp a title that was not rightfully his. However, Those at the Council of Niceae allowed Mellitus to stay in the clergy but forced him to take the title of Bishop of Lycopolis and disallowed him from ordaining any new ministers. The council also re-ordained all of the clergy that had been ordained by Mellitus.

The Council's ruling on the Mellitus Schism, and their decrees in the Eighth and Nineteenth Canons demonstrate the Council's willingness to forgive and reaccept large groups of heretics back to the Catholic Church. Those at the Council realized that the leaders of the schismatic churches had large followings. If Constantine wanted a truly unified Church than he must be willing to accept large branched of heretics back into the Catholic Church. Furthermore in the case of the Melitians, and the Novantianists there was no theological difference between the Catholic Church and the schisms, the differences being only based off of political power and the discipline on lapsed. Reaccepting these sects back into the church was supposed to allow for the Church Bishops to focus on their clerical duties and not have to worry about competing with rival sects of the church but rather having these sects return to the Catholic church would stop inner city feuds from disturbing the peace of the Empire. (While this was the basis for the decisional thoughts, historically It did not pan out like this, Melitius died soon after the council and his followers joined forces with the Arians and

continued to exist well after the Council of Niceae,<sup>125</sup> Novatianists didn't agree to reunify with the Catholic Church after the Council and still existed as a subset of the Church up into the seventh century)<sup>126</sup>.

While creating a creed that was universally followed by all Christians in the Empire was imperative to creating a unified and peaceful church, making sure that the Catholic church was also well organized was also key to the success of church. With Canons four, five, six, seven, fifteen, and sixteen Constantine and the Council at Niceae created a well organized structure for political power inside of the clergy. These canons laid out how the clergy was to be structured and run and laid out punishments for those who broke canon laws, usually with dismissal from the clergy or excommunication. Constantine had seen first hand in the both the success and failure of the Tetrarchy how important it is to have a strong line of succession. The council producing these canons created a system that would allow for peace and uneventful succession inside the clergy.

One of the benefits of the *homoousios* Christology is that it gives power to the Clergy to control the sacraments and therefore control access to Christ. By giving the Clergy the power over the salvation of commoners in the Empire the Clergy were able help maintain order among those in the Empire looking for salvation. Controlling the salvation of the Empire was an important duty that only the righteous could do. To make sure that only those who could properly give the sacraments could join the clergy the Council produced Canons One, Two,

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<sup>125</sup> Rubenstein. 105

<sup>126</sup>Chapman, John. "Novatian and Novatianism." The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 11. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911. 25 Apr. 2013  
<<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11138a.htm>>.

Three, Nine, Ten, and Seventeen. These Canons gave regulations for those who were in, or wished to join the Clergy. If the office was to maintain its power over the masses of the Empire, than those who controlled the offices must maintain a level of dignity over the commoners.

Several canons created by the Council of Niceae dealt with the re-admittance to the church of those who had had lapses in faith during the persecution by the Roman Empire. Much like the heretical sects, the Council determined to allow those who lapsed back into the Church. Much of the church's power came from the Religion's growing numbers. Furthermore it was in the apostolic tradition to convert members to Christianity<sup>127</sup>. Not banishing those who had lapsed in faith kept the church's numbers growing and continued with the Christian traditions passed down by the apostles.

In the early parts of the fourth century Emperor Constantine and Emperor Maxentius were engaging in open warfare over who would control the Roman Empire. The warfare ended when Constantine defeated and killed Maxentius at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge<sup>128</sup>. While Constantine's army was much smaller than Maxentius, "Constantine experienced a "Vision of the cross that foretold his victory."<sup>129</sup> Because Constantine had defeated his rival under the banner of Christianity, Constantine himself converted to the religion, gave massive land grants, and patronized many of the churches leaders<sup>130</sup>. While this was great for the Christians who had been getting persecuted for the past several centuries,

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<sup>127</sup> *Matthew. The Harper Collins Study Bible*. New York: Harper Collins, 2006. Print.

<sup>128</sup> Grant. 228

<sup>129</sup> Stephenson. 135

<sup>130</sup> Ehrman.

there was no set “Christian Doctrine,” that is, the no officially recognized set of beliefs among the different sects of Christians. Constantine believed that if Christianity was to become a legal religion in the empire then it must have one universal, theology. In order to do this, in the year 325 C.E., Constantine called for a Great Council of all the church leaders to meet in Niceae<sup>131</sup>.

The Council of Niceae created a doctrinal creed that linked Christians from East to West together allowing for there to be one true definition for what it was to be Christian. Creating this creed unified the church and disposed of all heretics within the Christian Church. With one set of beliefs there would be no more fighting between Christians over the nature of Jesus, but only Peace and prosperity<sup>132</sup>. The Council also created Canon Law that allowed for peaceful succession of Clerical ranks making sure that Bishops like Melitius, would never be able to usurp the metropolitan see without the support of all the regional bishops. We will never know if God spoke to Constantine before the Battle of Milvian Bridge or if the Holy Spirit controlled the voting at the Council of Niceae. However, when we look at the outcome and political reasoning behind the decisions made at the Council of Niceae we can see that the creeds, canons and declarations passed by the council were done so to increase the stability and security of the newly unified Roman Empire.

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<sup>131</sup> Mathews, Shailer. “The Beginning of a New Catholic Unity.” *The Biblical World* 41.1 (1913). 8

<sup>132</sup> This didn’t actually happen. Arius continued preaching and several years after the council Constantine felt sympathetic towards several Arians and had them re-communicated to the church. It is rumored that an Arian Priest baptized Constantine on his deathbed.

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