

THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA

BY

ROBERT C. PUTNAM, C. S.

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In her Message to The Mother Church for 1902, Mrs. Eddy makes an astounding statement concerning the disciples of Jesus. She says "The ignoble conduct of his disciples towards their Master, showing their unfitness to follow him, ended in the downfall of genuine Christianity, about the year 325, and the violent death of all his disciples save one" (p. 18). There is no record in biblical history of the death of John, the beloved disciple. Tertullian tells of John's escape from death when put in the boiling oil. In view of this and Mrs. Eddy's statement, can we assume that John overcame death? How can we conclude otherwise when we add to these facts the statements by Jesus in Revelation concerning the angel which said to John, "I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets." John was then on a plane with the angels as messages of God. Since God's messages live forever, John must have overcome death.

What made John loyal to the end? His loyalty had already been tested once at the cross when he was found

to be the only disciple there. What was it that John saw in Jesus that others failed to see? Was it not that he saw Jesus as the man of prophecy, as that one who from the beginning was destined to be God's witness? Seeing this, John realized that the Word spoken by Jesus was not his own, was not just another human opinion, but was the Word of God. He saw also that Jesus was the man spoken of by all the prophets since the dawn of history. On the walk to Emmaus Jesus appeared to two men and "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24:27). Seeing the care Jesus took to reveal his true place in prophecy before his ascension, is it not possible that failure to appreciate this fact may have been the cause of Christianity's downfall?

Mrs. Eddy referred to 325 A.D. as if it signaled the crash of genuine Christianity. Let us turn back the pages of time to this date. We find that Constantine has called the council of Nicaea this very year. The 318 bishops were called to decide on the canonization of The Bible. The Pentateuch had been closed to changes in the year 350 B.C. So much confusion had arisen over the rest of

The Bible that this Council was called to put an end to it. The importance of their decision cannot be overestimated. It now appears that they decided to include the books of the New Testament as we have them today with the books of Barnabas and Hermas* at the end apparently to be regarded as a sort of appendix.

The number of bishops (318) called to confer was the same number given by Barnabas as signifying Jesus on the cross. This shows the close connection of the Council's meeting with the decision to be made on the book of Barnabas. This book gives a marvelous account of the places throughout the Old Testament which prophesied of Jesus and reveals his true place in biblical prophecy. Barnabas is to Jesus as Bliss Knapp is to Mary Baker Eddy.

The Number 318

In the battle with the Amalekites (Ex. 17:10-12) about 1400 B.C., Aaron and Hur (the husband of Miriam) held up the arms of Moses in the form of a cross as he sat on the rock (Christ).

A T is a symbol for 300, and 10 and 8 are the letters of the alphabet for J and H for Jehovah or Jesus or Joshua.

This shows that Moses knew of Jesus on the cross about 1400 B.C.

According to Barnabas, (8:11) Abraham circumcised 318 men, so Jesus on the cross was known to him about 2,000 B.C.

Now Abraham took 318 men all born in his household to fight to save his brother's son, Lot. After that, Melchizedek appeared and blessed Abraham, for Jesus was a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 7:21-22).

Thus it appears that in 325 A.D. a fateful decision was made to reduce the status of this book. If the founder of true Christianity could not be seen in his proper place, it is evident that genuine Christianity would fall as Mrs. Eddy said it did at this time. Today Christianity is largely accepted by the world, but is it accepted as Jesus taught it? He said "Heal the sick." Only Christian Science is today teaching and demonstrating primitive Christianity.

It is significant that it is difficult today to find any authentic accounts of the acts of the Council of Nicaea, yet it appears that the above-mentioned decision was made at that meeting. Shortly thereafter, Constantine ordered Eusebius to prepare fifty copies of the Divine Scriptures

for the Churches of Constantinople. The "Sinaitic" manuscript, extant today, appears to be one of those copies. It contains the present New Testament with Barnabas and Hermas in an appendix. In A.D. 365, after the fall of genuine Christianity, Archbishop Athanasius sent out his Easter letter, and it contained a list of the books of the New Testament considered canonical. It is the same as we have today. The Vulgate Bible, prepared by Jerome in A.D. 383, from which came the authorized version, used the books given by Athanasius.

In addition to the decisions on which was to be considered Holy Writ, the most important controversy involved the conflict between the Arius and Athanasius doctrines. This dispute arose because of Jesus' statements "I and my Father are one," "My Father is greater than I," also his statement about his being the "Son of God." Essentially the question was "Is Jesus identical with God?"

Arius was an Egyptian presbyter who held that however far the Son may surpass other created beings, he remains himself a created being. Athanasius was bishop of Alexandria and represented the view that the Father and

Son possess the essential divinity of God equally, that the Son existed eternally, that the Son is as divine as the Father and can be worshipped without idolatry. This famous Council of Nicaea met in 325 A.D. to decide the issue. The actual controversy was largely on definitions of terms which could not be defined. Stripped of the details, the actual problem was this - was Jesus God? The Arians were saying no, the Athanasians, yes. The Council said yes, and this subsequently became the Roman Catholic doctrine. This decision of the Council had enormous consequences.

In 496 A.D. Clovis, a Salian Frank assisted Sigebert, a king of the Ripuarian Franks, to fight the German Alemanni. When it appeared that Clovis might be defeated, he vowed to his wife, Clotilda, that he would become a Roman Catholic Christian if God gave him the victory. He did win and kept his promise. German law was then superseded by Roman law, and the Arius doctrine was superseded by the doctrine of Athanasius, and the idea that Jesus was God was established as Roman Catholic doctrine.

Subsequently the Emperor Phocas acknowledged Pope Boniface IV in 606 A.D. as head of the church with Rome as the center.

In 1909 Mr. Kimball passed away. Shortly thereafter, a member of the household at Chestnut Hill came rushing into Mrs. Eddy's study and said she had seen Mr. Kimball downstairs. Without looking up, Mrs. Eddy said, "I wonder if he found the book he was looking for."

In Mrs. Eddy's library there was a copy of the New Testament Apocrypha containing the Book of Barnabas and the Similitudes of Hermas, especially the Ninth Similitude discussing the false qualities (stones), all those that oppose God, to be eliminated from the temple.

Mrs. Eddy had discussed the books with Dr. Baker. What was the book Mr. Kimball was seeking?

*Baker, Metaphysical Notes, p. 4 - Apocryphal N. T. III
Hermas Similitude 9