

# Year Marks Anniversary of First Council

**New York [RNS]** — The year 1975 marks the 1,650th anniversary of the first General or Ecumenical Council of the Christian Church.

Convoked by the Emperor Constantine, it opened on May 20, 325 in the imperial palace at a city called Nicaea (now Iznik, Turkey) on the Asiatic shore of the Bosphorous, some 60 to 70 miles from Constantinople (modern Istanbul).

The overriding concern of this first assembly of bishops from all parts of "the whole world" was to find a remedy for the disturbances that had seriously troubled the Eastern provinces of that world — the Roman empire — for nearly two years.

The cause of these disturbances, which involved rioting and fighting in one city after another, was a new teaching about a basic mystery of the Christian religion. The teaching, known as "Arianism," after its chief and most vocal proponent, Arius, a priest in Alexandria, was in essence a denial that Jesus Christ is God.

"Arianism," according to the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, "maintained that the Son of God (or the Word) was not eternal but created by God the Father from nothing as an instrument for the creation of the world; and that therefore He was not God by nature, but a changeable creature, His dignity as Son of God having been bestowed on Him by the Father on account of His foreseen abiding righteousness."

The bishops of what came to be known as the first Council of Nicaea condemned Arius' teaching as flatly contradictory to traditional Christian belief and affirmed that Christ is truly divine, "true God."

Although the record shows that this conciliar action did not put an end to the controversy, which continued to afflict the Church for more than half a century, it did lay the groundwork for later conciliar declarations and provide the basis for what the Westminster Dictionary of Church History calls "the whole framework of Christian theology as traditionally expressed."

## 8 St. Joseph Sisters Offer Final Pledges

Eight young women have made their final commitment to the Sisters of St. Joseph in recent weeks. The traditional rite of offering vows was set in seven separate liturgies embellished with contemporary details.

Sisters Christine Lloyd and Mary Maywalt, who teach at St. Agnes High School, shared a ceremony at the Motherhouse. During the Offertory, St. Agnes girls performed a liturgical dance choreographed by Sister Mary Kay Ryan.

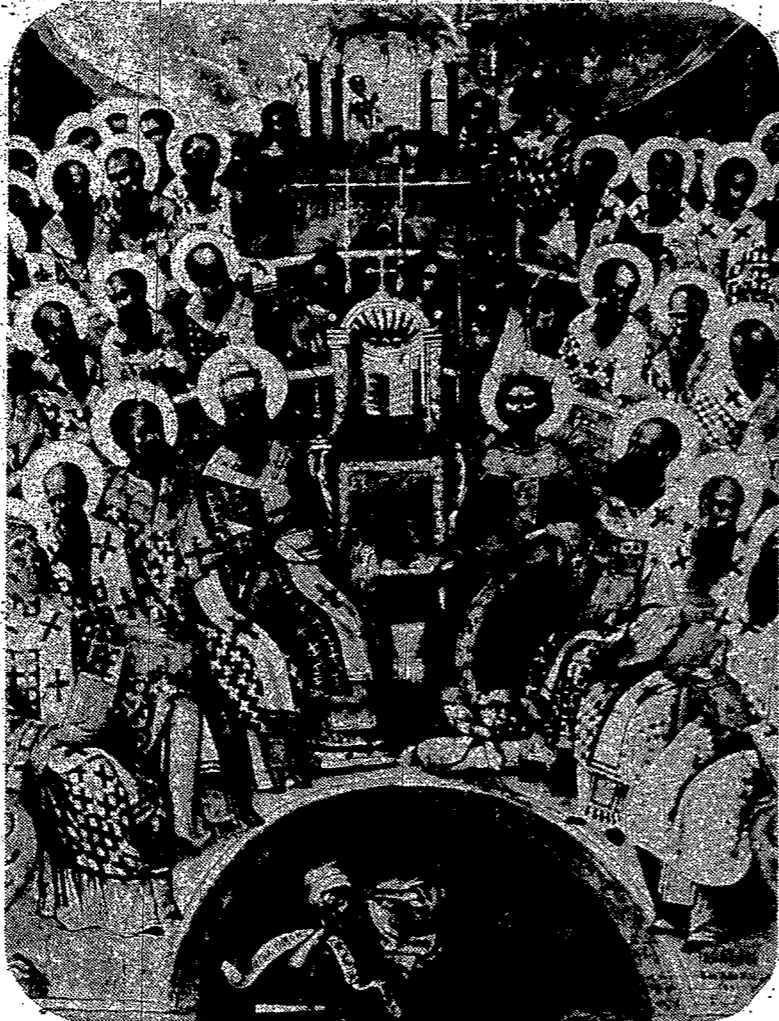
Sister Ann Dobbertin had a folk liturgy at Holy Trinity, Webster, and used her pupils' art work as a program cover.

Sister Jeanné Marie Day's guests at St. Charles Borromeo in Greece were the children of St. Joseph's Villa nearby, where she teaches.

At three of the ceremonies the homilies were delivered by members of the St. Joseph community, Sisters Elizabeth Ann

### BLESSED SACRAMENT

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on the first Thursday of each month at Blessed Sacrament Church, Monroe, at Oxford. The church will be open for this devotion July 3, from noon until 5 p.m. There will be benediction and the regular 5:15 p.m. Mass.



**A fresco depicting the first ecumenical council shows Arius being anathematized. The picture was painted about 1500 at Heraklion in Crete. (RNS)**

It is the judgment of many scholars that the Arian heresy posed a very grave danger to the Church. In the opinion of Adolf von Harnack (1850-1930), eminent German church historian and controversial theologian, Arianism, if it had triumphed, would have ruined Christianity completely, emptying it of all religious content, leaving it a mere system of cosmology and ethics.

The late Msgr. Philip Hughes, British Catholic historian, in his "History of the General Councils," characterized Arianism as "one of the greatest dangers" that the Church has had to face, "and this despite the fact that, in the critical Fourth Century, Arianism was never a popular thing."

The laity, as a whole, revolted from it. And it was this revolt, particularly in the East, that led Constantine, within a few months

of his conquest of the empire's Eastern provinces, to convocate the Church's first general council.

The chief concern of this theologically naive, but enthusiastic, "convert" to Christianity, who deferred his baptism until he lay on his death bed 25 years later, was for political unity and domestic tranquillity, rather than for settlement of a theological issue as such.

But, responding to the imperial invitation, bishops came to Nicaea from all corners of the empire. The vast bulk of them were from the Greek-speaking lands where the Arian trouble was raging, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Asia Minor. But there were bishops also from Persia and the Caucasus, from the lands between the Danube and the Aegean, and from Greece.

## R.I. Law On Abortion Loses in Court

**Providence [RNS]** — Rhode Island's 20-day-old abortion law, which barred physicians from aborting a "quick child" (fetus) and imposed the liability of prosecution for manslaughter, was ruled unconstitutional by a federal judge here.

Judge Raymond J. Pettine, chief judge of the U.S. District Court in Providence, said the state's statute was unconstitutional because it failed to include the mental and physical health of the mother as an exception for permitting an abortion.

State Atty. Gen. Julius C. Michaelson said he intended to appeal the ruling to the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston.

The Rhode Island law, signed by Gov. Philip Noel in late May, defined a "quick child" as one with a heartbeat, electronically measurable brain waves, discernible movement, and the ability to survive the trauma of birth. The only exception to the law involved a case in which the mother's life was endangered.

Opponents of the measure argued that it violated the U.S. Supreme Court rulings of 1973 establishing the legality of abortions during the first six months of pregnancy. The Rhode Island law applied to cases in the second three-month period of pregnancy.

Apparently, the only bishops from the West were from North Africa (Carthage), Italy (Milan), Gaul (Dijon), and two other Western Sees.

Pope Sylvester I, the Bishop of Rome, was unable to attend. He was represented by two priests from his diocese.

How many bishops attended is not known with certainty. The traditional number is 318, but the Oxford Dictionary thinks between 220 and 250 "more likely."

After the scarlet-and-gold clad master of "the whole world" had opened the proceedings with a speech of welcome and an exhortation to peaceful conference, the council fathers got down to business.

First off, they rejected an Arian creed offered by Bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia, the chief ally of Arius. Then, after much discussion and argument, took (probably) the Baptismal Creed of Jerusalem, as it is called, inserted a key — non-Scriptural — word, **homo-ousion** and declared:

"We believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, born of the Father, God from God, the sole-begotten; that is to say, of the substance of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, not made, of the same nature as, (or **consubstantial with**) — homo-ousion — the Father, through whom all things were made, which are in heaven and on earth."

This Nicene declaration, with four anti-Arian condemnations (anathemas) attached, were subscribed to be all the Council fathers present, except two.

The bishops then took up other matters of lesser import — touching on the date for the observance of Easter, the readmission of schismatics and apostates, and various aspects of clerical life — and closed their session either on June 19 or June 25, 325. (Authorities differ: Some modern scholars have argued that the closure was only an adjournment, and that a second and concluding session was held in 326.)

The word **homo-ousion** however, as it turned out, was to haunt the first Council of Nicaea. Adopted as a touchstone to distinguish traditional, orthodox faith in the divinity of Christ from Arian aberrations, it actually, and unfortunately for Church unity, was susceptible to variant, unorthodox interpretations.

And so it was that Arianism, in proliferating forms, was not really buried once and for all until the Council of Constantinople — reckoned as the Church's second ecumenical Council — in 381.

But it was the Church's first ecumenical Council that had intended to, and did, solemnly affirm the divinity of the man Jesus Christ, and unswervingly down the centuries the Church has continued to proclaim that He is indeed "true God from true God."

**The Church 1975**

Fr. Andrew Greeley

There are distinct advantages in the United States for being Jewish.

One of the more important is that when a member of the Jewish cultural elite begins to speak nonsense, he gets clobbered from all sides. The people who write letters to "Commentary" magazine may not be the most gentle and kindly souls in the world, but at least they keep their friends and neighbors honest. If you are a Jewish intellectual, you darn well have to know what you're talking about.

But if you are a Catholic intellectual, that's not necessary at all. You can write the most uninformed nonsense and get away with it, because Catholic intellectuals are sacred personages above and beyond criticism in their own community. This enables them to write drivel and pretentious nonsense, and still have the pleasant feeling that they are saying something important and significant. Abigail McCarthy, a charming and gifted woman, I am told, has recently joined the ranks of the Catholic intelligentsia who are pontificating on the subject of ethnicity.

The Lady Abigail grudgingly concedes that there may be some godd things to say about ethnicity, but quotes with admiration the comments of Justus George Lawlor on the ethnic revival. No man to use mild and moderate language, he calls the new ethnics "rebarbative and witless"; and the ethnic traits about which he writes have been dredged up from the "cloaca of prejudice and racist mythology."

Latins, Lawlor tells us, are urged to be ethnic by acting passionate, irrational, and lachrymose. The Irish expect to be bibulous, credulous, and uxorious. Slavs are supposed to be lusty, gutsy, and liberated from deodorants. If you are as important as Justus George Lawlor, you don't have to provide documentation for your assertions. If that's the way he says the new ethnicists are, then that's the way they are.

Is the new ethnicity, Ms. McCarthy asks, a right path or a byway? I wonder how many other social phenomena are to be subjected to such a simpleminded moral judgment? American society has been diverse from the very beginning; it is still diverse. And Ms. McCarthy wonders whether that is a bypath or the "right" way.

Then the Lady Abigail turns to your reluctant correspondent, relying on quotations from a newspaper article about a speech of mine. Now there is no reason why she should feel any need to refer to my work, but at the risk of being petulant, I must say that if she does refer to it, the intellectually honest thing to do would be to rely on something more than newspaper accounts of a lecture. I spent four years working on a tome, "Ethnicity in the United States." If Ms. McCarthy wants to speak to my position, as she "puzzles" over the new ethnicity, she should at least do me the courtesy of reading the book.

"Okay, so the Catholic intellectuals don't want to read my book. I write too much anyhow. Besides, your typical armchair Catholic expert doesn't have the time to pore over statistical tables. But they could turn to the new book by Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, "Ethnicity." It is a collection of essays by scholars from all over the world. Maybe if the Catholic critics of ethnicity realize that the book is published by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and based on papers presented at a meeting at Daedalus House, they will be impressed. If the American Academy approves ethnicity, maybe it will be all right for Catholics to accept it.