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Theology

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Essay 1

In Christianity, there are seven ecumenical councils which includes, the first Nicaea council of 325, the council of Constantinople of 381, Ephesus council- 431, Chalcedon council -451, second Constantinople council- 553, third Constantinople council- 680- 681 and second of Nicea’s council of 787. These councils represent an effort by the Church representatives to reach a consensus over Orthodox Church, jut to restore the peace. These attempts also aimed at developing an incorporated and integrated Christendom (Lane and Lane). As each type of catholic followers trace the legitimacy from apostolic succession and back from this time and afar, therefore this period is referred to as the Early Christianity. This era starts from the happening of council of Nicea. This council of Nicea attempted to restore Nicene Creed to its original arrangement. The Nicene Creed was however changed in the first council of Constantinople. It was actually reform and that’s why many see the later councils as touchstone of orthodoxy.

The church of eastern orthodox and Catholic Church consider all the above mentioned seven councils as right. Therefore, they regard them as ecumenical councils. The churches of oriental orthodox consider just the first three councils, whereas the Eastern Church accepts the first two. It is also important to note that there exist an additional council- the Quinisext council. Quinisext council was held between sixth and seventh councils of ecumenical around AD 692. It issued liturgical, canonical and organizational rules but not included the debates on theology. It is just considered essential in the Eastern orthodox council. They also consider it as the continuance of the sixth council. However, some of the representatives from the catholic and Eastern churches suggest about the happening of many other ecumenical councils. The following paragraphs present a comparison analysis and importance of the councils of Nicea, Chalcedon and the council of Ephesus.

The council of Nicea was convened by the emperor Constantine in AD 325. It was held to settle a controversial issue of the relation between the t Jesus Chris and God- the father. The emperor actually wanted to establish a universal argument over it. The representatives of the church came from all across the Europe, which were subsidized by the emperor. Before holding this council, the bishops used to held local and domestic councils as like the council of Jerusalem, but there was no universal council before (Lane and Lane). In the council of Nicea, a creed later known as original Nicene Creed was drawn up. The real Nicene Creed received universal support. The council described the ‘God’s only son, Jesus Christ’ as of the similar importance compared to God- the father. It became the founding stone of trinitariansim in Christianity. The council of Nicea also considered the issue of dating any Easter, it recognized the precise of *Alexandria see* in jurisdiction, but limited to its own province. It also considered the prerogatives by the churches in Antioch and many other provinces. It approved the custom of Jerusalem but in the absence of metropolitan dignity.

The council however was opposed by the Arians, which were later on reconciled by Arius. It was after this that the Arianism is considered renamed by the church. The controversy however was not limited to this council, rather it continued after the death of Constantine. The council of Nicea is also famous since various groups were formed which later espoused the Arian sympathies (L’Huillier). Later on in the year 359, the councils of eastern and Western bishops committed over the formula that both the father and the son are same in the accord. It was a crowning victory for the Arians after the council of Nicea.

The council of Ephesus convened in 431 was the council of bishops. It was convened in Ephesus in Turkey. This council was called on by the roman emperor Theodosius. Before conveying this council the emperor noted the growing discords among the bishops which he believed could threaten the peaceful environment the empire was going through (L’Huillier). After the assembly of the council, this third council afforded to restore the Nicean Creed in its original form. Since they had the representation from all the faith, therefore it was much likely that they will succeed in this attempt. The council not only confirmed the original Nicene Creed, it also condemned the followers and teachings of the Patriarch of Constantinople. It was the first of seven great councils (the first four of which have findings still universally accepted by Christians) that helped define Christian doctrine and apostolic teaching.

At the heart of Nicea was this Christological question: Was Jesus Christ created? If so, that would mean that he wasn't at the same level, or of the same nature, as God. If that was the case, critics of this belief argued, then the works of Jesus didn't have the same impact. Only God could truly forgive sins, and if Jesus wasn't fully God, then his work on the cross couldn't completely remove the penalty of sin. Arians weren't necessarily evil people; they just looked at certain Biblical passages (like Jesus as God's "only begotten son"), took them very literally, but neglected to see the theological implications of their interpretation. Along came men like Athanasius of Alexandria, who tried desperately to point out these theological problems, and some deep schisms that were already in the church began to grow. Athanasius (especially in his wonderful Incarnation of the Word) said there was a need to foster this theological understanding of Jesus' nature, built upon a strong Biblical understanding. Nicea was largely an issue of Biblical interpretation. What Nicea was not: A political ploy to stifle some sort of "true" Christianity. Was there a vote? Yes. Was there political maneuvering? It's likely. But that doesn't automatically lead to some sort of deep-seated conspiracy. It wasn't a time to somehow secretly throw out certain heretical books that were guaranteed a place in the Bible. It was, again, an issue of Biblical interpretation. It was about understanding Jesus' nature theologically, and not just Biblically.

The Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) was the ecumenical council where, after centuries of debate, the Christian church finally put forth its definitive statement of how Jesus’ divine and human natures interrelated. This statement, known as the Chalcedonian definition, was considered much broad. To this day it is considered to be the orthodox explanation of Christ’s 2 natures by virtually all Christian churches. There were actually 3 Councils of Ephesus. The 1st and most famous (AD 431) is mostly known for condemning the teachings of a bishop named Nestorius concerning Christ’s 2 natures. Nestorius felt that any union between divine and human natures was impossible, and that therefore Jesus must have had 2 completely separate natures within him. One effect of this concept was that Nestorius taught the Virgin Mary actually only gave birth to the human nature of Jesus, and therefore should not be called theonomous (“God-bearer”), as she had been back to the early days of the church, but only christotokos (“Christ-bearer”). The 1st Ephesian Council decided that Nestorius’ teaching was in error. As the Chalcedon Council would 20 years later, the theologians at Ephesus held that Jesus was a single, undivided human in whom divine and human natures are uniquely combined and unified without confusion. Nestorius was removed from his position as archbishop of Constantinople and eventually exiled to a monastery at El-Kharga in Egypt. Nonetheless, groups of Nestorian Christians continue to exist to this day, particularly in Iran and Iraq.

Works Cited:

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