

Ancient Church History 14
The Ecumenical Councils: Nicaea I

“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God,
and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

—John 17:3

I. Introduction

- a. The “Ecumenical” Councils
 - i. Nicaea I (AD 325)
 - ii. Constantinople I (AD 381)
 - iii. Ephesus (AD 431)
 - iv. Chalcedon (AD 451)
- b. Leading up to the Council
 - i. Controversies in Scripture
 - ii. Controversies outside of Scripture
- c. The Trinitarian Controversy before Nicaea I
 - i. Tertullian
 - ii. Athanasius and Arius
- d. The Convocation of the Council
 - i. Called by Constantine I (the Great)
 - ii. Details
 1. Constantine invited all ~1,800 bishops from East and West.
 2. Between 250-318 attended.
 3. Dates: May 20, 325 – August 25, 325

II. Central Contributions of Nicaea I

a. For Arius

b. The “Nicene Creed” (*Trinity Hymnal*, pg. 846)

i. The Clear Establishment of Trinitarian Orthodoxy

ii. The Terms Used

1. ὁμοούσιον (*homoousion*)

2. ἕτεροούσιος (*heteroousios*)

3. ὁμοιούσιον (*homoiousion*)

iii. One Little Letter Makes a Big Difference

iv. The Appendix

“Those who say that ‘there was a time when he [the Son] did not exist’ and ‘before being begotten he did not exist,’ or who allege that the Son of God is of another *hypostasis* or *ousia*, or is alterable or changeable, these the universal (*katholikē*) and apostolic church condemns.”

c. Smaller Matters

i. The Timing of Easter

ii. Various Other “Canon Laws”

III. Aftermath

IV. Conclusion

a. Do we need creeds?

b. The Importance of Extrabiblical Doctrinal Formulations

“So long as men, all professing to take the Scripture as their rule, deduce from it opposite doctrines, or put inconsistent interpretations upon its statements, it will be indispensably necessary, if they are to attempt to ascertain how far they agree with, and how far they differ from, each other, that they employ, in expressing their convictions, words different from those which are used in Scripture.”

—William Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1864), 1:287.