

Kingdom Congress of Illinois

Position Paper on Ekklesia Convocation: Convening for a Set Agenda

An ekklesia convocation is not a casual gathering of the saints; it is convened with a predetermined agenda. Something specific is to be determined or accomplished. The community of called out ones convenes with a purpose. Proclamations are made in the authority of Jesus' name that express God's heart on the matter, usually requiring searching the scriptures for insight and instruction before making those proclamations.

This convening with a set agenda in the context of a called out community, and a body that searched the scriptures for the related transcendent principle before issuing a proclamation can be found in the following examples of ekklesia convocations.

THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM

A specific issue prompted the calling of a convocation of the ekklesia at Jerusalem, which researched the matter and, with the authority of the scriptures, issued a proclamation for the church. The specific issue that caused the council to be convened was that Paul and Barnabas, apostles to the Gentiles, were disputing the teaching of certain Jewish Christians that Gentiles could not be saved unless they were circumcised (Acts 15: 1, 2). The apostles and elders came together to consider the matter (v.6). Peter gave testimony of how God had dealt with him regarding the acceptance of the Gentiles on the basis of faith in the Lord Jesus. Paul and Barnabas gave witness to the miracles worked among the Gentiles. James quoted the scriptures (Amos 9:11, 12) reminding the convocation that God had always purposed to include the Gentiles in His family. Understanding how the scriptures spoke to the issue, a proclamation was agreed upon and written down to be distributed to the church. "The massive influx of non-Jewish converts caused the Apostles to convene a council at Jerusalem. During this convocation, God revealed His eternal plan to build a church from the called out of all nations." (Dr. Patti Amsden; The Apostles' Creed. p. 176)

Later when Peter visited Antioch, he followed his convictions and was free to associate with the Gentile Christians. However, he yielded to pressure from the Judaizers, those who taught that circumcision was necessary for salvation, and began to draw back from the Gentiles thus influencing other Jews including Paul's associate Barnabas. Paul confronted the hypocrisy of Peter's actions (Galatians 2). The issue had already previously been decided by the council at Jerusalem, and Paul adds that Peter was not acting in line with the truth of the gospel (Gal. 2:14). The Bible Gateway Commentary postulates reasons for Peter's actions:

“At that time, Jewish Christians in Judea were facing bitter antagonism from Zealot-minded Jews for socializing with Gentiles. It is likely that the delegation from James simply reported to Peter that his open and unrestricted association with Gentiles in Antioch would cause, or had already caused, the church in Jerusalem to suffer greatly at the hands of the circumcision group. Confronted by these practical concerns for his home church and its mission to the Jews, Peter acted against his better judgment and separated himself from the Gentiles.”
(<https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/IVP-NT/Gal/Conflict-Antioch>).

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The specific issue of whether or not Gentile converts must become Jews prompted the calling of a convocation of the ekklesia. Having researched the matter and with the authority of the scriptures, the ekklesia issued a written proclamation that was disseminated throughout the local church. Later conflicts referenced the proclamation to promote resolution.

SEVEN COUNCILS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

There were seven ecumenical councils of the early church. These councils commenced with the First Council of Nicaea in 325 and concluded with the Second Council of Nicaea in 787. Between these two events were five more, each of which attempted to understand and establish a unified Christian theology. Since Emperor Constantine had made Christianity the state religion, each council was called by the emperor, usually in an attempt to unite the empire through uniting the Church. All but the seventh Council dealt with heresies concerning the nature of Christ. A brief summary of each Council follows below, then the Council of Nicaea and the Council of Ephesus are discussed in greater detail.

The First Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) drew up the Nicene Creed and established that the Son was true God, condemning Arianism. The First Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381) condemned Apollinarism, which taught that there was no human mind or soul in Christ. The Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431), condemned the doctrine of Nestorianism and reinforced the doctrine of the incarnation. The Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) repudiated the Eutychian doctrine of monophysitism, which taught that the Christ's human nature and His divine nature became one and that His human nature was absorbed by the divine, basically the opposite of Nestorianism. The Confession of Chalcedon provides a clear statement on the human and divine nature of Christ. The Second Council of Constantinople (A.D. 553) called by Emperor Justinian was basically an effort to reconcile what had become the Eastern and Western Church. The Third Council of Constantinople (A.D. 680) repudiated monothelitism, a doctrine that taught that Christ had two natures but only one will, and was again an attempt to unite the Church. The Second Council of Nicaea (A.D. 787) restored the veneration of icons as worthy of adoration but not worship. For a time one of the Emperors had forbidden the veneration of icons.

THE FIRST COUNCIL OF NICEA

The First Council of Nicaea in the fourth century was the first ecumenical, or church-wide, council of the Church and resulted in the first uniform Christian doctrine called the Nicene Creed. When Constantine won control of the Roman Empire in A.D. 312, and elevated Christianity to favored status, he discovered the fractured state of the church and what it believed. To bring unity he convened the Council at Nicaea. One purpose of the Council was to resolve disagreements arising over the nature of the Son in relationship to the Father, which was the essence of the Arian controversy.

The authority, Emperor Constantine, summoned bishops from all provinces and delegates came from every region of the Roman Empire. The Council was run like a Roman Senate. The Apostle's Creed was in existence at that time but was not uniform.

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The particular part of the Apostle's Creed defended and enlarged upon concerned the nature of the Son in his relationship to the Father. The disputed issues centered on the natures and relationship of God (the Father) and the Son of God (Jesus). The disagreements sprang from different ideas about the God-head and what it meant for Jesus to be His son. Alexander maintained that the Son was divine in just the same sense that the Father is, co-eternal with the Father or else He could not be a true Son. Arius emphasized the supremacy and uniqueness of God the Father, meaning that the Father alone is almighty and infinite and that, therefore, the Father's divinity must be greater than the Son's. Arius taught that the Son had a beginning and that He possessed neither the eternity nor the true divinity of the Father, but was rather made "God" only by the Father's permission and power and that the Son was the very first and the most perfect of God's creatures.

The Council declared that the Son was true God, co-eternal with the Father and begotten from His same substance, arguing that such a doctrine best codified the Scriptural presentation of the Son as well as traditional Christian belief about him handed down from the Apostles. Jesus Christ is described as "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God", proclaiming His divinity. Jesus Christ is said to be "begotten, not made", asserting that He was not a mere creature brought into being out of nothing but the true Son of God brought into being 'from the substance of the Father'. Finally, He is said to be "of one being with The Father". Other aspects of the Apostle's Creed were expanded in the Nicene Creed, but the relationship of the Father and the Son was the most critical. The Council settled the date for Easter according to the Roman calendar and many liturgical issues as well.

The long-term effects of the Council of Nicaea were significant. For the first time, representatives of many of the bishops of the Church convened to agree on a doctrinal statement. Also for the first time, the Emperor played a role, by calling together the bishops under his authority and using the power of the state to give the council's orders effect. Short term factions continued in the church as different Emperors came into power, but the Nicene Creed proved foundational in future church disagreements.

THE COUNCIL OF EPHESUS

The Council of Ephesus was convened in 431 by Theodosius II, emperor of the eastern half of the Roman empire, at the request of Nesotrius, the patriarch of Constantinople. Approximately 250 bishops were present. The Council confirmed the Nicene Creed, reinforced the biblical doctrine of the incarnation, and condemned the doctrine of Nesotrius.

Nestorius' doctrine (Nestorianism) tried to answer: "How can Jesus Christ, being part man, not be partially a sinner as well." To solve the question, he taught that Mary, the mother of Jesus, gave birth to the incarnate Christ not the divine Logos who existed before time itself. Nestorius believed that no union between the human and divine was possible. He argued that Jesus was more human and that Mary should be called Christ-bearer and not the God-bearer. Nesotrius' opponents charged him with detaching Christ's divinity and humanity into two persons existing in one body, thereby denying the reality of the incarnation. Pope Celestine I agreed with the Council, which denounced Nestorius'

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teaching as erroneous and decreed that Jesus was one person rather than two separate people. He was complete God and complete man, with a rational soul and body. Mary was to be called God-bearer, the one who gave birth to God. The Council declared it unlawful to bring forward a different faith rivaling what had been established by the Council at Nicea, which they said was established by the holy Fathers and the Holy Ghost. Although Emperor Theodosius had long been a supporter of Nestorius, he ratified the decrees of the Council.

THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION

The ekklesia is illustrated in more recent history by the Westminster Confession. The Westminster Confession of Faith, drawn up in the 1640s by an assembly of 151 theologians (mostly Presbyterians and Puritans) at Westminster Abbey, is the standard of doctrine for the Church of Scotland and many Presbyterian churches throughout the world. Several other denominations, including Baptists and Congregationalists, have used adaptations of the Westminster Confession of Faith as a basis for their own doctrinal statements. In each case, the Westminster Confession is considered subordinate to the Bible.

The council that wrote the Westminster Confession actually convened for several years. The Confession is a systematic exposition of Calvinism written from a Puritan viewpoint. It was originally drafted to reform the Church of England and to unify the various Christian sects in England at that time. The document addresses doctrines such as the Trinity, the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus, sola scriptura (by scripture alone), and sola fide (faith alone). The Westminster Confession of Faith is considered by many to be the best statement of systematic theology ever framed by the Christian church. As an attempt to “correctly handle the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15), the Westminster Confession of Faith has stood the test of time and remains a prime doctrinal standard for Protestants and evangelicals everywhere.

<http://www.gotquestions.org/Westminster-Confession-of-Faith.html>

In each of the previous examples of convened councils, it can be seen that a specific issue or situation prompted those with spiritual authority to call an assembly. The assembly carefully identified the applicable transcendent principles, came to agreement, and issued a proclamation. It also can be noted that these assemblies were not simple one or two hour meetings.

The above councils are ekklesia convocations that dealt with key doctrinal issues of the early years of the church. The ekklesia should be functioning today more in the area of providing directives for the church to impact culture. What do Christian/biblical principles have to say to the culture? What answers does the church have for the ills of society? Ekklesia convocations can examine and research current issues, apply biblical principles to them, and make a united statement that speaks to the cultural issues.

KINGDOM CONGRESS

The Kingdom Congress of Illinois has held a number of ekklesia convocations dealing with specific topics. Although the purpose of the Kingdom Congress is not to establish biblical doctrine, the gatherings endeavor to overlay sound scriptural teaching

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upon the events and policies that are influencing Illinois. By comparing the will of God with the practices of man, the Kingdom Congress attempts to discover the scriptural validity, or lack thereof, of public policy and cultural trends and, subsequently, publish those findings. The action of the Kingdom Congress aims to promote unity of purpose within the body of Christ, set a framework for praying God's will into the earth, and provide a foundation for actions that will foster righteous activity within the state.

The Congress is convened whenever leaders identify an issue of concern. The topic is researched to identify how it is affecting the culture and the scriptures are searched to determine God's will. A written document and prayer decrees are released at the end of the convocation. The goal of the Kingdom Congress is to release the decrees of Heaven through the decrees of the Kingdom Congress. Following Matthew 16:18, the Congress seeks to bind what is bound in heaven and to loose what is loosed in heaven. Participants in the Congress are authorized to act by signing a statement of faith. To this date four Congresses have been held on the topics of Hydraulic Fracturing, Graduated Income Tax, Minimum Wage, and restoring Foundational Covenants.

Copies of the Kingdom Congress Resolutions along with the position papers written to support the findings of each convocation and resolution may be found at www.kingdomcongress.com

This Position Paper was written by Joyce Geiler