

## *Period Between the Councils*

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At the conclusion of our last lecture, we were discussing the important Council of Nicea. Of course the Council of Nicea is best known for the creed that has the name of that council, the Nicene Creed. But as we were ending the lecture, we began to discuss other important events associated with the Council of Nicea. And I reminded you that at that council, more things were done to advance life and doctrine in the church than exclusively the establishment of that creed.

If I remember correctly, we discussed at the end of our last lecture a schism named after the bishop Meletius, who had ordained people incorrectly. There are some other issues, some fascinating ones actually, that were dealt with which at first will seem a little bit funny to us, especially this first one. The question is, When do Christians celebrate Easter? We all know when we celebrate Easter. We look at the calendar in spring, and it says right there on the day “Easter Sunday.” So there’s no big question, right? There was a question in the ancient church period as to when precisely that important celebration should be observed. We know that Jesus was crucified and resurrected at the time of a certain feast. And we know when that feast occurs in the Jewish calendar. As you know, the Jewish calendar has different months, names of months. And one of the names of the months is the month of Nisan. And on the 14th of Nisan, the Passover is celebrated. Should the Easter celebration always be coterminous with the celebration in the Jewish community? Historically, that’s what happened. But how much continuity and how much discontinuity should there be between the church and the synagogue? This was a great matter of concern and discussion, and that issue was hammered out on the anvil of the Nicene Council.

There was a group of people who maintained that Easter should always be celebrated on the 14th day of Nisan. And this group of people was given a Latin name, Quartodecimans, meaning fourteen. *Quarto* or our word *quarter* means “one-fourth,”

and decimans from ten, Quartodecimans. And one of those Quartodecimans was the ancient church father Polycarp. We've heard his name earlier. These people, the Quartodecimans, kept Easter on that day of the week no matter which day it fell on. So Easter could be on a Wednesday. There were others who argued that it should be structured around the fourteenth, but what was of highest importance is that Easter be celebrated on the day we call Sunday. Later on in the third century, there was the development of attempting to calculate Easter taking into account the lunar date of the solar year, that is, taking into account the equinox. And so, in the ancient church period, to make a long story short: Easter could be celebrated at three different times depending upon where you were living and under which group you were celebrating Easter. It would be kind of fun if we had jets in those days that we could celebrate Easter three times a year.

The council determined that Easter should be celebrated always on a Sunday but never on the 14th of Nisan. That is, when Sunday was the 14th of Nisan, then Easter should be celebrated either a week before or a week after just so that the discontinuity between the Jewish feast and the Christian observation should be maintained.

The council also tackled a number of other perplexing questions. And they wrote up twenty canons. "Canon" is a word that's very important especially in the sixteenth century, and it's spelled, by the way, with not two Ns. There's a cannon that shoots bombs, and then there's the word *canon* that deals with church law. Twenty canons were hammered out concerning such important issues as clerical discipline, laxity among church leaders, how the church should be divided into what geographical areas. For example, at this Council of Nicea, the church assumed the civil divisions of the empire to be their divisions as well. In other words, it's like in the United States, if you live in the state of Pennsylvania or California, the church became the church of the state of Pennsylvania or California. They assumed the civil divisions of the empire.

To guard against further schisms like the Meletian schism, they began to iron out the proper way in which men should be ordained to the ministry, especially those who then become known as bishops. And they began to set up a system which will become familiar in terms of hierarchy, that is, the way in which the church is moving is toward the development of bishops as we understand them currently today. And then a new office was called for from the Council of Nicea called the metropolitans. That's a word

that's very familiar to us. Some of us live in metropolitan New York or metropolitan Chicago, the metropolitan area, the big city area. And bishops of the big cities began to receive the technical term "metropolitan," so all ordinations to bishops had to be done with the consent of the metropolitan. And as we analyze these important developments, we see the church moving toward the adoption of the way in which the civil society ruled itself with the idea eventually of an emperor or a king. The church is moving in that direction. It's adopting the political structures around it.

Excommunication was also dealt with in the fifth canon of the Council of Nicea. How should they deal with the lapsed? We've talked about those poor people that we call the lapsed, and the various sins which were committed especially during times of persecution. Listen carefully as we see the way in which the church began to deal with these people. And I ask you to listen carefully, because it's going to sound rather strange to us especially those of us coming from evangelical Protestantism in the United States. If you are a lapsed, according to the Council of Nicea, here is the way you become fully reconciled with the church. Remember, the argumentation, the heated, bitter argumentation in the church prior to this time. It was held by some people that those who are lapsed should never be reconciled with the church or at best only as they are lying on their deathbed about to go to the throne of grace.

The church began to hammer out the proper way that those who are excommunicated can come back into the church. First of all, the lapsed are to stand with the hearers for two years. I'm reading from the minutes of the canon itself. What does that mean, "to stand with the hearers"? In contrast to the way churches are run in America, there was one person who sat in the church, and that was the preacher. The preacher would sit down to preach, and everyone else would stand up—a little bit different from what we see today. And by the way, this will help us to understand especially in terms of ecumenical relations, as the preacher sat down he sat on his preaching stool which is called a *cathedra* in Latin. And so when we have the expression that the pope is speaking *ex cathedra*, he's speaking from his preaching stool. He's speaking as the preacher to the church, and therefore he's speaking authoritatively. That's where that phrase comes from; that's how preaching was done in the ancient church. You would stand, and the preacher would sit. This is certainly one way that you can pack more people into your church. Think how many more people we could get into our churches if we got rid of all

those pews and chairs. Instead of building more church buildings, we could just have everyone stand all the time. I mean that in a light-hearted fashion. But that's the difference between the ancient church and our church today.

So those who were lapsed could stand and listen to the sermon, be instructed by God's Word. And they were allowed to do that for two years, but that's all they were allowed to do. Then listen again to the words of the canon. Then they were invited to be kneelers for seven years. So first you do two years of being a stander. Then you can do seven years of being a kneeler. What is a kneeler? A kneeler is someone who participates in the common, public prayers of the church community. As prayers were offered, prayers would be offered in the kneeling position. So we see a contrast between those who, for example, would come to hear a sermon because they would be interested. There's no television during the time of the ancient church, no newspaper. Books weren't available. There was no method of entertainment except public gladiatorial shows and public games. So oftentimes for entertainment, people would come to church and hear the preacher preach who was, often times especially in the ancient church period, a great orator. He would be entertaining. And as he would entertain and instruct and sometimes tickle the ears, and I don't mean that in the best sense of the word, of the audience, people from the community would stop by on their way to perhaps going shopping and listen to the preacher for fifteen minutes and then leave. Those were the hearers. But only those who were serious about their Christianity would wish to and be invited to participate in the prayers of the community. Those are the kneelers. And then for two years they could again, after their time of being kneelers, they could also participate in the prayers of the Lord's Supper. They could come to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, but they weren't allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper. And that's for two years after being kneelers.

So let's recap what we've learned. Someone is excommunicated, especially during the time of persecution. How did they get back into the church? It takes a long time. They first spend two years listening, seven years kneeling, and two more years getting close to the Lord's Supper but not being able to participate. Have you mentally calculated the years? Eleven years, it would take eleven years of penance before that lapsed person was allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper. How radical is that? How extreme is that? It's up to you to decide ultimately, but we've got to remember that the twentieth century and the way in which we live is not the

same as the fourth century. Our problems are not the problems of the fourth century. To be a lapsed in the fourth century was a little bit different from being a lapsed in the twentieth century. We're talking here about life-and-death situations, people making the ultimate sacrifice for Christ as they would face death, as they would face destruction. It was a radically different culture. However, I also want to challenge you to reconsider our own way of looking at discipline in twentieth-century America. As we can perhaps chuckle at the extreme way in which the early church dealt with these problems, are we in twentieth-century America perhaps a little too light in our understanding of discipline? So I mention that to you for discussion and contemplation. But the point is that it was the universal opinion of the church in 325. This was not just an isolated synod, but this was a general council of the entire Christian church which agreed on precisely this way of dealing with the church. So we can't dismiss this as entirely culturally relative. We must consider this a part of our own Christian heritage to be considered quite seriously.

I want to mention one last point of the important Council of Nicea. It's interesting to note one rule which was proposed but not passed by the council. And that was that persons who are clergy should not be allowed to live as married men. It was proposed that all clergymen be celibate. And that rule was turned down. So at least by 325, there was no rule for enforced celibacy for the clergy. And that's also helpful for us to understand ecumenical relationships as we see the Roman church struggling with the idea of clerical celibacy.

We move to the next period in our lecture outline, the period between the councils. Dear brothers and sisters, if you think there is confusion and trouble in the church today, wait until you hear the following lectures. There was no more difficult time in terms of struggle and turmoil as the time between 325 and 381. I've asked you to put 325 in your memory banks for the Council of Nicea. I'll ask you now to put the year 381 in your memory banks for the Council of Constantinople. And we're about to investigate the very difficult time between these two councils. We'll spend quite a few minutes analyzing this time.

The Council of Nicea did what? It produced the creed that we know as the Nicene Creed, and it produced the answer to some perplexing practical problems. Did it stop Arianism? As we lectured on the Nicene Creed, we saw that there were parts of that creed which dealt the death blow to Arianism of the same



substance of the Father, true God of true God, begotten not made. All of these things speak strongly against Arianism. And so we would presume that Arianism as a threat to Christianity was terminated in 325. However, that's not the case. It's going to take us to the year 381 to resolve this difficult problem. One of the main features of this period between the councils was the tremendous number of local, synodical gatherings where the bishops from the different geographical regions would come together and hash out problems and deal with theological questions. As I'm about to lecture, I'm going to mention a few important creeds more local in nature than the important Nicene Creed. But I want to emphasize that the lecture that I'll be giving to you is only a very boiled-down account of all the complex events, especially the theological events which are transpiring during this time. In a few moments, I'll refer a special book to you that will give you more detail if you're interested in following this through.

What's happening between these two councils are a number of local assemblies that are summoned either by the emperor himself or by local bishops. I would remind you again that the Nicene Council was instigated by the emperor and paid for by the emperor. The church and the state are not separated at any time during our period of investigation from the termination of the Bible about 95 to 600. Church and state are always wedded during this time. Church and state are wedded basically until the nineteenth century. And what we experience in America is more a change, more a unique exception to the rule rather than the rule itself. So the emperor paid for the Nicene Creed and council, and he's going to pay in 381 for the Council of Constantinople; 325 was the time of Nicea. The next creed that we should look at very quickly is the creed that was developed in the year 341. And now you should be taking notes for all these years, because it will provide a snake-like skeleton of different years. As we look at this chronologically, it will all fall together at the end. At least that's my hope.

In 341 there was a council held in the city of Antioch known as the Dedication Council. We call it the Dedication Council. They didn't call themselves the Dedication Council, because it was dedicating a beautiful church in the city of Antioch. Constantine had become emperor, as you know, and made Christianity legal in the first part of the fourth century. And he began to build a huge church building in the town of Antioch. But it took a long time for the completion of that great cathedral. It was begun with Constantine, but it was finished under his son, whose name was Constantius. And he was

present at this council. At the council there were ninety-seven bishops all from the Eastern church. What's the Eastern church? That's the church from the Eastern part of the empire who speak usually Greek. The real reason for their coming together was in actuality to provide a unified Eastern response to a synod. What's a synod? A synod is a local church gathering. A synod held in Rome in either late 340 or early 341 pronounced both Athanasius and Marcellus of Ancyra guiltless of theological crime and had them readmitted to the church. Wait a minute. Readmitted to the church? Athanasius is our hero. Remember our biographical look at him? He's the one who had an orthodox doctrine of the Trinity.

And who is Marcellus of Ancyra? We haven't even mentioned him. Let me briefly mention Marcellus and flesh in some of the details. Marcellus of Ancyra died in AD 374. And a few brief comments can be made concerning his theological position. He maintained that God is a single monad, and we've talked about what that word *monad* means. And that the Son, the name Son is given to this incarnate Logos of the single monad God. And so the Logos functions as God's (what he calls) self-revelation and self-activation. So Marcellus is very close to the fellow Sabellius but is not a Sabellian in his Christology. What happens in this Council of Rome in late 340 or early 341? The Roman council—and what language did they speak in Rome? They're speaking Latin. This is a Western part of the church, it says that Athanasius our hero, and he'll be our hero throughout this whole part of the story of the church. Athanasius and Marcellus are both legitimate orthodox theologians. The Eastern church, which had been heavily influenced by Arianism, had said earlier that Athanasius was not a good guy but a bad guy. That is, that his theology was not acceptable. So Athanasius is going to become not the eye of the hurricane, because in the eye there's calm. I think there was calm in Athanasius, but his life was so full of storm that the eye of the hurricane isn't quite the right example. But he's going to become the object of great shooting between the Eastern church and the Western church. So in a sense, he's the poor fellow walking down the middle between two camps shooting at each other. And he's going to get hit a number of times.

Athanasius had been made orthodox by the Western church even though Athanasius and Marcellus had been deposed earlier by the Eastern church. Now is this confusing? I hope so, because the situation is a confusing one. The Eastern church and the Western church are about to have some real struggles. Let's put ourselves in their shoes. What would happen if I suddenly switched into

another language and started to lecture to you in Swedish? I can't lecture to you in Swedish. But what would happen if I suddenly did? There would be a lot of confusion. And perhaps someone would come on the tape and say now the translation of what Dr. Gamble is saying follows these lines. But you know, as you try to translate a lecture, the translation sometimes misses some of the parts. It doesn't quite fit the original. And what would happen if I were trying to lecture to you on some fundamental points of Christianity, and you were hearing Christianity for the first time? What would happen, for example, if I were explaining to you the exact nature of the love that we have in Jesus Christ, how we are to repent and be saved from our sins? And as I was describing this process, I would use certain Swedish words that would be very difficult to translate, that there would be no exact equivalent. And for all of you who have been involved in translation work, whether it's from Greek or Hebrew or a modern language, you know that there are certain words which have no English language equivalence. It would be a confusing situation, wouldn't it? And what would happen if passing this course was absolutely essential for you to get into the ordained ministry? Maybe you'd want to learn Swedish, or you'd study the original Swedish that I would be lecturing to you. This silly example helps us to understand the difficulty between one half of the church which speaks one language incomprehensible to the other half of the church which speaks another language. How do you communicate? How do you share theological words? How do you translate from your culture into another culture? Those of you who are interested in mission work or have done mission work should be especially sensitive to this problem. Those of you who are going into mission work, for example, need to learn to translate language into a language that perhaps might not have direct equivalence. How do you say that Jesus will make you pure as the driven snow when you're a missionary on the equator and snow has never been seen? That strange language you need to change your expressions to make it comprehensible to your audience. So this is the situation.

Athanasius and Marcellus are deposed by their brothers (this becomes a little bit more complex) who even speak their same language because they think that especially Athanasius does not understand the nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son. So not only are they speaking different languages, but even those who speak the same language don't agree on these important issues. And this harkens back to Arianism itself. Athanasius was an assistant to the great Alexander during the time of the Council of Nicea. Alexander dies. Athanasius becomes



the head pastor of Alexandria. He is strong for the truth. He is strong for the full deity of Jesus Christ. But those who had bought into Arianism and subordinationistic Christology are quite anxious to get rid of Athanasius because they believe that he does injustice to the nature of God Himself who is essential monad or one. And now it's the Western church that speaks Latin that's going to come to the rescue for this poor fellow, Athanasius.

Again we see the movement of God in the church as these complex issues come to resolution. We're going to see oftentimes as we outline the events between 325 and 381 it is the Latin-speaking church that comes to the aid of a Greek-speaking brother as the Latin church wrestles with translating these Greek words into Latin. And as they see the importance of what Athanasius is doing in a new and fresh way, they determine in 340 that Athanasius is certainly no heretic but that Athanasius should be applauded for his aiding the church in understanding the Bible's teaching. The Eastern church didn't like that. Wait a minute. This fellow is an Eastern church father. You guys in the West can't tell us in the East that what we've done is wrong, because that's what the Western church is telling the Eastern church.

So the first thing that this body, this Dedication Council meeting in Antioch in 341, does is to counteract the charges of Athanasius. And Athanasius had been charging that the main leaders in the Eastern church were pseudo-Arians. By the Council of Nicea determining that Arianism was a heresy, it became illegal to be an Arian. And another complicating factor comes into this thousand-piece jigsaw puzzle. Remember I mentioned a few moments ago, church and state are wedded during this time. So the emperor determines that if you're a heretic, you don't deserve to be in the empire anymore. That is, heresy began to be punishable by the state. Was that anything new? No, because Christianity was seen as a heresy while the Roman state was pagan. Therefore, the Christians were put to death. Does that mean that after the time of Constantine the Christian state of Rome is going to put to death heretics? Yes and no. At this point, the answer is no. Heretics will be banished from the empire as not being worthy Roman citizens. It's kind of a funny change of events, isn't it? And we'll spend some time analyzing church and state during this time period to make that which is most foreign to us as Americans more understandable. The point to remember is that Christianity became the legal religion. And if the emperor says that what we call orthodox Christianity, that is, Nicene Christianity, Christianity and that word *orthodox* just means basic historic Christianity for

us. If that's the religion of the empire, then it's illegal to be an Arian. In a few moments, we're going to notice that that whole religion of the empire is going to change. As the emperor becomes an Arian himself, then orthodox Christianity is going to become illegal. But that's jumping a little bit ahead.

So the charge of Athanasius was that Eusebius of Caesarea, for example, and his buddies, his cronies were all pseudo-Arians. And in the Dedication Council of Antioch, they had declared themselves not to be pseudo-Arians. But this document is rather long, and it goes on and on. It is an Eastern baptismal formula greatly expanded with biblical phrases. And this council, this meeting of 341, attaches at the end something that's very important for us to understand. The credal development during this time terminates in a group of anathemas. What's an anathema? An anathema means a condemnation. That word is found in the Scriptures: "Let him be anathema." Let him be, in the most strong language, condemned to hell. Let that person find his home with the devil. And so we begin to see in the creation of these creeds at these councils, a list of anathemas. All the bad guys are stuck at the end so everybody knows who they are and not to listen to them. And once again, we get a good insight to the tensions within the Christian church during this early time period.

Speaking of anathemas, I want to give you one joke. It's the one and only joke of these lectures. Three professors were sitting in the professors' room together, and a student came in to talk with each one of them. The one student comes in and wants to see the Hebrew professor. The Greek professor is there also, and the church history professor. The student comes in first to see the Hebrew professor. And the student comes in, and the Hebrew professor greets that student with the Hebrew phrase *shalom*. He says peace to you, brother. And the student does his business with the professor and leaves the professor's room. Then the second student comes in and meets the Greek professor. And the Greek professor says to him *eiréné*, peace be to you, brother. Come on in and tell me what you need. Then finally the third student comes in to the church history professor's room. And how does the church history professor greet him? "Anathema" is the word that the church history professor uses to the student, which is strong language for what the church historians usually feel when the students come and bother them. So don't bother church history professors. The anathema is an important part of the development of creeds but shouldn't be part of our lives today

There was a lot of activity, as I mentioned just a minute ago, between 325 and 381. Another important person in this field which I'll mention very briefly is the person named Sabellius. And I've mentioned his name briefly before. Sabellius had lived in the prior century, but he was seen in the fourth century as a hero. Sabellius had been excommunicated in the early part of the third century. And Sabellius . . . had regarded the Godhead as a monad which expressed itself in three operations. We've talked about this monad and yet distinct, the important theological issue that orthodox Christianity is going to maintain that God is both monad and distinct. Sabellius said that God is monad that expresses Himself in three operations as Father, as Son, and as Spirit. Now this is pretty complex stuff. That is, there's one God, and sometimes He, to use twentieth-century language, makes Himself appear like the Father or seem like the Son, or work as the Holy Spirit. He has three different operations, much like the twentieth-century father who is pastor, who is father, and who is husband: one man who has three operations. Sometimes he functions as father, sometimes he functions as preacher, sometimes he functions as husband. That's what Sabellius taught. And Sabellius and Sabellianism are also playing a role in the Christological discussion during this time period.

As we continue to look at what's happening in 341, we'll see some of the influences of Sabellianism. We note, as we look at the creed, and if we could have a text of the creed in front of us that would be very helpful. As we look at the text of that creed, it is intensely scriptural in its tone. They attempted to express their theology and their doctrine as far as possible from excerpts from the Scripture. How does that contrast with the council and creed of 325? Do you remember what we emphasized in our last lecture as we talked about that creed? That word *homoousion* of the substance with the Father, which we find in the Nicene Creed, is a non-scriptural word. You don't find that Greek word in the Scriptures. Yet it expresses the truth of Christianity. And we discussed very briefly the legitimate implementation of such words. Of course the word *Trinity* is not found in the Scripture either. And none of us would argue that we shouldn't use that word. But in many ways, the Dedication Council of Antioch represents a conservative, and I mean that in the bad sense of the word, counterreaction to the Creed of Nicea. They say, let's only use the words of Scripture as we express our faith. Do any of us have an objection to using the words of Scripture to express our faith? I hope not. Yet in the midst of this type of strife and Christological controversy, it is only non-scriptural words which put the death blow onto Arianism. That

word *homoousios*, for example, is the decisive word. Jesus is of the substance of the Father that the Arian can never confess. But with the Dedication Council of Antioch using only scriptural words, that means that Arianism can find itself accommodating the words of the Dedication Council of Antioch. For example, Jesus the Son is described in that creed as “unalterable and unchangeable.” Arius could agree with those words. He’s now dead, but Arius’s followers can follow that word. We see that there are some other problems. Christ is described as exact image of the Father. That’s a scriptural phrase. He’s described as life. He’s described as way. And all of these titles are scriptural. But Marcellus of Ancyra, and I mentioned him very briefly, maintained that these titles were only properly given to Christ as He is incarnate. The important point for us is to see that Marcellus as well as Athanasius were considered as bad guys in that they used such words as *homoousion*, especially Athanasius. And so the condemnation for the theology of Athanasius continues with the Dedication Council of Antioch.

Let’s summarize what we see in 341. In 340 or early 341, the Western church said that Athanasius was an orthodox theologian. This is in contrast to an earlier council in the East which had said that Athanasius was unorthodox. The Eastern church turns around and says, Listen, you guys in the West. You’ve slapped us in the face. It’s our prerogative to determine who is orthodox or who is not orthodox. We are going to give a creed that we feel is a better expression of our faith, and that one that we developed and we agreed to in 325. But we don’t like the use of non-scriptural terms. So let’s go back to the Scripture. Let’s just use those terms to express our faith. Here the Arians who had been outlawed find this to be a most acceptable compromise for them. The bad words for them like *homoousios* are now excluded from implementation in the creed and were a little bit (that is, those of us who are pseudo-Arians) are a little bit more comfortable with this creed than we were with the Creed of Nicea. And that rotten figure, Athanasius, at least according to the pseudo-Arians, is now once again terminated. So that’s where we are in 341. We’ve made some important movements in church history. We’ve made some important movements in the development of doctrine.

As we begin to terminate today’s lecture, I’d like to reflect very briefly on what we’ve seen so far, as in the next lecture we’re going to move ahead chronologically. But we need to understand where we have gone as a class. As a class, we’ve seen that the entire church has agreed to the Council of Nicea. There was a little bit of pressure for the church to agree to that council. It

was the emperor who called it. It was the emperor who paved the way of all the church leaders. It was the emperor who said this is a good creed. I would like everyone to sign it. Now who's going to buck the emperor? So everyone in the church signs, but in the back of the minds of many theologians there is a lot of hesitancy. Those people that we'll call pseudo-Arians think that Arius had some good things to say and felt some dissatisfaction with non-scriptural terminology, for example. So this festering questioning in the minds of many theologians still needs to be resolved. And we're going to see the church, if we could look at it in terms of a pendulum, swing from the strong orthodoxy of the Nicene Creed to the other extreme as Arianism once again comes into its own. And so look forward with me to the next lecture, which is going to describe and begin to flesh out what I see to be some of the darkest days in all of the history of Christianity.