

THREE GREAT COUNCILS

References:

Notes For Servants:

- 1.
- 2.

Objectives:

General:

Specific:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Instructions:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Bible Verse:

**“And put no difference between us and them,
purifying their hearts by faith.”**

(Acts 15:9)

Lesson:

THREE GREAT COUNCILS

In the first three centuries, Christians were persecuted and hundreds of thousands were martyred for their faith. During the time of persecution, the Christians defended their faith and died for it. Christian beliefs were simple, pure and strong. In the year 313, Constantine, the Roman Emperor, accepted Christianity and forbade all persecution of Christians.

In few years, Christianity became a state religion of the Roman Empire. Statesmen and officials were Christians. The Christian Church faced an important task in the following two centuries: TO EXPLAIN the Christian faith, and to answer the challenges of pagan schools and heretic philosophies which continued to influence the minds of many people.

THE DANGER OF ARIANISM

At the beginning of the fourth century, a priest in the city of Alexandria called Arius started a

strange teaching. He taught that Jesus Christ was not God in the same essence as God the Father, and not eternal. Arius was a cunning scholar. He was able to popularize his ideas among simple-minded people, as well as among some highly educated people who were still attached to pagan thinking. He was a good propagandist, cultivating his popularity by visits, speeches, letters, and by writing popular songs in which he formulated his theological arguments.

The teaching of Arius was more dangerous for Christianity than the worst persecutions. If Christ was not God, who had become Man, who had suffered and died for men, and in His death had conquered death, then Christianity would have become some moral ideas, like what pagan philosophers had offered. Arius taught that God was a Supreme Divine Being completely separated from mankind. Christianity professed faith in God Who so loved man that He Himself became Man and suffered and died for the sins of man.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.” (John 1:1-2)

THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA

The Church of Alexandria felt the danger of the Arian heresy. Alexandrus, the Patriarch of the Coptic Church at that time, condemned the teachings of Arius and tried to guide him to the Christian faith. Arius complained to the Emperor Constantine. The Emperor finally accepted to call a General Ecumenical Council, in order to settle the dispute. Three hundred and eighteen bishops and priests from the churches all-over the world were assembled in Nicaea in Asia Minor in the spring of 325 A.D. Among them, there was Bishop Paul from Syria with his burned hands carrying the signs of the persecution he had suffered, and St. Paphnotius and St. Potamon, both blinded in one eye and lamed from the tortures inflicted on them, Patriarch Alexandrus and his deacon St. Athanasius the Great from Egypt.

The Council studied the teachings of Arius and examined them carefully. Long and heated arguments took place. A lengthy dialogue took place between the young deacon Athanasius and Arius. Athanasius explained the Orthodox faith showing how THE SON IS OF ONE ESSENCE OF THE FATHER. The Council finally confirmed that Arius had distorted the Christian faith. The Fathers of the Council, led by Athanasius, proclaimed the faith of the Church in clear terms: “We believe in ONE God, God the Father The Pantokrator, of One Essence of the Father.”

The Council of Nicaea was one of the greatest events in the history of Christianity. It has brought together for the first time the largest number of bishops who formulated the Creed of the Church, and saved it from the Arian heresy.

THE COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE

The Christian faith was again threatened by a new heresy. Mecedonius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, taught that the Holy Spirit was created. A second ecumenical Council was assembled in Constantinople, in May 381 A.D., by invitation of Emperor Theodosius the Great. One hundred and fifty bishops attended the Council. After lengthy discussions, the Council refuted the heresy of Mecedonius and completed the Creed of the Church.

“We believe in the Holy Spirit, The Lord, the Giver of life, Who Comes forth from the Father, Who spoke by the Prophets We look for the resurrection of the dead, And the life of the coming age. Amen.”

THE COUNCIL OF EPHESUS

After fifty years, Nestor, the Patriarch of Constantinople, preached that God was not born from the Virgin Mary, but she had given birth to a human being and God dwelt in him later on. He forced his teachings on the Church. His heresy reached Alexandria. The Patriarch of Alexandria, St. Cyril the Great, wrote to Nestor advising him to leave his wrong teaching. He also wrote to many bishops around the world warning them of the danger of the new heresy. Finally, a third ecumenical

Council was assembled in Ephesus in 431 to settle the matter. Two hundred bishops attended the Council. The council refuted the teaching of Nestor and declared the introduction to the Creed:

"We exult you, O Mother of the True Light; and we glorify thee O Saint Mother of God ...etc."

Conclusion:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.