

# The Papacy And The Civil Power –

## Chapter X. Part 2 The Council of Nice



Continued from [Chapter X. Part 1 Constantine](#) .

Eusebius, after a general enumeration of the countries from which the “distinguished prelates” who attended the council came, says, “The prelate of the imperial city [Rome] was prevented from attending by extreme old age; but his presbyters were present, and supplied his place.” He does not refer to any other presbyters who were there, and certainly does not include Hosius among those who represented the Bishop of Rome, for two reasons: first, because he classes him among the prelates; and, second, because, in the preceding, sentence, referring to Hosius, he had said, “Even from Spain itself one whose fame was widely spread took his seat as an individual in the great assembly.” (“Life of Constantine,” by Eusebins, bk. iii., ch. vii.)

Hence, Hosius, who was Bishop of Cordova, and the only representative of Spain present, took his seat in his own individual right as one of the most distinguished prelates, and not as a mere presbyter or legate of the Bishop of Rome, of whom he was the equal in authority and the superior in fame.

Sozomen, referring to the absence of the Bishop of Rome on account of old age, says, “But his place was supplied by Vito and Vicentius, presbyters of his Church.” (\*) Thus he makes *two* legates only from Rome, and not *three*; and does not mention Hosius as one of them.

\* Sozomen, bk. i., ch. xvii. Du Pin calls them Victor and Vicentius, “Eccl. Hist.,” vol. ii., p. 251; and Tillemont, Vitus and Vincentius. See post.

Socrates makes no statement on his own authority, but refers approvingly to what Eusebius has said. He says nothing about Hosius being the legate of Silvester, but refers to his presbyters. Theodoret does not mention Hosius, but agrees with Sozomen as to the number of the papal legates, and with Eusebius, Sozomen, and Socrates as to their character—that is, that they were presbyters, and not bishops. He says Silvester “sent two presbyters to the council, for the purpose of taking part in all the transactions.” (Theodoret, bk. i., ch. vii.)

Hosius was not a *presbyter of Rome*, but was the Bishop of Cordova in Spain,

as is stated by both Sozomen (Sozomen, bk. i., ch. xvi.) and Socrates, (Socrates, bk. i., ch. vii.) and could not, consequently, have been one of the papal legates. But not a word is stated by either of these authors about the Bishop of Rome being represented by Hosius, either as one of his legates or in any other capacity. They all concur in the precise contrary, that he was represented by presbyters, and not bishops; and Sozomen and Theodoret agree that there were only two of these. And why were they only presbyters? The answer is plain. Each one of the churches in Asia, Europe, and Africa had its own bishop, and its own distinct jurisdiction. They existed upon terms of perfect equality, none having any primacy or supremacy over the others. Therefore, when these bishops were summoned by Constantine, those who could not attend in person sent their presbyters—as the Bishop of Rome did—and those who attended represented their own churches. Hosius represented his own Church, and was a man of far too much celebrity to have surrendered his equality with his brother bishops to play an inferior part in the name of such a bishop as Silvester, of whom scarcely anything was known beyond the fact of his having been Bishop of Rome, until the false and forged legends of the monks in the fifth century assigned to him the connection with the Council of Nice, which has ever since been disingenuously repeated by the supporters of papal power and infallibility.

But who presided over the Council of Nice? Weninger says, "The sovereign pontiff presided, by his three legates." Enough has been said to show that there was no such thing as a "sovereign pontiff" known or recognized in those days, especially not in the sense here meant; but that need not be dwelt on here. There were but two legates, and they were both presbyters only. Can any man of intelligence suppose that such an assembly, composed of so many distinguished bishops, at a time like that, when rank and station had attached to them far more of dignity and influence than they now have, would have submitted to be presided over by mere presbyters?

The supporters of the monkish fable have observed this difficulty, but have proved themselves equal to it by increasing the papal legates to three, and making Hosius one of them! There were a large number present, besides him, of eminent ability. Eusebius says, "Some were distinguished by wisdom and eloquence, others by the gravity of their lives, and by patient fortitude of character, while others again united in themselves all these graces." And he speaks of men among them "whose years demanded the tribute of respect and veneration." ("Life of Constantine," by Eusebius, bk. iii., ch. xi.)

Socrates mentions two of "extraordinary celebrity," the bishops of Upper Thebes and of Cyprus. Who of all these presided? There is no positive answer to this question. Manifestly, it was not considered a matter of any special consequence, and certainly not as in any way affecting the merits or validity of what was done, or the fact would have been stated. Eusebius says that, upon the assembling of the body, "the bishop who occupied the chief place in the right division of the assembly then rose, and, addressing the emperor, delivered a concise speech," etc., (*Ibid.*, bk. iii., ch. xi.) but he does not say who this was. Nor does Sozomen, or Socrates, or Theodoret. But Eusebius shows enough to dispel the papal fiction and forgery, that one of the pope's legates presided, by the statement of the fact, of which he had personal

knowledge, that a "bishop," and not a "presbyter," presided.

Weninger says, "Osius, whom Athanasius styles the leader of the council, occupied the first place." If this were an established fact, it would prove only this: that, in order to support the claim of Romish supremacy, its advocates originated the false assertion that he was one of the papal legates, without a single word of authority from any responsible or reliable quarter. Athanasius became Bishop of Alexandria in 326, the year after the council. He was present at the council as a deacon; and whatever is found in his writings in reference to it is entitled to the greatest consideration, and ought to be accepted as true. In his "Second Apology," he calls "Hosius the father and president of all the councils," (Du Pin, vol. ii., p. 251, note.) not specially of the Council of Nice. He certainly does not say here that he was the leader of that council.

Between the beginning of the fourth century and the Council of Nice there were twelve councils assembled. (See Du Pin's "Chronological Table of Councils," attached to vol. ii. Of his "History.") To which of these did Athanasius refer? If to all, including that at Nice, then it was merely probable that Hosius presided over that council. But it is more probable that he designedly employed general language, because, like Eusebius, Sozomen, Socrates, and Theodoret, he did not consider the presidency of the Council of Nice as a matter of any special importance; otherwise he would, undoubtedly, have stated who presided there, for he knew precisely what the fact was. At all events, he leaves it in doubt whether he intended to include Nice or not. And reasoning thus, Du Pin, the learned Roman Catholic historian, says, upon this question, "'Tis not certainly known who presided in this council, but 'tis very probable that it was Hosius." (*Ibid.*, vol. ii., p. 251.) But, upon this hypothesis, he proceeds immediately to say that he did so "*in his own name*," and, therefore, not in the name of the Bishop of Rome, or as one of his legates.

And in a note to this text it is stated that at least two writers, Proclus and Facundus, have alleged that Eustathius, Bishop of Antioch, presided. It then continues: "But it is more probable that Hosius presided there *in his own name, and not in the pope's*; for he nowhere assumes the title of Legate of the Holy See, and none of the ancients say that he presided in this council in the pope's name. Gelasius Cyzicenus, who first affirmed it, says it *without any proof or authority*." (*Ibid.*)

But there is other cumulative evidence to the same effect, also from the very highest Roman Catholic authority. Tillemont, in his learned and instructive "History of the Arians, and of the Council of Nice," disposes of this question in very decisive and expressive language. Alluding to the council, and after stating that it was convoked by Constantine, and not by the Bishop of Rome, he says:

"Neither Eusebius nor the ancient historians say anything of St. Silvester's sending any other legates to the Council of Nice, but the two priests, Vitus and Vincentius. There is none but Gelasius Cyzicenus who says that Hosius of Corduba had the same post. His authority, how inconsiderable soever it be, could not but be of weight, if it was not certain that he corrupts the text

of Eusebius by inserting this and some other clauses."

Then, referring to the pretense that Hosius presided over the council in the name of the Bishop of Rome, and to the language of Athanasius already quoted, he continues:

"We have even some authorities for believing that it was St. Eustathius of Antioch who presided in the council. For John of Antioch, writing to St. Proclus, about the year 435, gives him the title of "first" of the holy fathers assembled at Nice, and Facundus, the "first" of that council. It is collected from Theodoret that he had the first place on the right hand, and that he made a speech to Constantine in the name of all the bishops—which, of course, belongs to the president. It is thought the same might be shown from St. Jerome. The chronicon of Nicephorus calls him expressly the chief of the fathers at Nice. St. Anastasius Sinaita might likewise mean the same thing; and the title of president is found in a letter attributed to Pope Felix III., which would be much more considerable authority if there were not many reasons to induce us to believe that this piece is not older than the eighth century."

In a note it is said: "Gelasius Cyzicenus, who lived at the end of the fifth century, is the first we find who says that Hosius was the pope's legate in the Council of Nice, with the priests Vito and Vincentius. He even reports this fact as a thing very authentic, since he *inserts it in the text of Eusebius*, as if it belonged to it. *But it is not found there in the printed copies*. Valesius takes no notice of *anything like it* in the manuscripts. And it is even evident that the text of that historian cannot be read, as Gelasius quotes it, *without a manifest corruption and perverting his sense*.

"All that can be said of this pretended delegation of Hosius, is that all the historians mention his assisting at the Council of Nice, and speak of legates who were sent thither by the pope; but that no author more ancient than Gelasius, nor perhaps any more modern who is worth notice in this matter, puts Hosius in the number of those legates. Even the 'Synodicon,' which in other respects is full of faults, does by no means place Hosius among the pope's legates." ("History of the Arians and of the Council of Nice," by Tillemont, vol. ii., pp. 599, 600, 669, note iv. London ed., 1732.)

Thus is this falsehood, which originated *nearly two hundred years after the Council of Nice*, completely disposed of by authorities which no honest searcher after the truth can disregard. Until it was invented as a cover for papal usurpations, not one word was to be found anywhere, in any history, showing, or tending to show, that Hosius was one of the pope's legates, or presided in his name. The forgery has its parallel only in the "False Decretals," which soon followed it.

If he did preside in any other name than his own, it is far more likely to have been in that of Constantine than of the Bishop of Rome. Constantine convened the Council, and was present; the Bishop of Rome had nothing to do with it except to send his representative, as he was prevented by old age from attending in person, like other bishops. We know nothing of the relations between him and Hosius, except that they were bishops of distinct

and independent churches, one in Italy and the other in Spain. But we do know, as Du Pin says, that Hosius "was much esteemed by the emperor," and that he was, according to the intimation of Eusebius and the statements of Sozomen and Socrates, the messenger by whom he sent his letter of rebuke to Alexander and Arius. This would give some plausibility to the belief that he presided in the emperor's name. But this is of no importance, since the question before us involves simply the truth or falsehood of the pretense that Hosius presided in the name of the pope. This is shown to be not only unsupported by a word of proof, but absolutely false—a bold and unblushing forgery!

Weninger says again: "The fathers were guided in their deliberations by these instructions [those of the pope to his legates], as well as by the symbol of faith prescribed by Silvester and brought from Rome."

If history did not furnish the most positive proof of the falsity of what is here asserted, it might be supposed to be true, because of the frequency of its repetition and the apparent sincerity with which it is made. But, like what has gone before it, it vanishes before the "touch-stone of truth."

The council was disturbed at the very beginning by angry discussion among the discordant bishops. Says Eusebius: "Some began to accuse their neighbors, who defended themselves, and recriminated in their turn." He continues: "In this manner numberless assertions were put forth by each party, and a violent controversy arose at the very commencement." The contending parties seem to have addressed themselves not merely to the assembly itself, but to the emperor. Manifestly, he was regarded as the ruling spirit of the council. He, probably, did not attempt to employ his imperial authority to control its deliberations, but it is unquestionably true that they were mainly influenced by the deference paid to it by a majority of the prelates. It is probable, even, that many of them were absolutely governed by it. Eusebius says as much in this: that, notwithstanding the violence of the discussion, "the emperor gave patient audience to all alike, and received every proposition with steadfast attention, and, by occasionally assisting the argument of each party in turn, he gradually disposed even the most vehement disputants to a reconciliation." By his address, and his eloquence in the Greek language, he persuaded some, and convinced others, "until at last he succeeded in bringing them to one mind and judgment respecting every disputed question." The result thus produced was, "that they were not only united as concerning the faith," but also as to the time of celebrating the feast of Easter. Whereupon the "points" were "committed to writing, and received the signature of each several member," and a festival was solemnized in honor of God. (Life of Constantine," by Eusebius, bk. iii., chh. xiii., xiv.)

In all this there is no mention made of the Bishop of Rome, or of any instructions from him, or of any formula of faith prepared by him, or of anything said or done by his legates. The emperor himself is the front figure in the assembly. All others are in the background.

Sozomen says that after Constantine had burned all the complaints of the contending bishops against each other that had been handed to him for investigation, he took part in the deliberations of the council. He heard

each party for and against Arius, and, after the condemnation of Arius by the council, sent his followers into banishment by an imperial decree. The "Confession," or "Symbol of Faith," was decided on with his approval. This is not inserted in Sozomen's history, because he thought "that such matters ought to be kept secret" from "the unlearned," and to be known only "by disciples and their instructors." (Sozomen, bk. i., ch. xx. 306) But he nowhere mentions any instructions from Rome, or any participation by the pope's legates in the proceedings of the council.

The account given by Socrates agrees with that of Eusebius, from whom it is taken, but he gives the "Confession of Faith," and points out the manner of its adoption, without any reference to the Bishop of Rome or his legates, or any instructions from him. (Socrates, bk. i., cb. viii.)

Theodoret is somewhat specific as to the manner in which the creed was adopted, predicating his statement upon the authority of a letter written by Athanasius immediately after the council to the Christians of Africa. Alluding to the bishops, he says "they all agreed in propounding" certain declarations of faith; yet he does not include the Arians among these, for they stated their "conclusions" in such a way as, according to him, to expose "their evil design and impious artifice." He states the final adoption of the "Symbol of Faith," and gives also an important letter from Eusebius of Cesarea, the historian, which throws much additional light upon the character of the proceedings, and the personal agency of Constantine in fixing the terms of the formulary.

It shows, indeed, that the word *consubstantial* (of the same substance, nature, or essence)—the most important and conspicuous word in the creed—was inserted upon his suggestion alone. When the creed, as agreed upon by the bishops, was laid before the council, it did not contain this word, yet it is here stated that it was "fully approved by all;" and the letter continues:

"No one found occasion to gainsay it; but our beloved emperor was the first to testify that it was most orthodox, and that he coincided in opinion with it; and he exhorted the others to sign it, and to receive all the doctrines it contained, with the single addition of one word—*consubstantial*." (Theodoret, bk. i., chh. viii., xii.)

With such facts as these staring them full in the face, it is but little less than the boldest imposture for the papal writers to pretend, as they do, that the proceedings of this council were controlled by instructions from Rome, and that the formulary of the creed was prepared there and forwarded by the legates of the pope. In what estimate can they themselves hold the theory of papal primacy and supremacy when it has to be upheld by such wholesale perversions of history?

The introduction of the one word, *consubstantial*, into the creed by an emperor who, whatever may have been his Christian convictions, was not yet baptized into the Church, led to one of the fiercest and most protracted controversies the Church ever had. The insertion of it, after the assent of all the bishops had been obtained to a form of creed without it, shows the degree of influence which Constantine had over the council, how completely it

was the creature of his imperial will, and how idle and violative of truth it is to say that he would himself have yielded, or have permitted others to yield, to the dictation of the Bishop of Rome. The latter may have commanded respect by his age and piety, but he had no right to command any obedience beyond the limits of his own ecclesiastical jurisdiction, which he may have asserted himself, or which had been assented to by other bishops; whereas it is well known that Constantine so wore the robes and wielded the imperial power of Caesar as to brook no disobedience to his royal will, whether exercised in the affairs of State or Church.

Having convoked this council of his own accord, he felt that he had the right to overlook, if not to dictate, its proceedings, as the most certain and expedient mode of bringing discordant elements into harmony, and saving the cause of Christianity from discomfiture. If any instructions from Rome had been presented, he would have heeded them or not, as may have suited his designs. That he was master of everything done there is sufficiently apparent from all the proceedings; and if it were not, Theodoret shows that he was, at another place.

When certain accusations of a criminal character were made against some of the bishops, and laid before him, he put them aside till the close of the council, when he burned them publicly, and declared he had never read them, saying "that the crimes of priests ought not to be made known to the multitude, lest they should become an occasion of offense or of sin. He also said that if he had detected a bishop in the very act of committing adultery, he would have thrown his imperial robe over the unlawful deed, lest any should witness the scene, and be thereby injured." (Theodoret, bk. i., ch. x.)

Most amiable and considerate emperor! Most fortunate bishops! Yet it ought not to be supposed that any very large number of those who were assembled in this celebrated council needed this kind of royal protection, as it is not to be doubted for a moment that many of them were of that class of sincere Christians in whose care the cause of true Christianity and genuine piety is at all times safe. Those who had control of the proceedings were, doubtless, in a great degree, the instruments of Constantine; while such as were really devoted to the welfare of the Church were left to acquiesce, from fear of the royal displeasure, and to return to their churches, and there regulate, by their example, the Christian deportment of their flocks.

Weninger makes another equally unsupported assertion when he says that "at the close of the council all the acts were sent to Rome for confirmation." His object is to maintain by it the propositions, first, that the decrees of a general council are not valid without the approval of the pope; and, second, that this approval was obtained before those passed by the Council of Nice took effect. Nothing of the kind then occurred. There is not a word or syllable of evidence to that effect.

Eusebius says that, after the council had closed, Constantine "gave information of the proceedings of the synod to those who had not been present, by a letter in his own handwriting," which letter he gives at length. It is imperially addressed by "Constantinus Augustus to the

Churches." He tells them, "I myself have undertaken that this decision should meet the approval of your sagacities;" and commands them to receive it as a "truly Divine injunction, and regard it as the gift of God;" because "whatever is determined in the holy assemblies of the bishops is to be regarded as indicative of the Divine will."

He does not refer to the Bishop of Rome at all, either with reference to his approval or otherwise. And when counseling unity of practice in regard to the festival of Easter, he does not refer to the practice at Rome alone, or to the decrees of its bishops, or to any other particular church, to show what that unity is, but tells them that it consists in the practice which prevails in Rome, Africa, Italy, Egypt, Spain, Gaul, Britain, Libya, Greece, Asia, Pontus, and Cilicia; thus ignoring, to all intents and purposes, the claim of Roman primacy, if any such were then made. Eusebius also alludes to a letter from the emperor to the Egyptians as "confirming and sanctioning the decrees of the council." ("Life of Constantine," by Eusebius, bk. iii., chh. xvi.-xxi., xxiii)

Sozomen alludes to the letter mentioned by Eusebius, written by the emperor to the churches, as well as that to the Alexandrians, and says he "urged them to receive unanimously the exposition of faith which had been set forth by the council;" making no reference to the pope's approval. (Sozomen, bk. i., ch. xxv.)

Socrates gives this letter to the Alexandrians, and another to the "bishops and people," as well as that to "the churches." They all set forth the binding obligation of the decrees of the council, without any reference to the pope, or his connection with them in any way. (Socrates, bk. i., chli. ix.)

And Theodoret states the same facts, and inserts the same letters. (Theodoret, bk. i., chh. ix., x.)

It is not pretended by any of these authors that the decrees of the council were ever submitted to the pope, or that it was supposed to be necessary. The very reverse is true, both as it regards the fact and the universal sentiment then prevailing. However much Rome may have desired her triumph over the old apostolic churches, she had not then achieved it.

The reference to the proceedings of the council, and to the eighteenth and *twenty-ninth* canons, made by Weninger, to show that it fully recognized the primacy of Rome and the infallibility of the pope, not only does not help him out of the difficulty, but gets him deeper into it. We give him the benefit of his statement in his own words. He says:

"A yet more cogent proof is furnished us by the very acts of the council itself. The eighteenth canon rules that the Church, faithful to the teachings of the apostles, has reserved all cases of importance to the arbitration of the Holy See: *Cujus dispositioni omnes majores causas antiqua apostolorum auctoritas reservavit.*' Can there be any case of greater importance—'major causa'—than a question about matters of faith?" (Weninger, p. 106.)



Now, it so happens—unfortunately for this author and the cause he supports at the cost of so much candor—that there is not one word in the eighteenth canon of the Council of Nice which the most skilled and practiced ingenuity can torture into what he has here alleged. On the contrary, the sentiment and action of the council, so far as it acted at all, was precisely the reverse. The eighteenth canon is not even upon the subject referred to, and makes no reference to it whatever. There are no such words to be found in it as “Cujus dispositioni omnes majores causas antiqua apostolorum auctoritas reservavit.” It has relation to presbyters receiving the Eucharist from deacons, and is in these words, as translated by Boyle:

“CANON XVIII. *Of Presbyters receiving the Eucharist from Deacons.*—It having come to the knowledge of the great and holy council, that in certain places and cities the Eucharist is administered by deacons to presbyters; and neither law nor custom permitting that those who have no authority to offer the body of Christ should deliver it to those who have; and it being also understood that some deacons receive the Eucharist before even the bishops, let, therefore, all these irregularities be removed, and let the deacons remain within their own limits, knowing that they are ministers of the bishops, and inferior to the presbyters. Let them receive the Eucharist in their proper place, after the presbyters, whether it be administered by a bishop or a presbyter. Nor is it permitted to deacons to sit among the presbyters, as that is against rule and order. If any one will not obey, even after these regulations, let him desist from the ministry.” (\*)

\* “Historical Views of the Council of Nice,” by Boyle (1836), p. 62. These “views” may also be found attached to Cruse’s Eusebius, Boston ed., 1836.

If it be objected that the translation here used is by a Protestant divine, it is answered that to the same effect is that of the learned Du Pin, a doctor of the Sarbonne, and Regius Professor of Divinity at Paris. (Du Pin, vol. ii., p. 253.) And the great Tillemont, whose authority, as a Roman Catholic historian is unquestioned, speaking of it, says: “The eighteenth canon humbles the pride of some deacons who administered the Eucharist to priests. It likewise forbids them to sit among the priests—that is, to sit in the church as priests.” (Tillemont, vol. ii., p. 644.)

Here it is abundantly shown that there could not, by any possibility, have been in this eighteenth canon anything of the kind alleged by Weninger, and that his statement amounts to an entire perversion of its meaning—that it is, in fact, a palpable misrepresentation of it. Whether originated by him or some other defender of the papacy, is of no consequence, since the forgery and its object are both apparent. That it is a forgery, like the “False Decretals,” anybody who will take the pains to investigate may easily see. The Council of Nice did not intend, in any part of its proceedings, to confer supremacy over the other churches upon that at Rome, or upon the Bishop of Rome, or to recognize it as existing. The jurisdiction of the several churches, as established by “ancient usage,” was defined by the sixth canon, which is thus given by Du Pin: (\*)

\* The Nicene Council did not, in the sixth canon, consider the question of primacy at all. Referring to that part of it which points out such rights of the Bishop of Rome as were analogous to those of the bishops of Alexandria and Antioch, Dr. Hefele says: "It is evident that the council has not in view here the primacy of the Bishop of Rome over the whole Church, but simply his power as a patriarch."—*History of the Christian Councils*, by Hefele, p. 394. Elsewhere he quotes approvingly from another: "The Council of Nicaea did not speak of the primacy."—*Ibid.*, p. 397. He also says the sixth canon "does not consider the pope as primate of the Universal Church, nor as simple Bishop of Rome, but it treats him as one of the great metropolitans who had not merely one province, but several, under their jurisdiction."—*Ibid.*, p. 397. St. Augustin spoke of Pope Innocent I. as "President of the Church of the West"—not as primate of the whole Church.—*Ibid.*, p. 399. St. Jerome considered the Bishop of Alexandria as Patriarch of Egypt, and the Bishop of Rome as Patriarch of the West, each having authority only in his own patriarchate.—*Ibid.*, p. 400. The Synod of Arles, in 314, regarded the Bishop of Rome as having jurisdiction only over several dioceses.—*Ibid.* Justinian spoke of the ecclesiastical division of the world, in his day, as divided into five patriarchates—Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem—each independent of the other.—*Ibid.*

"We ordain, that the ancient custom shall be observed which gives power to the Bishop of Alexandria over all the provinces of Egypt, Libya, and Pentapolis, because the Bishop of Rome has the like jurisdiction over all the suburbicary regions (for this addition must be supplied out of Ruffinus); we would likewise have the rights and privileges of the Church of Antioch and the other churches preserved; but these rights ought not to prejudice those of the metropolitans. If any one is ordained without the consent of the metropolitan, the council declares that he is no bishop; but if any one is canonically chosen by the suffrage of almost all the bishops of the province, and if there are but one or two of a contrary opinion, the suffrages of the far greater number ought to carry it for the ordination of those particular persons." (Du Pin, vol. ii., p. 252. Boyle's translation (p. 59) is substantially the same, though somewhat different in phraseology.)

Tillemont says it was the opinion of Baronius that the necessity for this sixth canon grew out of the resistance by Melitius, the Bishop of Lycopolis, and founder of the sect called Melitians, to the authority of the Bishop of Alexandria; and thus refers to the canon:

"This canon orders that the rights and pre-eminences which some churches had of old, as those of Alexandria and of Antioch, should be preserved. It regulates particularly the jurisdiction of that of Alexandria over Egypt, Libya, and Pentapolis, by that which the Church of Rome had."

He then proceeds to show that Ruffinus confines the jurisdiction of the Church of Rome to the "suburbicary churches" only; and, thus limited, he considers it to have included no other churches than those existing, in Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica. (Tillemont, vol. ii., p. 640.)

This canon, as interpreted by both these great Roman Catholic authors, as well as by Boyle, means this, and nothing more: that as the Bishop of Alexandria had power and jurisdiction over the churches in the provinces of

Egypt, Libya, and Pentapolis, and the Bishop of Rome had like power and jurisdiction over those in the diocese, or suburbs, of Rome, so should the Bishop of Antioch and the bishops of the other churches have like power and jurisdiction, each within his provincial limits, each province being required to preserve, according to the ancient custom, the rights of its metropolitan church. There is not one word about the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome beyond his diocese; not a word about his authority over any other churches but those within the Roman suburbs; not a word about appeals to him in cases of disagreement about the selection and ordination of bishops outside his provincial limits; not a word about the Church at Rome as the "mother and mistress of all the churches;" not a word about the "Holy See" of Rome; not a word about any obligation to obey the Bishop of Rome, any more than the bishops of other churches; and not a word about the pope, either in his pretended capacity of "Head of the Church," or any other. With all this before him, it was necessary that this author should have been trained in the Jesuit school, in order to fit him for the task of unblushingly shutting his eyes to it.

But Du Pin leaves no room for doubt about the meaning of the council, or the interpretation of its decrees, when he says: "This canon, being thus explained, has no difficulty in it. It does not oppose the primacy of the Church of Rome, but neither does it establish it. It preserves the great sees their ancient privileges—that is, the jurisdiction or authority which they had over many provinces, which was afterward called the jurisdiction of the patriarch or exarch (a bishop in the Eastern Orthodox Church ranking immediately below a patriarch). In this sense it is that it compares the Church of Rome to the Church of Alexandria, by considering them as patriarchal churches. It continues, also, to the Church of Antioch, and all other great churches, whatsoever rights they could have; but, lest their authority should be prejudicial to the ordinary metropolitans, who were subject to their jurisdiction, the council confirms what had been ordained in the fourth canon concerning the authority of metropolitans in the ordination of bishops." (\*)

\* Du Pin, vol. ii., p. 252. The fourth canon provides that a bishop should be ordained by all the bishops, except where it is difficult to assemble them, etc., when it may be done by three, with the consent of the others by letter—its validity depending upon the metropolitan bishop of the diocese; which means that it shall not depend upon the consent of the Bishop of Rome, unless in his diocese.—*Ibid.*

It is important to observe scrutinizingly this language of this great author, for it is full of meaning. He says this canon "does not oppose the primacy of the Church of Rome, but neither does it establish it." The reason is plain: *no such primacy was then asserted*, or had then been heard of, except in the pretenses set up by a few of the popes, or would have been tolerated by the bishops of the other churches. For these reasons, the canon was silent on the subject. But although it was silent in words, it rebuked in spirit this ambitious pretense, by defining distinctly the jurisdiction of each one of the "great churches," and so defined it that one should not be considered greater or more privileged than another. No thought of primacy or superiority

entered the minds of any of the leading bishops of the council, and if there had been one there to claim it for any particular church, he would have been sternly and indignantly rebuked. The whole history of those times, and everything known of this council, proves this, and whatsoever may be palmed off upon the superstitious and credulous part of the world to establish the contrary is false and forged, manufactured with the same disregard of truth and history as were the pseudo-Isidorian and other fabricated decretals.

The metropolitan bishops referred to in these canons had a recognized superiority over the other bishops of their provinces. Originally the bishops had assistants, or coadjutors, who aided them in the discharge of their episcopal duties, when disabled by old age or infirmity. It is supposed that some of these had episcopal ordination, and that others were only presbyters; but, in the end, they were all recognized as bishops, with limited and distinctly marked jurisdiction. This difficulty was remedied, however, when one was chosen superior to the rest, and invested with certain powers and privileges for the good of the whole. He became the primate, or metropolitan, that is, the principal bishop of the province to which he belonged.

Eusebius speaks of Titus as superintendent, that is, metropolitan, of the churches in Crete;(Eusebius, bk. iii., ch. iv.) and Chrysostom says that Timothy was entrusted with the government of the Church throughout Asia. (Bingham's "Antiquities of the Christian Church," bk. ii., chh. xv., xvi., where this subject is fully discussed.) And it was in this sense alone that the jurisdiction and superiority of metropolitan bishops was spoken of by the Council of Nice. Each province, or diocese, had its own metropolitan bishop, or primate, and the idea that the Church at Rome was, as it regarded the others, the metropolitan church, and its bishop primate over all, never was asserted in this council, or claimed by any body there, so far as any true history shows, or tends to show.

Weninger, pursuing his favorite idea, and seemingly resolved that it shall be no fault of his if it is not maintained, as the foundation upon which the claim of papal supremacy must rest, says also:

"The *twenty-ninth* canon [of Nice] reads as follows: 'The incumbent of the Roman See, acting as Christ's vicegerent in the government of the Church, is the head of the patriarchs, as well as Peter himself was.' 'Ille, qui tenet sedem Romanuni, caput est omnium Patriarcharum cicut Petrus, ut qui sit Vicarius Christi super cunctum Ecclesiam.'" (Weninger, p. 107.)

It has already been clearly and sufficiently shown that no such matters as are involved in this statement were considered or acted on by the Council of Nice at all, in so far as either of the canons referred to is concerned. But, after perverting, and misquoting, and mutilating these, this author overleaps every possible difficulty at a single bound, and adds a canon which was never enacted by the council! There were only twenty canons in all passed by the Council of Nice! And such is the undoubted "truth of history." Neither Sozomen nor Socrates give the number. Theodoret gives the number as twenty. These are his words: "The bishops then returned to the council, and drew up twenty laws to regulate the discipline of the Church." (Theodoret, bk. i., ch. viii.) Du Pin says:

"These rules, which are called canons, are in number twenty, and there never were more genuine, though some modern authors have added many more." (Du Pin, vol. ii., p. 252.)

There is this note explanatory of this text of Du Pin:

"Theodoret and Ruffinus mention only these twenty canons: though the latter reckons twenty-two of them, yet he owned no more, because he divided two of them. The bishops of Africa found but twenty of them, after they had inquired very diligently all over the East for all the canons made by the Council of Nice. Dionysius Exiguus, and all the other collectors of canons, have acknowledged but these twenty. The Arabic canons which Ecchellensis published under the name of the Council of Nice cannot belong to this Council." (*Ibid.*, note (k).)

Referring again to "the twenty canons," he continues:

"I do not think that there ever were any other acts of this council, since they were unknown to all the ancient historians. There is a Latin letter of this synod to St. Silvester [then Bishop of Rome] extant, but it is supposititious, which has no authority, and which has all the marks of forgery that any writing can have, as well as the pretended answer of St. Silvester. Neither is that council genuine, which is said to have been assembled at Rome by St. Silvester for the confirmation of the Council of Nice. *The canons of this council are also forged*, which contain rules contrary to the practice of the time, and which it had been impossible to observe." (Du Pin, vol. ii., pp. 253, 254. See, also, note (1))

Tillemont is not less explicit. In his "History of the Council of Nice," he explains the contents of the twenty canons, and says:

"These are the twenty canons of the famous council, which are come to our hands, and are the only ones which were made. At least, none of the ancients reckoned them more than twenty. Theodoret mentions no more. When the Church of Africa sent to the churches of Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople for the canons of Nice, they sent them only the same twenty which we still have; and the twenty-two of Ruffinus contain no more than these twenty, only they are divided after another manner; insomuch that there is no room to believe that any more were made." (Tillemont, vol. ii., p. 645.)

But Tillemont was fully informed of the efforts that had been made—like that of Weninger—to add to these canons, in order to build up and support the papal system. And, as a faithful historian and honest member of the Roman Catholic Church, he felt himself constrained to expose and denounce them. He says:

"We find many other determinations attributed to the Council of Nice, in the pretended letters of the popes Mark, Julius, and Felix; in a letter from St. Athanasius to Pope Mark; in Gelasius Cyzienus; and in an Arabic collection given us by Turrianus. But there is nothing more plain than that all these are apocryphal, without excepting Gelasius, who we know gives us very often suspected pieces." (*Ibid.*, P. 646.)

And he does not spare one of the infallible (!) popes who engaged in this nefarious attempt to add to these canons by forgery, in order to affirm the right of appeal to Rome! He says:

“Pope Zosimus alleges two canons of the Council of Nice, which allowed bishops and even other ecclesiastics to appeal to the pope. But the Church of Africa proved these canons to be forged; neither Zosimus nor his successors were able to prove the contrary; and it is acknowledged now that these canons belong to the Council of Sardica, (Which was not an ecumenical or general council.) and not to that of Nice.” (Tillemont, vol. ii., p. 647.)

It is not often that so much convincing evidence is found accumulating upon one point as there is upon this. So overwhelming is it, that no writer of the present day, unless he be a Jesuit, will venture to hazard the loss of his reputation for veracity by assigning any other than twenty as the number of Nicene canons. One of the most recent investigators of this question among the learned divines of England is Dr. E. B. Pusey, who published, a few years ago, a history of all the councils, from the assembly at Jerusalem, in 51, to the Council of Constantinople, in 381. Having before him all the authorities bearing on the question, he fixes the number of Nicene canons at twenty, without seeming to suppose the matter debatable. (Pusey’s “Councils of the Church,” p. 112. See, also, “History of the Christian Councils,” by Hefele, pp. 262, 434.)

Yet, directly in the face of all this, this Jesuit defender of the primacy and infallibility of the pope unblushingly publishes a false and forged canon, which he calls the twenty-ninth, to prove that the Council of Nice thereby declared the Bishop of Rome to be “Christ’s vicegerent in the government of the Church,” and “the head of the patriarchs as well as Peter was!” Can bold effrontery be carried further? The forgery, whenever and by whomsoever made, is bold and entire, made out of whole cloth. There is not a single word by any of the early “fathers” that can be tortured, by the utmost ingenuity, into such a meaning. On the contrary, we have seen that where the Bishop of Rome is spoken of in the sixth canon—and he is referred to in no other—he is merely called by that title, as all the other bishops are called by their titles, without any indication of preference to him over the others. He is never spoken of as “Christ’s vicegerent,” or as “head of the patriarchs,” nor is the Church of Rome ever alluded to as the “Apostolic Church.”

It cannot be too frequently repeated that this twenty-ninth canon is a downright forgery—one by which the world has been already sufficiently imposed on. It has been clung to by the supporters of the pope, as against the rights of the whole Church, because they know that if deprived of evidence that the first ecumenical council sustained their theory of papal infallibility, it necessarily falls to the ground. That it did not sustain it, and that there was no pretense of its existence then, is absolutely incontestable.

Continued in [Chapter XI. Pepin](#)