

**A HISTORICAL VIEW OF
THE COUNCIL OF NICE,
WITH A TRANSLATIONS
OF DOCUMENTS**

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A Historical View of the Council of Nice, with a translations of documents by Isaac Boyle

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ISAAC BOYLE

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BY THE REV. ISAAC BOYLE, A. M.

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P R E F A C E .

THE ecclesiastical history of Eusebius extends only to A. D. 324. The Council of Nice was convened the following year. The publisher of Eusebius being about to furnish another edition of the work, and thinking that a translation of certain documents relating to that celebrated convention, throwing light on its transactions, would be interesting to the readers of Eusebius, and add some value to the new edition, the writer of the following pages, was induced, at his request, to undertake the performance of such a version. But in the prosecution of his task, he perceived that the documents would be better understood, and consequently be more acceptable to the reader, if preceded by a short and connected view of the origin of the Arian controversy, and of the proceedings of the synod; derived from such original and authentic sources of information as were within his power. He has therefore introduced the documents by such a summary of events. In preparing it, it is very possible he may have inadvertently fallen into some mistakes; but not, he trusts, into any error of importance. He is conscious, at least, of no wilful misrep-

resentation of facts, nor of any intentional departure from the truth of history.

In some instances, the writer has given the descriptions of the authors, from whom he has derived his materials, with more minuteness of detail than may seem consistent with the narrow limits to which he has been restricted. But he thought that these particulars might be useful as presenting a picture of the manners and character of the times to which they relate. He has also given at length some narratives which have no immediate reference to his main design, because he considered them as interesting or instructive.

In the translations annexed, he has sought to give a faithful version of the originals; without, however, obscuring the meaning by aiming at too great a degree of mere verbal exactness. In other words, he has endeavored not to sacrifice the sense and spirit of his authors, by too strict an adherence to the letter. How far he has succeeded in this attempt, is respectfully submitted to the decision of those, who are best qualified to judge.

A HISTORICAL VIEW OF THE COUNCIL OF NICE.

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It was the charge of our Saviour to his apostles, after his resurrection, to "go and teach all nations." This command was, in a great measure, accomplished by them, and those who succeeded them in the ministry, within three centuries of the time when the gospel was first preached in Judea by its divine Author. In the prosecution of their glorious enterprise, a great proportion of the then known world, by the blessing of God on their indefatigable labors, submitted to the religion of Jesus. They visited the burning climes of Africa, and the various regions of Asia, to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation; and a great part of Europe, from the countries bordering on the Mediterranean to the distant shores of Britain, received the light of Christian truth. But, although their efforts were crowned with so considerable a share of success, they encountered in their progress almost continual opposition, and endured nearly every variety of hardship and persecution. Some of them were assailed by the bigotry and malice of the Jews, and others became victims to the rage and cruelty of their gentile oppressors.

They were exposed to the lawless violence of the multitude, and suffered from the sanguinary decrees of rulers and princes. If, under the milder sway of a few of the Roman emperors, they enjoyed an interval of comparative repose, it was only to be followed by a renewal of their calamities. At length, however, a brighter prospect was opened to the Christian world. In consequence of the victory of Constantine, over the tyrant Licinius, in the year of our Lord 323, external tranquillity was fully secured to the Church; and in order to confirm it, several beneficial laws were enacted by the emperor. He recalled those who had been banished for the profession of the faith; and the property of such as had been despoiled of their goods, was restored. He gave directions for enlarging the ancient churches, and building new and more splendid ones. He commanded that the clergy should be held in honor; and shielded their persons from indignity and outrage. The people were exhorted to relinquish idolatry, and embrace the true religion; and many other salutary measures were adopted, to extend the influence, and promote the welfare of Christianity.

But while Constantine was zealously employed in this laudable design, and the Church was protected from foreign enemies, a dissension had arisen in its own bosom, which occasioned much animosity, and long continued to disturb its domestic peace. It happened that Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria in Egypt, disputing one day, in the presence of his presbyters and other clergy, on the subject of the three divine persons, and being desirous of making a display of his knowledge, remarked, that in the Trinity there was a unity.* Arius, one of his presbyters, who was well versed in the art of reasoning and in metaphysical distinctions, thinking that the bishop was desirous of introducing the opinion of Sabellius † of Lybia, inclined to an error directly

* Socrates, L. I. c. 5.

† It will be recollected that Sabellius, who lived about the middle of the third century, believed in a *modal* Trinity, considering the Son and Holy Spirit as different manifestations only of the Godhead, and not as separate persons.

opposed to it, and replied, with great asperity, that if the Father begat the Son, the latter must have had a beginning; from which, he continued, it clearly followed that there was a time when he was not, and that his substance was made from nothing.* These novel and hitherto unheard of opinions excited many persons to enter into the controversy. By a little spark a great fire was thus kindled. The evil which originated in the church of Alexandria, pervaded the whole of Egypt, Lybia, and the upper Thebais, and reached at length to many other cities and provinces. Numbers favored the sentiments of Arius; but no one defended them with more warmth and earnestness than Eusebius, formerly bishop of Berytus, but who had now surreptitiously obtained possession of the bishopric of Nicomedia, in Bithynia. Alexander, being greatly incensed at these proceedings, assembled a numerous council, in which Arius and his followers were deposed; and afterwards wrote to the other bishops informing them of the fact.† His letter, copies of which were sent to all the cities under his spiritual jurisdiction, served only to increase the mischief, by kindling the flames of discord among those who received it. Some signified their approbation of the letter, while others expressed their dissent. Eusebius, of Nicomedia, opposed it more strenuously than others, as it made unfavorable mention of himself. The credit of Eusebius, at that period, was great, because the emperor then made Nicome-

* Sozomen gives the following account of this dispute. "Arius having declared his opinions in public, some of those who heard of them, blamed Alexander for having suffered him to advance such novel doctrines, but this prelate thought proper to leave the two parties at liberty to dispute upon an obscure subject, lest if he should prohibit the controversy, he might seem to terminate it by force, rather than by persuasion. Sitting, therefore, in the midst of his clergy, he permitted every one to say what he thought proper. Alexander inclined sometimes to one side, and sometimes to the other, but declared at last for those who maintained that the Son of God is consubstantial and coeternal with the Father, and required Arius to hold the same opinion; and because he refused to do it, drove him from the Church, together with the priests and deacons who supported him." *Hist. Eccles. L. I. c. 15.*

† Documents, A.