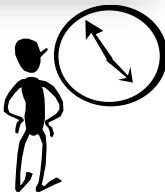


## Inside this issue:

<i>The Council of Nicea</i>	1
<i>The Same Movement, Yet We are Different</i>	4
<i>Advise for Those Looking to Preach</i>	6
Duty Rosters	7
Announcements & For the Record	8



## Time of Assembly



### **Sunday:**

Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.
Worship	5:00 p.m.
(every other week)	

### **Wednesday:**

Bible Study	6:30 p. m.
-------------	------------

## The Council of Nicea

By Andy Sochor

The first ecumenical council, that occurred in Nicea, was in 325 AD. It was a gathering of church leaders from across the Roman Empire who came together to discuss certain controversial issues and come to a consensus on the church's "official" position on these matters.

Before discussing this, it is important to distinguish this from the meeting in Jerusalem found in Acts 15. Luke recorded that some men came from Judea to Antioch and taught that the Gentiles needed to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses in order to be saved. Paul and Barnabas had "great dissension and debate with them" (Acts 15:2). It was determined to send Paul, Barnabas, and some other brethren to Jerusalem to discuss this question. Many who affirm the legitimacy or authority of the Council of Nicea ( and later ones) believe that this meeting in Jerusalem was essentially the same type of gathering. Yet it was not.

The Council of Nicea was a gathering of church leaders throughout the Empire who were called together by Constantine. The meeting in Jerusalem came about when a group of disciples from Antioch traveled to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders of the church in that city (Acts 15:2-4). The brethren from Antioch went to Jerusalem because ( 1) the apostles were there and (2) the ones who were disturbing the church in Antioch with their teaching had come from their "number" (Acts 15:24). A problem had arisen in Antioch, so those who were connected to it in some way met to resolve the issue.

### Peace Leads to Controversy

In "Early Persecution," we discussed the persecution that had targeted the church through the beginning of the fourth century. This persecution "officially" ended in 313 AD

when Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Toleration. With this and his alleged conversion, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire.

It is certainly good for brethren to enjoy peace. Paul said that Christians are to pray for civil authorities *"so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"* (I Timothy 2:2-4). However, while such peace can help the gospel spread, it can also provide false teachers with more opportunities to spread their errors.

In the most recent article in this series, we discussed the beginning of apostasy. We saw that the seeds were already planted at the end of the first century and started bearing fruit in the second century. Therefore, it should not be surprising to see significant departures from the doctrines and practices found in the New Testament by the fourth century ( the time of Constantine and the Council of Nicea).

## Controversies that Arose

Three major controversies that arose following the Edict of Toleration centered around the teachings of Arius (256-336 AD), Apollinaris (310-390 AD), and Pelagius (355-420 AD). The first of these was addressed at the Council of Nicea. The others were dealt with at councils in Constantinople (381 AD) and Carthage (418 AD). Before discussing the Council of Nicea further, let us briefly summarize these controversies.

**Arianism** - This controversy concerned the Trinity, particularly the relationship between the Father and the Son. This doctrine - attributed to Arius - held that Jesus was created and, therefore, not equal to the Father.

**Apollinarianism** - Apollinaris opposed the doctrine of Arianism and the idea that Jesus was inferior to the Father. Yet his doctrine was seen by many as an overreaction (or overcorrection) to the teachings of Arius. Apollinarianism is the idea that Jesus could not have had a human spirit because this was inherently sinful.

**Pelagianism** - This controversy centered around sin and salvation. Pelagius taught that man had free will and could choose to do good or evil. His teachings were contrary to the popular doctrine of original sin taught by Augustine.

It is important to note that these "heretical" positions have been defined by their opponents. Many or all of their actual writings were destroyed. However, if we were alive back then and did not align with the official "orthodox" position decided upon by these councils, we would have been labeled as heretics as well. This is especially likely with the controversy over Pelagianism since we would affirm that man has the ability to choose to do either right or wrong ( cf. Joshua 24:15) and that God will hold each person accountable for his own sins and not the sins of anyone else (Ezekiel 18:20).

## Council of Bishops

The first ecumenical council was called by Emperor Constantine in 325 AD. The chief issue to be addressed was the controversy over Arianism. Constantine presided over 318 bishops who met in Nicea in Bithynia - an area in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).

This council met to establish the "official" position of the church. In doing this, they formulated a creed - an official statement of faith that was to be accepted by all the churches. Many would argue that such creeds represented the teachings of Scripture. However, in reality, they were human interpretations of Scripture that should not have been held to as authoritative. This becomes more clear as additional and conflicting creeds were created and adopted by others after this point.

As Constantine - the ruler of the Roman Empire - presided over this meeting, it also indicated an official union of church and state.

## The Nicene Creed

During the Council of Nicea, the bishops adopted a formal statement of faith - the Nicene Creed - as the "official" position of the church. This was later revised at the first Council of Constantinople in 381 AD. This revision - the Nicene Constantinopolitan Creed - is what many today refer to as the Nicene Creed. The revised creed stated the following:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, Begotten of the Father before all ages, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father; by whom all things were made:

Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man;

And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried;

And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures;

And ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father;

And He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke by the Prophets;

And we believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins.

We look for the Resurrection of the dead, And the Life of the age to come.

Amen.

For the most part, we probably would not argue with the content of the creed. In some portions, we may question the wording; but it is not far from what we read about in the New Testament. So why does it matter? The problem is that it takes a man-made statement of faith and turns it into an authoritative statement equal to - or maybe even preferred over - the Spirit-inspired word of God. This is the problem with every creed, no matter how close we believe it is to the New Testament.

## Summary

Since the end of the first century, the apostasy that the apostles warned about continued to slowly build as churches drifted further away from the doctrine of Christ found in the New Testament. However, at the Council of Nicea, an "orthodox" position was adopted for the church as a whole in the form of the Nicene Creed. Christians would now be pressured to accept this because it was the "official" position of "the church." Furthermore, with the new union of church and state, it would become increasingly more difficult - and dangerous- to simply follow the teachings of Christ without the opinions, commandments, and traditions of man.

---

## The Same Movement, Yet We Are Different

By Andy Sochor

Daniel Austen Sommer (1878-1952) was the son of the gospel preacher, Daniel Sommer. In 1916, D.A. Sommer debated J. Roy Wright of the Christian church. The debate dealt with several issues, including instrumental music in worship and missionary societies. In his first speech, Sommer pointed out something that he and Wright had in common.

*"About a century ago a movement started out to try to bring the people back from the traditions of man to the plain, simple way as taught in the word of God. **Elder Wright belongs to that movement; I belong to that movement; and yet we are different. And why?** Because in the course of the years things have been introduced into this reformation that have been contrary, as many have believed, to the principles with which we started out — that where the Bible speaks we speak, and where the Bible is silent we are silent."* (Wright/Sommer Debate)

The Restoration Movement was an effort by individuals to leave the churches of men and abandon the creeds of men in order to simply follow the pattern found in the New Testament. Yet a century after the movement began, Sommer and Wright— who could both claim to be part of that movement— were debating serious differences they had in the work and worship of the church.

Today, nearly a century after Sommer's debate with Wright, the differences among those who claim to be part of the same movement have only grown. Even among

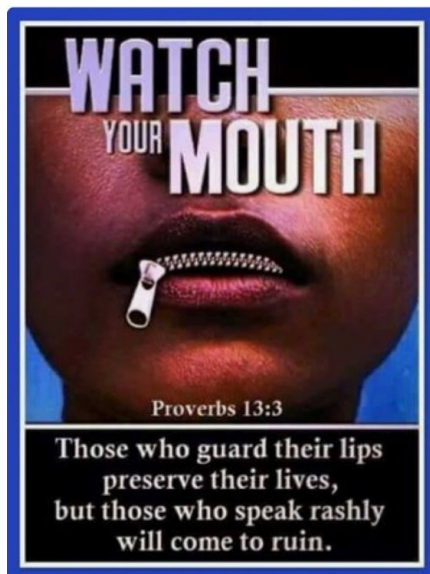
"churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16), we see churches supporting colleges and other human institutions, operating day cares, erecting "fellowship" halls, welcoming women preachers, moving the Lord's Supper to Saturday evenings, tolerating unrepentant sinners and false teachers, and more.

The problem today is the same as it was in Sommer's day – the introduction of things that are contrary to the fundamental principle of the movement. That principle, as Sommer pointed out, is this: "Where the Bible speaks we speak, and where the Bible is silent we are silent."

That principle is not just a good idea derived from human wisdom. It is based upon some fundamental passages in Scripture that describe our responsibility toward God's revealed word.

- *"Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God..."* (I Peter 4:11).
- *"Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus"* (Colossians 3:17).
- *"Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus"* (II Timothy 1:13).
- *"Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son"* (II John 9).
- *"I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book"* (Revelation 22:18-19).

It does not matter if an individual or congregation *claims to be* or is *classified as being* part of the Restoration Movement. We must have enough respect for the Lord that we simply follow the New Testament as our only rule of faith and practice. This will surely put us at odds with the religious world as a whole. Sadly, it will also often put us at odds with many of our brethren. But we must be content to be among the few that are faithful to the Lord than to go along with the many who demonstrate a preference for the doctrines, opinions, and practices of man.



---

# Advice for Those Looking to Preach

By Scott Smelser

Six random points in no particular order:

- \* A powerful message from a stern and elderly Tom Butler (addressing myself and several college-aged guys many years ago): "You young guys. You come and tell me you want to preach. No, you don't. You don't want to preach. What you want are a pulpit and a paycheck. If you want to preach, preach. There are people all over this community that need to hear the word. Reserve a room at the library, go through the community, and tell people that you will be speaking on the gospel that night. You don't need somebody's permission to preach. If you want to preach, do it."
- \* Look way beyond starting at a small established church and aiming to "climb the ladder" to larger churches. And don't forget the importance of planting new churches. What did Paul say? "*My aim is to preach the gospel where Christ has not been named*" (Romans 15:20 CSB). Now, not everybody needs to do the same work. At Corinth, Paul planted, Apollos watered. Both were important. Without watering, gardens die. But without planting, gardens don't get started. And also, if you're planting then pick a good partner. Jesus sent them out by twos. Paul went by twos (and more). A good co-worker (or 3 or 4 like at Philippi) makes a big difference.
- \* Books: Don't get enthralled with the latest-greatest author and his new book. Be a student of the biblical text. The better you know the biblical text, the less you will be impressed with some of the books that come along.
- \* Also on books: If you are building a library, get the books other books are written about. Somebody told me that years ago. I don't remember who, but it's good advice. As an example: If you want to know about the so-called gnostic gospels, look at the Nag-Hammadi texts themselves, not just books about them. Actually reading the so-called "Gospel of Thomas" will tell you most of what you need to know about that text and the gnostics that spread it.
- \* Keep Christ at the center: Don't convert people to the church (which is composed of people who sinned and needed a Savior), convert them to the Lord (the one who can save the sinner, who can then be one of his people). The church doesn't save, the church is the saved. And the church doesn't make the rules, the church obeys the rules. Keep the focus on Christ.
- \* Brethren: Don't put yourself above helping people out with manual stuff. Helping somebody paint, fix their car, or going to play sports with them. These can be good opportunities to get to know them better, and for them to get to know you. I'm not saying to let yourself become the church errand boy. But do be a servant and a friend.