

The Authority of the Ancient Councils And the Tradition of the Fathers

The Councils in the Early Church

The Council “was an event rather than an institution.” (p. 116)

It was in 2nd c. Asia Minor that Councils came into existence. (p. 116)

By the 3rd c. in North Africa a “kind of conciliar system was established.” (p. 116)

The Imperial or Ecumenical Council

“It would be no exaggeration to suggest that Councils were never regarded as a canonical institution, but rather as occasional charismatic events.” (p. 117)

Councils were recognized by their “charismatic authority,” not by any formal regularity. (p. 117)

“The Council is not above the Church ...” (p. 118)

Christ: The Criterion of Truth

“Christ is the Truth ...” but “How is revelation to be understood?” (p. 119)

“The appeal to tradition was actually an appeal to the mind of the church, her *phronema*.” (p. 119)

“The permanence of Christian belief was the most conspicuous sign and token of its truth; there were no innovations.” (p. 119)

Arguments from antiquity had to be used carefully, for “Our Lord designated himself not as custom but as truth.” (Tertullian, p. 120)

“Antiquity without truth is age-old error.” (Cyprian, p. 120)

“In the Gospel the Lord says, ‘I am the truth.’ He did not say, ‘I am the custom’.” (Augustine, p. 120)

The Meaning of the Appeal to the Fathers

“Tradition came to mean transmission rather than delivery.” (p. 122)

“Apostles and Fathers ... It was this double reference, both to the origin and to the unflinching and continuous preservation, that assured authenticity and warranted belief.” (p. 122)

“Fathers were those who transmitted and propagated the right doctrine, the teaching of the apostles; they were guides and masters in Christian instruction and catechesis.” (p. 122)

See quotation from George Prestige on p. 123.

The phrase “The Fathers of the Church” meant that they spoke on behalf of the Church.

“The Fathers were true inspirers of the Councils, whether they were present or in absentia, and often even after they have gone to eternal rest.” (p. 123)

“The teaching authority of the ecumenical councils is grounded in the infallibility of the Church.” (p. 124)

Possible Questions for Discussion

What does the word “Ecumenical” even mean?

If you were asked to describe/define an Ecumenical Council in five minutes or less, what would you say?

Fr. Florovsky’s article does not speak of any specific Council in detail. Can you name the Seven Ecumenical Councils; give an approximate date; and discuss the main theme under discussion?

What are the main dogmas witnessed to by the Ecumenical Councils?

How would you argue for the Councils as meaningful events in today’s contemporary Christian world?

How do we define the Fathers of the Church, according to Fr. Florovsky? What is their great contribution?

What do we mean by the double reference to the “Apostles *and* Fathers?”

Why do you think that there is such a wide-scale revival of the study of the Church Fathers today?