TRUTH, AUTHORITY AND HERESY IN THE FOUR FIRST ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

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Abstract /Resumo

In this article, we will assess the Catholic and Adventist point of view of the history of the Christian Church during the first four ecumenical councils in the light of their documents. Seventh-day Adventists see the Christian Church during this period as corrupt and not guided by divine authority. Roman Catholics, in turn, understand that this is the most glorious period of the church, when divine authority shaped the truth against heresies. Assuming that all truth is God's truth, did the church represent or not divine authority? Which religious group is more historically accurate in its description of reality, Catholics or Adventists?

Keywords: Ecumenical councils; Divine truth; Ecclesiastical authority; Heresy.

Neste artigo, avaliaremos o ponto de vista católico e adventista da história da igreja cristã durante o período dos quatro primeiros concílios ecumênicos à luz de seus documentos. Os adventistas do sétimo dia veem a igreja cristã durante esse período como corrompida e não guiada pela autoridade divina. Os católicos romanos, por sua vez, entendem que esse é o mais glorioso período da igreja, quando a autoridade divina moldou a verdade contra heresias. Supondo que toda verdade é de Deus, a igreja representou ou não a autoridade divina durante esses quatro concílios ecumênicos? Qual grupo religioso é mais preciso historicamente em sua descrição da realidade, os católicos ou os adventistas?

Palavras-chave: Concílios ecumênicos; Verdade divina; Autoridade eclesiástica; Heresia.

Arthur Holmes (1979) in his book All Truth is God's Truth advocates the idea that secular and religious authority are not antagonistic to each other since all truth is God's truth. But he recognizes that this unity raises some pro-

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blems, since humans are sinful and God is pure.² When this concept is applied to the realm of ecclesiastical and civil laws (NEW CATHOLIC, 1967)³ and to the issue of authority, one can notice the Christian dilemma (NEW CATHOLIC, 1967).⁴ Where can we find divine authority?

This dilemma is not new and can be perceived in the tensions around the four ecumenical councils of the Christian Church.⁵ For example, Seventh-day

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² He explains this in chapter 2. For him the dichotomy of secular as evil (not divine) and religious as good (divine) does not correspond to the reality that God created all humans and that civil powers are also instituted by God. Since Holmes (1979, p. 20, 21, 23) sees God working in history, and all humans in the image of God, he has no problem in identifying secular power as one arm of God's true authority. But he does recognize that this unification does not guarantee absence of error. "The problem of evil cannot and indeed must not be ignored", since humans are imperfect (HOLMES, 1979, p. 23).

³ Donlon (1967) defines ecclesiastical authority not only confined to doctrine but to order. Tracing the origin of ecclesiastical authority to Jesus, handed down to the Apostles, he advocates the idea that the authority of Mt.28:18 is conferred to the disciples by successive generations of Christians; and the goal of such authority is not to limit freedom but to foster spiritual growth, which includes the cutting off of evil. To illustrate that, he uses the parable of the vine of John 15 and the language of cutting off the unfruitful branches. This idea is important as we consider the meaning of heresy and orthodoxy.

⁴ Meagher (1967, p. 1114) phrases nicely this conundrum: "The Christian sees himself, in effect, as a citizen of two cities, one temporal and the other spiritual, existing side by side and institutionally distinct, each autonomous in its own sphere". The problem is raised because of the basic premise that religious authority is different from the civil one. But how did the early Christians consider this separation? As it is noted in the next section of this paper, the secular and spiritual power were very much unified (considered as one) for early Christians and pagans. In addition, this is important to consider in the definition of orthodoxy and heresy.

⁵ The very definition of an ecumenical council brings already the problem of divine authority. A council is a gathering of people that get together to solve a specific problem. In the context of church councils, it is assumed that an ecclesiastical council is a meeting of church representatives to solve issues related to the Christian faith. In other words, it has the final authority in the ecclesiastical sphere. The word "ecumenical" comes from the Greek word meaning "inhabited world". So, by definition, it is the meeting of church leaders who represent the whole Christian world. But this is not so simple as it will be to some extent investigated later. Just to exemplify, by ecumenical councils some scholars understand that they are meetings having the wide acceptance of the church with the authorization of the bishop of Rome, the Pope (KELLY, 2009). This papal view is considered by most of the western world, since it refers to western Christianity, or, when it comes to ecumenical councils, to the ones the Roman Catholic Church considers universally valid and authoritative, in contrast with Orthodox gatherings after the schism of the

Adventists view the history of the Christian church in the first century as completely different from the one after these four councils. For them, the church of the Apostles was pure, but after the ecumenical councils Christianity as an institution became corrupted (DEDEREN, 2000).[6] For Adventists, divine authority did not sanction most of the decisions of these councils because it was against Scriptures, politically decided and influenced by Roman paganism.

In the Catholic view of Christian history, however, the paramount development of divine authority happens in the four centuries after the death of Jesus' apostles, when Christians unite with the State to define truth in dogmas against heresies (CATHECISM, 1984, p. 53; KELLY, 2009, p. 3-5).[7] Contrary to the Adventist view, it is believed that those councils were inspired by God, who gave them the same level of authority as the Scriptures.

Seventh-day Adventists see the Christian church during the period of the four first ecumenical councils as corrupted, without divine authority. Ro-

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11th century (1054 AD) (THE ENCYCLOPEDIA, 1999, p. 697-698; ENCYCLOPEDIA, 2005, p. 2039, 2041). Since even the Orthodox considered the first four councils as ecumenical, the delimitation of my research will not be altered. However, it is important to consider that the issue of authority (divine authority itself) lies at the heart of what an ecumenical council is all about.

[6] According to Dederen (2000, p. 576), Seventh-day Adventists believe that the church is the body of believers that keep the commandments of God. They also agree that it is historically the universal and local group of believers that follows the teachings of Jesus; the authority, however, to be followed is the Scriptures, which they consider as their trademark (DEDEREN, 2000, p. 560, 561, 576). Since the Scriptures are the supreme authority, both local and universal church leaders need to be subjected to it, with which the Roman Catholic Church agrees (see footnote 7). This opens space in their historiography for mistakes in the so-called Christian Church history. The Adventist view on prophecy identifies that such a thing happened exactly in the period of the four ecumenical councils. By interpreting the little horn of Daniel 7 and 8 as being the church-state Catholic institution and the first beast power of Revelation 13 as the Roman political and later religious system, they see the authoritative power of this system against the Word of God as Satan's influence inside the Christian Church changing the truth into error by introducing pagan ideas which replaced the teaching of the Bible (for further details, see CANALE, 2000), HOLBROOK, 2000, MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION, 1988 AND WHITE, 2005).

[7] For Catholics, God has guided "historically" the decisions of the church councils, in such way that they are as authoritative as Scriptures, as it is discussed later in the context of the four ecumenical councils. Because Tradition is for them the voice of the Holy Spirit through the church magisterium in the apostolic succession, represented in the ecumenical councils, and Scriptures are also inspired by the same Spirit, there is no contradiction between one and the other, but a continuum (CATHECISM, 1984, p. 28-29). This view, however, can be questioned as it is discussed later.

man Catholics, in their turn, understand that this is the most glorious period of the church, when divine authority shaped truth against heresies. Supposing that all truth is God's truth,[8] did the Church during the four ecumenical councils represent divine truth and authority or not? In other words, regarding this issue of divine truth and authority in the Church, who are more historically accurate in their description of reality, Catholics or Adventists?

The problem raised by this paper is a historical one that has theological implications. However, the solution proposed here is historical and not theological. As explained above, the different views of divine authority and truth advocated by Catholics and Seventh-day Adventists put us face to face with the dilemma that both groups claim that they are historically based. Another reason to approach this subject historically is that the issue of divine authority is a complex one involving the action of the supernatural, which has been discussed in other works.[9] Therefore, it is not the goal of this paper to try to solve this problem in the sphere of revelation-inspiration. In this paper, I try to evaluate the Adventist and Catholic view of history in the light of the documents of the ecumenical councils.[10]

Our first methodological step will briefly investigate how divine authority was conceived by Christians in the first four centuries, namely, in the first ecumenical councils of the church. Since the historical period is a long one, in this paper I try to describe their definition of divine authority in the light of how heresy and orthodoxy are defined and treated in the period between those councils. Especial attention is given to the first four ecumenical councils because it is in and through them that an abstract notion of divine authority and truth became a historical fact.

In the search of how divine authority was interpreted in the canons of the first four ecumenical councils, I considered those involved in them in order to ex-

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[8] Holmes (1979, p. 89) explains that when someone makes inference from facts, it is logically necessary to fit such inferences within the principle of non-contradiction. This principle states that one thing cannot be true and false and the same time. In this particular case, either the ecumenical councils are divinely oriented and contain truth or not. They cannot be both, since they would be logically contradictory.

[9] This point has been extensively dealt with from an Adventist perspective by Fernando L. Canale (2001).

[10] It is not my purpose to determine which affirmation is more logical or true, for this would require another way to tackle the problem by discussing it more theologically and philosophically than historically. However, investigating how the councils and those involved in them considered the concept of divine authority may shed some light on this debate.

plain them in the larger scope of their decisions. This research also takes into consideration the implementation of some canons promulgated between each council to understand the historical context. The four ecumenical councils of the Church are: The Council of Nicaea (325 AD), Constantinople I (381), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451); so the time span of this research is about 130 years.

It is still a belief in the Catholic Church that divine authority is found in the ecumenical councils of the Church, and that it all started in these four ecumenical councils deemed authoritative for the faith of all Christians. Catholics claim that their tradition is the true one coming from God himself. In opposition, Seventh-day Adventists believe that the doctrinal developments of these councils are the result of corrupt power struggle between church and state, which ended up in many theological errors.

As far as I know, despite the bold claims of the Adventist Church against the Catholic position of divine authority in the first four centuries of Christianity, no study has explained them historically. The closest Adventist historical evaluation of the truthfulness of Christianity in the first four centuries is found in Froom's works (1950) Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers.11 However, in it he does not tackle the issue of divine authority in light of the ecumenical councils. Explaining divine authority from this perspective is important because it is the boldest claim of Roman Catholicism that its divine authority is derived from such councils.

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DIVINE UNDER CONTROL[12]

The ecumenical councils did not just happen out of the blue; after all, Christianity had a history of almost three centuries before they took place. It started with Jesus Christ and his disciples around the 30's AD. According

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[11]   The closest he comes to the importance of divine authority in the Church through the ecumenical council is found in chapters 16 (the transition hour of the church) and 21 (Gradual emergence of the papal power). He hints that the Council of Nicaea is a transition point in Christianity toward apostasy, but his emphasis is on the prophetic interpretation of the antichrist. Although the prophetic interpretation is the purpose of his book, this view of history shows even more how Seventh-day Adventists have interpreted the early Christian period as an apostate period.

[12]   This introduction about the years prior to Nicaea is brief and incomplete due to lack of space and time. What happened in Christianity in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd centuries is complex and still very much unknown. However, from what it is known, I did a summary in connection with the issue of divine authority (GUY, 2004). For a good introduction of early Christianity, see Chadwick (1988).

to the NT Scriptures, Jesus claimed to teach and to be the only truth, for He was God.[13] After Jesus had lived and died in Palestine, He ascended to heaven leaving his apprentices to spread His message of truth to the world. But as one reads the post-ascension New Testament writings, one can see that Christians were facing problems with the definition of truth.[14]

The picture I have from reading the NT is that falsehood had been mingling with what "serious" Christians considered to be the truth, and soon the apostles sought to define it authoritatively by appealing to their divine connection.[15] By the end of the century however, those who had been with Jesus died and no connection with God as supreme authority could be claimed. Amidst the persecutions and heresies, the church needed

[13] See, for example, John 1:1-18; 4:13,14; 5:24-27; 6:51; 8:26-32; 14:6;18:37,38. For a recent essay about the biblical context of those claims, see Andreas J. Köstenberger and R. Albert Mohler (2005).

[14] For example, in Matthew 24:4, 5 Jesus mentioned that Christians would be susceptible to deceptions. In Acts 15, where it is recorded what is considered by many to be the first ecumenical council, apostles and other Christian leaders of Palestine debated the issue of gentile inclusion and circumcision. This is probably the same one mentioned by Paul in Galatians, chapter 1. In this letter a tension of truth and error is clearly seen by the fact that Paul even states that "other gospels" not from God were been taught among them. In 2 Thessalonians 2:6-10, Paul admonished the church that Satan was working to deceive the church, and in Acts 20:28-31, Paul even says that it would be from inside workings. Other evidences of struggles about the truth can be perceived in the epistle of Jude, in the seven churches of Revelation 2-3 and in the mention of antichrists in 1 John 4:1-6 and 2 John 7-11. In these late letters John ties the issue of Christ nature to the errors that were been introduced into the church. If one considers that Jesus is the truth, both God and human in flesh, one can see the difficulties Christianity had to define it (GUY, 2004, p. 268). Again, we come back to the issue of divine authority.

[15] See discussion of the canon production and apostolic succession in relation to the personal connection of the apostles with Jesus in Philip Schaff (1950a, p. 198-205) and New Catholic encyclopedia (SULLIVAN, 1967). The argument used by both authors is that Paul, Peter and John are the three great apostolic exponents that appealed to their connection with Jesus to validate their authority over the church, and this was accepted by the early Christians. For an explanation of how this affected the emergence of the "written authority", see Margareth M. Mitchell (2006). It is interesting the Mitchell (2006, p. 179), right at the beginning of her discussion about the "Christian tradition and Scriptures", states that the "first element in the establishment of the Christian 'written record' was the singularly most significant decision" by faithful Jew that the word of God had "unquestioned literary authority". This implies that in the search for the establishment of the Christian canon, divine authority was the definite mark to be found.

an anchor of authority; but since God was not physically present, neither those who had been with Him, the debate over divine authority was taken into a more abstract/subject vein (JOHNSTON, 2009).[16]

With the canon not being formed yet, the first disciples dead and Jesus in heaven, the Christian church was left with very little objective ways of establishing authority. As a result, clashes of opinions in Christianity rose, but a bigger problem came and slowed down the process of defining the truth, i.e., the imperial persecutions.[17] Striving to be alive, Christians had to worry less about doctrinal clarity (JOHNSTON, 2009, p. 268). However, after a little more than two hard centuries, imperial persecution ceased, opening space for Christians to continue clarifying the truths they claimed.

Following this period, Constantine appears in the scene as the "Christian emperor" legitimizing Christianity as official religion. As part of this process of legitimation, he summoned the Council of Nicaea, which set the precedent for ecclesiastical definition of faith. After Nicaea, three more ecumenical councils cemented what was considered by

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[16]   In this insightful article, Johnston argues that at the very beginning of the Church, after Jesus' departure to heaven, the issue of authority was high. According to his reading of the NT, at the time of the apostles the Holy Spirit used many Christians who prophesied in their home-churches. These utterances needed to be evaluated by the whole congregation. However, as time went by, these more individual and "subjective" means of divine authority were replaced by more objective means of authority, such as the hierarchical positions of deacons, elders and bishops. The classical example is the suppressing of the Montanist movement, which affirmed that they had the Spirit of God. The danger with this objectivation of divine authority, he argues, is that the church tried to control the power of God, which throughout Scriptures was only subject to God himself. "Prophets constitute a power center that is independent from and potentially a rival to officially constituted authority. A prophet is not elected by anyone or accountable to anyone except God" (JOHNSTON, 2009, p.18). Later in the 3rd century, Cyprian would use the same subjective argument for authority as the Montanists (see footnote 19) in the dispute with Stephen, bishop of Rome, about the Novatians. However, arguing against the same Novatians, Cyprian used also the argument of apostolic succession and the objective hierarchy of church bishops to establish his authority. His theory is simple: only those who are connected with Peter, who was placed by Jesus as His successor (Jo 21:17 and Mt.16:18-19), are rightly connected with God. The chain is: God-Jesus-Peter-Apostles-leaders of church-church members. So with this idea of divine authority, the truth is not anymore subject to the Holy Spirit in individuals, but institutionalized in the person of bishops (see HALL, 2006). As it is noticed below, this objectivation of divine authority, as pointed by Johnston, is exactly what happened with the rise of Constantine.
[17]   For more on persecution and how it shaped the faith and practice of Christians, see Guy (2004).

"most" Christians as divine ecclesiastical authority.[18] Nevertheless, how was it defined and achieved?

PRE-NICAEA CONCILIAR AUTHORITY

It is now recognized that prior to Nicaea, in the midst of persecutions, there were gatherings of church leaders to solve problems of diverse nature (HUGHES, 1960, p. 1-4).[19] Many consider the very first of

[18]   Later many bishops and councils referred to those four ecumenical councils as inspired by God and the source of divine authority for the church (see VON HEFELE, 1896).

[19]   Here it is good to clarify that some authors use the word synod (Gr. gathering) as councils. The best review I have found so far about ecclesiastical meetings prior to Nicaea is that of Karl Joseph von Hefele (1883). In chapter 1 of book I, he explains those councils of the 2nd century, and in chapter 2 those of the 3rd century. The meetings of the 2nd century are those which documental evidence (mostly by Eusebius Pamphili) points as being of ecclesiastical nature. He divides them in three categories: Synods relative to Montanism (VON HEFELE, 1896, p. 77-80), synods concerning the feast of Easter (p. 80-83) and some doubtful synods, most of them in Rome (from the LibellusSynodicus). The important information for the topic of this paper, about authority, is that those synods were local, where leaders got together to solve doctrinal or practical matters of the church. About the 3rd century, ecclesiastical meetings, Hefele concentrated his attention on the synods of Carthage and Rome on account of Novatian schism (VON HEFELE, 1896, p. 86-126). In the debate about baptizing heretics between Cyprian and Stephen, Hefele (1896, p. 103) discusses the issue of authority. Stephen, bishop of Rome (who is considered a Pope by Hefele) argues that they had ancient tradition on their side (p. 104-105). Cyprian, however, does not question this ancient practice, but he argues that tradition is not more precious than truth when the Holy Spirit reveals further truth. Hefele (1896, p. 104) concludes that "in his [Cyprian's] practice a progress brought about by the successive revelations of the Holy Spirit" is the final authority. So when the Pope Stephen appeals to tradition (ancient practice), Cyprian argued that it was human practice and not divine one. But later, Hefele (1896, p. 106) recognizes that what really counted as authoritative practice was the interpretation of church fathers like Vincent of Lerins and Augustine, who argued that ancient practice going back to the apostles was on the side of the papacy and should be divine. It may be important to remember that, while the Christians were being persecuted by the empire, they did not persecute each other. Excommunication or condemnation of "schismatics" or "heretics" were performed by the removal of church communion and non-participation of the Eucharist, two aspects deemed by some church fathers as the means to salvation (FERGUSON, 1990). But notice that no physical measures were taken to expel Christians who would not conform to the

those meetings the one narrated by Luke in Acts 15, known as the Jerusalem Council, which dealt with the issue of inclusion of gentiles in the church (FERGUSON, 1990; VON HEFELE, 1883, p. 77). These councils are a picture of what happened with the coming Christian councils, especially prior to Nicaea:[20]

a. They were limited and local as one can see in the debates in Galatians 1;

b. the gathering aimed at solving current problems (attempts to unify beliefs);

c. representatives of many churches were gathered;

d. letters were sent with their decisions to be followed by congregations involved, and

e. decisions were not necessarily followed by all.

Some of these characteristics, such as the fact of being limited to local issues and solving local problems, were probably because of the environment of persecution and of slow communication among believers. Letters could take months to arrive from one place to another, being sent on foot, on horseback or by boat. What this brings out is that the authority of those meetings was not felt and practiced by the majority of Christians. One can also argue, following Cyprian's reasoning, that what was revealed to one church was divine, while another did not receive such revelation.

In other words, the "authority of God" was very much subjective and not well defined institutionally by Christians to be followed by "all". However, with the rise of Constantine this would change dramatically. Actually, the rise of Constantine was not only a rise of a Christian emperor but of an

so-called ecclesiastical norm. This would change with the institutionalization of the church in the Roman Empire after Constantine.

[20] These conclusions are based on my reading of Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris (2007), Mark Edwards (2007), Von Hefele (1883, p. 77-230) e Hall (2006).

imperial church with the introduction of ecumenical (worldwide) meetings. With imperial help, bishops from all over the empire who could not otherwise be gathered to discuss issues were brought together. Moreover, through the state support the decisions of those councils were carried by the imperial court much more efficiently. Certainly, a new era had arrived to Christianity (CHADWICK, 1988, p. 125).[21]

IMPERIAL OR ECCLESIASTICAL MEETINGS?

How quickly the fate of Christianity changed. Around 303 Roman emperor Diocletian launched one of the most brutal persecutions upon Christians. Churches were destroyed, Scriptures burned, people imprisoned, put under slavery, but no killing, at first. As the time passed and Christian endurance increased, they were tortured and killed, especially in North Africa and Egypt (see EUSEBIUS; MAIER, 1999, p. 290-308; FREND, 2006).

In the year 313, rescue came with the rise of General Constantine. Together with Licinius, they issued a decree that not only stopped the persecution of Christians but gave this religion the privilege of being a state institution (EUSEBIUS; MAIER, 1999, p. 311-313; SCHAFF, 1950a).[22] The

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[21] For Hughes, Constantine's conversion is more than just the end of persecution. As a matter of fact, his conversion shaped Christianity as a whole. He also agrees that post-persecution church ushers in another era in the field of authority and truth establishment from an ecclesiastical perspective, for it became officially an institution (HUGHES, 1960, p. 118). What changes did this bring to the church concept of divine authority? As it is described in footnote 16, after Constantine, divine authority became more objective in the Church. Peter Huff in his article suggests that the Catholic view of divine authority is an attempt to bring together the subjectivity of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers with the objective character of ecclesiastical hierarchy. It can be noticed here a development of Cyprians' idea. For Huff, "The Catholic church historically has seen itself as a living community of faith divinely commissioned to address unique historical challenges in response to the leadership of the Spirit who, according to Jesus' promise, 'will guide you into all the truth' (Jo 16:12)". Herein Adventists would also agree, I think, for they also bring this tension of local and universal church guided by the Holy Spirit as noted in footnote 6. But how one defines "living community of faith divinely commissioned" is another issued to be discussed as already hinted in this paper in the discussion of heresy and orthodoxy.

[22] For Schaff (1950a, p. 93), this changed completely the definition of divine authority in the church. Right at the beginning of his discussion of Constantine's rising to power in Christianity,

Edict of Milan came together with what is mentioned by many as the first ecumenical council, the council of Arles in 314. The records state that this meeting truly gathered representatives from "all the world" (SCHNEIDER, 1999, p. 238; EUSEBIUS; MAIER, 1999, p. 346-347; FERGUSON, 1990, p. 238).[23] Christianity would never be the same. Now divine authority could be discussed and defined by the church.

Regarding divine authority in church-state relation, Drake has a great insight worth considering. In his analysis of powers in the time of Constantine, he explains that it was normal for both Christians and pagans to consider secular power as guided by God, i.e., as divine. Since this was true for them, it is not so adequate to explain their definition of divine authority and to approach the historical sources of this period with the modern mentality which has a dichotomy between church (spiritual) and state (secular/non-spiritual) (DRAKE, 2007).[24]

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he poses the dilemma: did the reign of God prosper in the hands of civil power? His answer seems to be a strong yes, but with hard qualifications and consequences. For him, spiritual authority became secular and secular authority was assumed as spiritual (SCHAFF, 1950a, p. 92-94). So, the question of our subtitle fits well: what authority did the councils exercise, ecclesiastical or imperial? Which one is divine?

[23]   It is interesting that Eusebius (1999, p. 347) enthusiastically expressed the gathering together of bishops after persecutions as a fulfillment of Ezekiel 37:7 with regard to the church, the body of Christ. He even states that in those meetings "there was one power of the divine Spirit infusing all the members, who were of one soul, showing the same enthusiasm for the faith with one hymn of praise on the lips of all". This generalization and positive thinking can be hardly the faithful description of the four ecumenical councils, with their divisions and quarrels. For Von Hefele (1883, p. 180-199), some may consider Arles as a general council because Constantine indeed brought about 600 bishops from almost all quarters of the empire. But Hefele (1883, p. 182) argues that for the West it can be counted as ecumenical, but not for the whole Church, since many representatives of the East was not present. For Hefele, then, the definition of an ecumenical council seems to be decided in the numbers of representatives of churches involved in the meetings. This issue of participation will be considered later on in this paper.

[24]   Drake shows that Constantine was considered a divine deliverer by Eusebius (see EUSEBIUS; MAIER, 1999, p. 306), who believed that while Jesus was Savior on heaven, the Roman emperor was savior on earth. Agapetus expressed the same sentiment about Justinian I years later (DRAKE, 2007, p. 404). When one considers that even during NT persecutions Christians (more explicitly Paul) believed that God instituted the political powers, it is not hard to believe that Christians would have the same thinking, especially when a general or emperor rises to defend the Christian church. However, it is worth

This was so, especially in Christianity, Drake argues, because of the monotheistic view inherited from Judaism. This author (2007, p. 405) thinks that this view of one God contributed to the monarchical representation of God on earth. This is the caesaro-papist system which Christianity inherited from roman worldview.[25] But as it is known, the issue of monotheism was not so settled in Christianity, neither the issue of divine authority, for both belong together. However, it is interesting to notice that this undivided character of spheres of divine power in the decision of the four ecumenical councils is clearly perceived in the discussion of divine authority.

So, maybe the proper answer to the subtitle of this section would be none, i.e, neither imperial nor ecclesiastical, but divine. Since God was considered to be the One behind both of them united in the councils. On the other hand, this raises several questions about how divine authority is exercised and defined. To understand more about it, let us consider the four ecumenical councils and probe into this issue of divine authority through

considering Eusebius' affirmation of a dual savior in the light of the Cyprian discussion of objective and subjective sources of divine authority. Eusebius' view comes closer to the objective perception of divine authority in a visible hierarchical power in contrast with the more spiritual and abstract inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Holmes (1979, p. 23), in his second chapter, suggests that this tension between secular and religious needs to be seen in the light of Creation "with God working creatively in men and history, the secular [not being] beyond help." By this he means that, despite human failures, Creation shares the reality of common grace. So ultimately there is really no separation between them (HOLMES, 1979, p. 26-27), as Christians seemed to believe in the period suggested by Drake (2007, p. 25). As far as civil power is concerned, he argues that in OT times God did not disassociate himself from it, but rather was much involved in its activities (HOLMES, 1979, p. 25). In addition, Paul in the NT brings the same concept of divine interaction with civil government. Holmes (1979, p. 25), in the first chapter, advocates an idea similar to that presented by Catholics, i.e., that civil and religious authorities are two arms of divine authority. Thus, Christian calling includes both, depending on the peculiar gifts God has bestowed upon each individual. With this reasoning, Holmes (1979, p. 26) affirms that civil power is a "divine calling".

[25] This monarchical image of divine authority was shared by Pagans and Christians. For both, the premise that divinity needs to be on the side of the ruler was the legitimation of true power. The same "secular" ruler is the one who maintains the goodwill of the gods. This is the duty of the pontifex maximus. "There was, thus, a sanctity attached to the office of emperor that cannot be lightly discounted when considering the relationship Christians had with the empire – after Constantine as well as before him" (DRAKE, 2007, p. 405).

questions such as: who summoned them? Who participated in their decisions? What were the decisions involved and how were they enacted?

I conclude from this brief overview of divine authority in the councils prior to Nicaea that the issue is closely related to the definition of how God acts and speaks in the church. While Jesus was on earth physically, it was easy to distinguish truth from error, because it was very objective through His presence. But after He left, the Spirit substituted the authority, opening for a more subjective interpretation of divine communication and authority.

As Holmes tried to conciliate metaphysical objectivity and epistemological subjectivity (HOLMES, 1979),[26] so did the apostles in the NT with the institution of local leaders and the opening for spiritual manifestation. The same was tried by Cyprian and his theory of apostolic succession and progressive revelation. But as Johnston (2009) pointed out, the leading of God was too abstract in the face of error and church tended to the objective side of divine authority represented in the church councils.

Those meetings tried to be the voice of God, but it was not universal. However, with the advent of Constantine, the Council of Arles revealed that what had been tried in the times of persecution could be better performed with political support, since this would allow a universal discussion of religious issues. Viewing Constantine as a savior and a divine authority, the church could broaden its hierarchical definition of truth. But did it happen? This is what will be considered in the next section through the four ecumenical councils.

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[26] As it was noted in footnote 24, Holmes advocates the idea that civil and religious powers are two spheres of divine authority, based on creation and common grace shared by all. This explanation about truth and authority is based on his premise laid out in his first chapter. For Holmes (1979, p. 6), religious power is subjective in nature and civil or secular is objective. To arrive at the whole truth of God, one needs to consider both aspects, which, he suggests, is not contradictory. What is relevant in his idea, for this research, is his suggestion that metaphysical objectivity (revelation of God such as the Scriptures) is compatible with epistemological subjectivity (individual perception of reality). Since God reveals objective truths to subjective humans, this needs to be taken into consideration as one evaluates divine authority and truth. Holmes gives great ideas to discuss the relation of divine authority, but does not give objective solution to the problem. As one can notice in our initial discussion and later in the rest of this paper, this combination was not either so easily achieved by the church and its councils.

COUNCILS AND DIVINE TRUTH

As discussed previously, the idea of divine authority shaped the concept of ecumenical councils. Amidst persecution it was hard to come up with a unanimous voice for the church, whatever the subject might be. But now with freedom and imperial support, the church would try to do its best to once and for all define divine authority without the apostles and the Lord himself in their midst. But this was not an easy task as it is seen in the theological debates in these first four ecumenical councils. Actually, the very fact of their existence shows that error was a common part of the church.

This section probes first the issue of error/crisis and the origin of the ecumenical councils and then issues concerning who convoked/summoned the meetings, who participated, who imposed their decisions and how they were accepted. It is in this context that I venture to discuss the definition of those councils about heresy and orthodoxy in the quest for divine authority and truth in the church.

Why the councils anyway?

As I read the canons and some historical accounts of the ecumenical councils, I have to agree with the conclusion of Philip Hughes: ecclesiastical councils exist because of crisis/error.[27] The topic that most caused trouble to

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[27] This is the main premise of his book entitled The Church in Crisis. Hughes states right in the first page, "Each had its origin in a particular crisis of Church affairs."(, p. 1). In light of this premise, it is good to consider the different kinds of councils and why they were summoned. For Von Hefele (1883, p. 4) and Ferguson (1990, p. 238), there were are at least five kinds of ecclesiastical councils: diocesan synods – where a bishop gathered with his clergy; provincial synods – where leaders of small regions met to solve issues of their areas; patriarchal synods – where a larger region (province) would gather; synods of residence or endemic – normally in Constantinople, when the emperor called church leaders to discuss issues of interest, especially power struggles; ecumenical synods – whose decisions, normally related to doctrinal issues, were accepted by all the bishops of the empire. Besides those five, Hefele (1883, p. 4-5) adds 3 more: mixed synods – when bishops met statesmen; synods of united provinces – when bishops of different provinces get together for a common interest; and general synods – which were not widely accepted as ecumenical, adopted by only one half of Christianity (East or West). As one can see in the definitions of councils/synods, divine authority can be approached locally, universally and even separated (divided). Also, if one considered that geography played a major role in those meetings, the issue of political or state influence is clearly seen in the origin of all those

the Christian church was the very definition of God in Jesus, the truth. From Nicaea to Chalcedon, one common thread is present: the discussion about Christ's human-divine nature (CHADWICK, 1988; GUY, 2004).

However, this seems to pose a challenge to the quest of divine authority in the church. Since there were errors or divided conclusions about the same religious issue, this would lead to the question of how divine authority worked in history to determine what is considered absolute truth. This is an important question because what was debated in these early centuries is now considered fundamental beliefs of Christianity. The topics that came to the forefront were the nature of Christ and the Trinity, which were far from being understood equally inside the church and even among its leaders.

There are many ways to approach this subject in the history of the four ecumenical councils. I adopted the methodology of evaluating the causes behind their decisions and how those decisions were put into effect. This is done in this paper by generally evaluating some selected factors in each council. The factors I selected are: who summoned them (God – represented by whom, emperor or the bishops?); who participated actively on them (how did God communicate in the council? Was all the church represented?); who imposed their decisions (were they unanimous? Was the Spirit divided as Cyprian argued previously?), and how wide were their acceptance (is divine truth defined by the majority?).

Who summoned and presided the councils?

This question needs to be asked because of the intermingling of church and state so prevalent in this period, which is different from the modern understanding, as previously referred to. When Christianity became an official religion of the Roman Empire, "the church could now act upon the state; so could the state act upon the church; and this mutual influence became a source of both profit and loss, blessing and curses, on either side" (SCHAFF, 1950b, p. 91).[28]

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councils. Concerning the causes for those meetings, Hefele (1883, p. 5) states that there are six basic reasons for the existence of an ecumenical council: (1) schism or heresy, (2) ascent of two rival popes, (3) decisions concerning attacks upon enemy Christians, (4) cardinals who did not elect a Pope, (5) pope suspect of fault and heresy, (6) questions of reform in the church. In the case of the first four ecumenical councils, only option 1 and 6 are viable.

[28]   He even argues that "they [Ecumenical Councils] could not arise until after the conversion of the Roman emperor and the ascendency of Christianity as the religion of the state" (SCHAFF,

One of the factors that contributed to this church-state relationship in the ecumenical councils is detected in the concept of authority found in who convoked/summoned these important meetings. First of all, to gather bishops from all over the empire, the one calling them needed to have some kind of authority. But it is good to remember that the struggles behind the convocation are more complex than just one mere human decision. What historians normally try to convey is that behind the decision to summon a council various political events happen that cause one individual to finally use his/her authority to gather ecclesiastical authorities from many places of the Roman Empire.

So finally, who did it? It seems right to affirm that all the first eight ecumenical councils, which obviously include the first four in focus here, were ultimately convoked by the emperor (VON HEFELE, 1883, p. 3-7).[29] The reason was a pragmatic one both from a religious and political point of view. He was the one who supported the councils financially, providing food, shelter, security and lodge for the hundreds of bishops who would gather in one city (SCHAFF, 1950b, p. 135-335). However, when it comes to the question of who ruled these meetings the issue is not so clear.

There are two major possibilities raised. First, that the emperor was the supreme authority behind the councils; secondly, the theory of the papal (bishop of Rome) authority. The imperial interpretation is summarized by Edwards (2007, p. 378), who affirms that "the principle that the emperor may give authority to the council was established in a preamble, which ascribed the First Ecumenical Council to Constantine and the Fourth to Marcian and Valentinian."[30] The second option is advocated by Hefele (1883, p. 52), who affirms that "there cannot be an ecumenical council without union with the Pope".

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1950b, p. 332). Louth (2004, p. 394) also argues that the very nature of the name ecumenical to refer to the whole of Christianity needs to have an authority broad enough to encompass it, and the only one able to do it in the time of the Roman Empire was the emperor himself.

[29] This fact is mentioned by Schaff (1950b, p. 335) as well as by The Encyclopedia of Early Christianity (1999, p. 296). For example, Nicaea, like the others, was initiated by letters sent by the emperor to gather the church leadership in a synod (VON HEFELE, 1883, p. 6, 7, 268; SCHAFF, 1950b, p. 134). This procedure seems to be the standard for the other four councils under consideration.

[30] Schaff (1950b, p. 337) also advocates this idea that the temporal strength of the Roman emperor gave him the sufficient authority to gather the first ecumenical councils.

The argument for the first position, the imperial authority, is based on his political power, which was much higher than that of any other bishop. Schaff (1950b, p. 335) even argues, against the papal theory, that the first and most important council (of Nicaea) was summoned without the presence or consent of the bishop of Rome.[31] Hefele's (1883, p. 6-15) argument, however, is that even though the emperor was the one who politically made it possible, it was the See of Rome who dispensed the ecclesiastical authority behind it, or the final word.[32]

Hefele (1883, p. 33) continues explaining that even Constantine made this participation of the Roman bishop clear when he divided the business of the church and of the empire by affirming "I am a bishop. You are bishops for the interior business of the Church." "I am the bishop chosen by God to conduct the exterior business of the Church" (HEFELE, 1883).[33] In this argument, one is invited back to the question about separation of secular and religious authority and how divine authority plays a part in this kind of separation or unification.

The Issue of participation

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The representative nature of the ecumenical councils is tied with their authority, as was pointed out by Hefele in his theory of papal supremacy. But

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[31]   Hefele (1883, p. 27-45) also recognizes this and explains that in almost all of the eight ecumenical councils the Pope was not even present. But his authority was exercised through his legates who were sent to preside the councils with the authority of the Pope himself, for they spoke for him as the Pope spoke for God.

[32]   In these pages, he clearly advocates the idea that the data show that the emperor officially called the meetings, because of his political power. But ultimately, since it was a religious gathering, the authority was of the representatives of the church, who was epitomized in the figure of the bishop of Rome. This raises the question of representation addressed next. Schaff (1950b, p. 336) goes against this position by affirming that even its presidency was performed by the emperor and not by the papal legates.

[33]   In p. 281, he affirms that the "emperor had opened the Council as a kind of honorary president, and he continued to be present at it; but the direction of the theological discussions, properly speaking, was naturally the business of the ecclesiastical leaders of the Council, and was left to them" because Constantine and the imperial court knew little of theology (see also CHADWICK, 1998, p. 125). If Constantine and his court knew little of theology, could the church trust the doctrinal authority of the councils they presided? How did God speak through him in these theological matters? These are important issues to be answered in the debate about divine authority in the ecumenical councils.

who actually was present in those meetings? Did they represent the whole Christian church? Can we say they spoke unanimously for God?

By understanding the physical mechanism of summoning a council, one may evaluate a little better who attended and, therefore, represented the church in the ecumenical councils. Again, Hefele is the most detailed account used by recent authors from the 1900s and 2000s. He explains that letters from the emperor were sent to the metropolitan bishops and some other eminent bishops, and those would call some suffragans (minor bishops), who would decide to come to the local of the synod in the specified date (VON HEFELE, 1883, p. 17).

In his detailed discussion about the first four ecumenical councils, Hefele (1883, p. 16-27) leaves open the possibility that politics could decide who would attend or not, because it could happen that metropolitan bishops did not want to call other bishops, and that the decision about going or not was a personal matter. In such cases, the decisions of the ecumenical councils could not ultimately be deemed as the representation of the whole church of God.[34] Because the bishopric of big cities was considered a political office by the government, after its institutionalization, it could be easily used politically by avoiding enemies and inviting those of common mind.

In addition to this argument, another point is brought forth by Hefele (1883, p. 18-19) in this issue of representation in the councils. He shows that since Cyprian and the Synod of Carthage in the 250s, the ecclesiastical councils were composed only of bishops; even though clerics and laymen could be present, they had no participation in their decision.[35] In light of this informa-

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[34]   In volume II, Hefele (1883, p. 342-343) discusses each of the councils from 326 to 429 AD. About the synod of Constantinople I he concludes that the participants were summoned by the emperor Theodosius, and they were only the bishops that belonged to his division of the Empire (east). While the Gratian's part, from where the bishop of Rome, pope, belonged did not participate in full, and maybe was not even represented by legates. He also makes the remark that Theodosius "immediately upon his accession required of all his subjects the confession of the orthodox faith" (VON HEFELE, 1883, p. 342) and this most certainly influenced in who was invited or not.

[35]   And it cannot be argued that only the bishops knew the right decisions to make and what each issue involved; because Casiday and Norris (2007, p. 3) argue that "these debates occurred not simply inside halls of power and within synods of bishops, but also in the fish markets and the public baths. In fact, civil and ecclesiastical politics had begun to intertwine at the local long before any emperor became personally involved, but with Constantine's political ascent, the importance of his Christianity for the divine safekeeping of the empire came to

tion, a couple of questions can be raised: How did (does) God communicate in the councils? Was God represented just through a minority who would be present in the political meeting held by the emperor?[36]

These questions are relevant because, as one reviews the history of what was decided in those councils, one can see the shift from one opinion to the other, which puts in check the validity of their truthfulness, permanence and trustworthiness. This character of trustworthiness and permanence can be seen in those who imposed the decisions upon the churches.

WHO IMPOSED THEIR RULES?

It seems correct to affirm that the decisions made by the bishops in the four ecumenical councils were actually performed by the legislative power of the emperor. Hefele (1883, p. 42-43) suggests that the bishops sought the emperor to execute those who were against the decided matters of the councils.[37] But he also advocates that this was only possible because there was a papal confirmation who gave its divine imprimatur (VON HEFELE, 1883, p. 45-46).[38]

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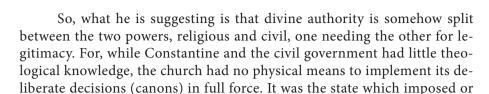. . . . .

occupy the place of sacrifices to the gods which had held the earlier emperor". So, the issue of representation plays an important role in discussing the notion of divine authority as played out in the decisions of the four ecumenical councils.

[36] And it is interesting to notice that the same Hefele uses the argument of representation against the ecumenicity of Arles in 313. Chadwick (1988, p. 130) also argues that it was the representation in the Council of Nicaea that gave it its ecumenical authority. However, this is still debatable, for, as both recognize, few bishops from the East, without the presence of the bishop of Rome (Pope), participated in it.

[37] He explains that Nicaea's decisions became law of the state by an imperial edict. In Constantinople I the assembly asked/begged for the confirmation of the emperor (VON HEFELE, 1883, p.42) In Ephesus, a request of confirmation on the part of the emperor was not necessary because the emperor was already in favor of its decision, so he just sanctioned the decisions by law of state (VON HEFELE, 1883, p.43). In Chalcedon, the emperor consented to the decrees of the councils. Edwards remarks that to "endorse the canons was to endorse the president", showing that since the emperor was the one behind the ecumenical implementation, his was the final authority after all (EDWARDS, 2007, p. 373).

[38] Also in p.28 he boldly affirms that the emperor acted together with the Pope's authority. He then explains how this worked in the ecumenical councils one by one. In Nicaea, he admits there is a high probability that its decision was recognized by Pope Sylvester. This conclusion

So, what he is suggesting is that divine authority is somehow split between the two powers, religious and civil, one needing the other for legitimacy. For, while Constantine and the civil government had little theological knowledge, the church had no physical means to implement its deliberate decisions (canons) in full force. It was the state which imposed or practically fulfilled the canons of the councils in the local churches.[39]

But the use of force to implement the councils' decisions raises another question as one goes further in this quest about the authority of God in the ecumenical councils of the church, because the use of force shows that the "truth" defined by the councils was not completely accepted. It also implies that God needed

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is based on later documents which affirmed that such was the case. Later on, Pope Julius I affirmed that "ecclesiastical decrees and the decisions of the synods ought not to be published without the consent of the Bishop of Rome, and that this is a *rule* and *law* of the Church" (VON HEFELE, 1883, p. 45). In the case of Constantinople I, it is a little more problematic, because its canons were rejected by the Pope, who accepted only its creed (see more details in VON HEFELE, 1883, p. 370-374). This raises the question (long discussed by the Eastern and Western schism) about the authority of such council and, in a broader range, how divine authority plays its role in ecclesiastical decisions. In the case of Ephesus, Hefele (1883, p. 45) confirmed that Pope Celestine's legates signed its canons, which were sanctioned a year later by Pope Sixtus III. Of Chalcedon, the Pope sanctioned only the creed and the articles of faith, rejecting explicitly, however, article 28, which affirmed the authority of Constantinople's bishop. The pope argued that this was against Nicaea, which restricted papal supremacy to the See of Rome. Hefele (1883, p. 46) makes the point that later on the bishop of Constantinople asked confirmation from the Pope as the Synod did. But one needs to be careful in this bold affirmation without much historical evidence, since in all 5 volumes of his *History of the Councils* Hefele makes bold apologies for the papal supremacy.

[39]   In Nicaea the emperor at first expelled Arius and his party, but later admitted him and his party, expelling Athanasius and those who went against the previously condemned Arius. This change occurred when Constantine died and his three sons, later only two, divided the empire. While Constantius II in the East sided with Arius, his brother Constans in the West sided with the Nicene group. Between the ecumenical councils of Nicaea and Constantinople, this division of emperors in the East and West with different opinion continued with Valentinian and Valens. But by the time of the Council of Constantinople I, Theodosius ruled the whole empire and gave his civil authority to the council's Trinitarian decision. In Ephesus the Emperor sided with John of Antioch against Nestorius, and sanctioned the persecution of Nestorians. In Chalcedon the Roman emperor also forced the deposition of Dioscorus, bishop of Alexandria, who was condemned in the synod, and put in place one appointed by him (for details, see HEFELE, 1896; GUY, 2004, chapter 10 and 11; KELLY 2009, p. 21-47).

force to show the truthfulness of His claims through the church-state union. Why the use of force if the decisions of these meetings were the truth? And how steadily was this "truth" accepted by this kind of authority which used enforcement?

The acceptance

The decisions of the councils were not at all unanimous[40] and probably this is why the church needed the strength of the empire to impose its decisions. After all, such decisions needed to be imposed because of the great division they caused in the church. In Nicaea, the Arians were separated from the Athanasian group. At first, the emperor Constantine sided with the decision of the Nicene council and condemned Arius, but later removed his decision because of the wide acceptance of Arius' ideas in Christianity. Later, to avoid imperial quarrels he accepted both groups (VON HEFELE, 1896, p. 35).

With the Council of Constantinople I, the Arians were again persecuted, but with much antagonism. The Christological positions were somehow very similar and at the same time very different.[41] And each one who advocated the different positions accused each other of being wrong and demanded the emperor to exterminate the errors from the kingdom of God.[42] Behind this attitude, there was the strong mentality of the union between Christianity and the Roman Empire. It should be remembered that divine favor was seen when

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[40] It is not the goal of this paper to trace the different schools of thoughts concerning the debate about truth, but how the concept of divine authority plays its role in the discussion about it. For details on the different parties in the Christological debate in the four ecumenical councils, see Von Helefe (1896). And for a brief but important summary related to the issue of authority in the Christological synods until the 600s, see Edwards. In this article, he shows the struggle between politics and faith in the shaping of the doctrine of Christ and hints a little how this authority issue was played out in each of the four ecumenical councils under consideration.

[41] For a concise explanation of differences and similarities of the parties, see Guy (2004, chapter 11). For a more theological analysis of the Christological debates of the first four ecumenical councils, see Karl-Heinz Uthemann (2007).

[42] For example, after the Synod of Constantinople I, the bishops in the synod "prayed them [the emperors – of the East and West] to lend the aid of the secular arm for the actual deposition of the condemned, and the appointment of orthodox bishops in their stead" (VON HEFELE, 1896, p. 377).

the emperor followed what was right in the eyes of God; and who defined what was doctrinally right was the church, which was represented in the councils.

Thus, in the mind of the religious parties inside the councils, since one group thought differently from the other, one was right and favored by God while the other was wrong and deserving divine penalty that came through excommunication and finally imperial persecution (DRAKE, 2007, p. 425; SCHAFF, 1950b, p. 143). It seems to me that this dynamics of acceptance and refusal of what was considered divine truth was imbedded in their understanding of divine authority in the ecumenical councils – an understanding which involved the relation between church and state, and certainly this shaped what was considered truth (orthodox) and falsehood (heresy).

Whose was the truth?

In the previous topic, it was noted how the notion of divine authority was played out in the decisions of the ecumenical councils. Since the notion of authority of God is very subjective, as observed in the beginning of this study, the church tried to define it more objectively with the union of civil and religious powers. Therefore, in this part of the article, as an attempt to evaluate how the understanding of divine authority was played out by the councils, I follow their concrete actions to evaluate their claim of authority in those gatherings of bishops.

Taking into consideration the issue of error/crisis, the origin of the ecumenical councils and the concrete actions surrounding them (who convoked/summoned the meetings, who participated, who imposed their decisions and how they were accepted), I tried to set the background for the definition of orthodoxy and heresy. It is within this context that I venture to discuss the definition of those involved in the councils about heresy and orthodoxy in their quest for divine authority and truth in the Church.

An important notion that stood out previously was the belief that divinity was involved in history behind the emperor and the ecumenical councils. When one recognizes this, it becomes easier to understand how the church's decisions (in the councils) were seen as the voice of God. Thus, orthodoxy was what God spoke, and heresy was the opposite, that which was against God. But since the councils and emperors were not unanimous in their decisions throughout history, it is no wonder that the issue of divine authority was still debatable.

In order to avoid the deterioration of so precious a union and acceptance offered by the Roman Empire, Christians strived to define more precisely, in the midst of many voices, what was right and wrong and what was the voice of God (EVANS, 2002).[43] And to these two different definitions they called respectively orthodoxy[44] and heresy.[45]

ORTHODOXY AND HERESY

By definition, the concept of divine authority in terms of orthodoxy and heresy is a problematic one. Since it is an opinion or a representative statement of truth, it can be questioned. And this is exactly the issue in the ecumenical councils of the church. To claim divine authority above the decisions or "opinions" of a council meant that another group or individual was authoritative, and therefore had the

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[43]   As was indicated by Johnston, Evans also points to a drastic difference of divine authority understood in the time of the apostles and after Nicaea. While in NT times the community was the locus of the acts of the Holy Spirit, and consequently of divine authority, it had no longer such role after its growth and institutionalization. This process of institutionalization gave opportunity to ample differences. The issue of unity in the body of Christ (the Church) increased because unity with Jesus was synonymous with salvation (EVANS, 2002, p.1-3). Therefore, the church needed to be united. The divine authority and salvation in Nicaea was thus attached to a conciliar divine authority, for they thought those meetings were inspired by the Holy Spirit, which was finally accepted and established in Chalcedon (EVANS, 2002, p.8, 9). One can see the shift of the action of the Holy Spirit from a community church to a conciliar meeting. For more information on the specific ideas named heretical or orthodox in the four ecumenical councils, see David Christie-Murray (1989), chapters 3-9. In this issue of the guiding of the Holy Spirit in the community of faith, Murray in the first chapter affirms that all Christians "teach that the work of the Spirit is that he should lead Christian worshippers into all truth. It soon became plain, as orthodox Christians and heretics alike claimed his authority for their conflicting beliefs, that any revelation he would make would not be written in letters of fire across the sky or engraved on angel-delivered plates of gold. Truth would come piecemeal and painfully through the clash of men's minds in controversy and at a cost of much suffering and often lives" (CHRISTIE-MURRAY,1989, p. 6). This demonstrates the tension between subjective and objective evidences of the divine authority in the church, as explained previously. As he concludes, it was the objective view, in the power of the institutionalized church, that 'controlled' the Holy Spirit and his authority.

[44]   From the Greek orthos – right; and doxa– to think, belief, opinion.

[45]   From the Greek haeresis – choice. But probably after the church father Irenaeus, the term became associated with the "wrong" choice against what was called orthodoxy or dogma.

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truth. Hence the quest for divine presence behind the councils' claims. But how did this come about in the four ecumenical councils

In Nicaea, it was clear that the emperor left to the councils to decide what should be considered "orthodox" (VON HEFELE, 1896, p. 12-13), but after the council's decision to condemn the Christological ideas of Arius, an imperial decree caused him to be exiled and his writings to be burned (VON HEFELE, 1896, p. 1).[46] The treatment for those considered heretics were severe punishments. And notice how orthodoxy is defined indirectly, if not directly. Orthodoxy is conformity to the ruling of the ecumenical councils backed up by the emperor.[47]

The very fact that Arius was received back to the Church and that the other three ecumenical councils after it went back to this same Christological issue showed that although the Nicene creed had been first accepted as authoritative, it was not received as the voice of God for all. Politics was much involved in the decisions of the councils. It is known that many people influenced the emperor to bring Arius back, and the very act of condemning both Athanasius and Arius and afterwards absolving both indicated that the emperor was not so interested in the divine truth but in the peace and unity of his imperial affairs (VON HEFELE, 1896, p. 29, 35, 39-43).[48]

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[46] Not only Arius but also his adherents suffered with the imperial edict. "Constantine banished them [Eusebius of Nicomedia and Theognis] also to a distant country" (VON HEFELE, 1896, p. 2).

[47] In Hefele's writing, those labeled heretics are thus declared based on the decisions of the council of Nicaea. It seems that, for Hefele, Nicaea is the basis for all the other ecumenical councils in terms of determining what is orthodox or not. Notice these references: "Since the recall of Bishop Eusebius [Nicomedia] from exile, the Emperor no longer suspected him of Arianism. The orthodox confession which the former had made had set him entirely at rest on this point" (VON HEFELE, 1896, p. 36). "In all his measures against Athanasius, however, Constantine had never in any way called in question the orthodoxy of the man, which would surely have been the case had he himself inclined towards Arianism; but then Athanasius had been presented to him as a disturber of peace, and it was for this reason that he was so much out of favour with him. Lastly, it must not be overlooked that, except for Jerome, all the Fathers, and especially Athanasius himself, always speak most honorably of the Emperor Constantine, and entertain no doubts of his orthodoxy" (VON HEFELE, 1896, p. 37). Orthodoxy as can be seen by these sample quotes is defined as conformity to the Nicene Creed. Notice also this later reference, "Pope Zosimus, in the year 417 or 418, cited the fifth canon of Sardica as Nicene, and a Synod held at Constantinople in 382 cited the sixth as Nicene. The Synod must evidently have been considered as an appendix to that of Nicaea, and therefore its equal, that is, it must have been honoured as ecumenical" (VON HEFELE, 1986, p. 173).

[48] The same pattern continues in the other ecumenical councils, for each emperor made up his mind in regards to what was doctrinally "right" and backed up the council that suited his inter-

It is interesting that throughout Hefele's description of the ecumenical councils no biblical reference is presented to give the councils their definite authority. But as he points out, "the whole theological controversy of his day [*sic*] appeared to him [*sic*] a consequence of the unhappy mixture of philosophical ideas with the teaching of Scriptures, and that it was necessary to return to the latter to find out the truth" (VON HEFELE, 1896, p. 31).[49]

Rather, the appeal of the councils to its divine authority is made in reference to their old tradition, which includes the claim of the Church of Rome as the oldest apostolic tradition. This is probably the reason for the claims of the bishop of Rome as having the prerogative over the ecumenical synods and being the only one who could validate the truthfulness of the ecclesiastical meetings (VON HEFELE, 1896, p. 59, 117, 122, 173, 332, 382, 456).[50] And throughout history those two powers (papal-ecclesiastical and imperial-state) would try to exercise what they thought was the correct tradition.

Going back to the issue of punishment, it has already been briefly mentioned that Arius (as an example of a heretic) was exiled after the Nicaea council and his writings burned. However, much more was done toward those who stood against the decisions of the imperial councils. Soldiers were sent to remove bishops from their churches; others were put in prison and even killed as a result of the edicts from the other councils. These acts of violence were not only performed by those in favor of the council, but also by the opposing groups that happen to live together in the same cities and congregations (VON HEFELE, 1896, p. 59, 117, 122, 173, 332, 382, 456).[51]

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ests. And it is even interesting that Louth (2004, p. 394) suggests that even the title Oecumenicalas, which refers to the first four councils, may "originally have had some link with the Church's bid for tax exemption" and was later doctrinally considered as possessing ultimate authority.

[49] That the biblical teachings were the basis for the development of the councils' divine authority is questioned by many Christians, especially by Seventh-day Adventists, as we noted at the beginning of this paper. It is not the purpose of this research to evaluate such claims. For such arguments, look up the references suggested in the first part.

[50] Hefele's boldest claim (1896) in his survey is the one made in p.174, that "The Emperor is not the authority entitled to decide as to the character of the ecumenical Synods" but only the Pope.

[51] Just to mention some examples: "But the prefect of Egypt, the apostate Philagrius, a countryman of Gregory [the usurper of Athanasius in Alexandria], drove the faithful by force out of the churches, and allowed the greatest outrage to be committed by Jews and heathens" (VON HEFELE, 1896, p. 48). "Amid fresh acts of bloody and brutal violence, Gregory forthwith on Good Friday took possession of the church of Cyrenus. Further abominations in other churches followed, and were succeeded by judicial prosecutions. Many men and women even of noble

Far from unity, the councils' decisions highlighted more vividly the disparaging differences between people in the Church. And with the rise and support of the empire, each group would claim to themselves divine authority to exterminate those who were in the opposite side of their understanding of Christianity. Heresy, thus, was treated as the minority which had no power and should be exterminated for the sake of the health of the church which was "correctly represented" by those who were persecuting.

No wonder both groups tried to invoke the "secular arms against the recusants" when they had the opportunity (VON HEFELE, 1896, p. 18).[52] Divine authority was very much politically biased. Thus, heresy is defined in contrast to what was considered proper orthodoxy. Since orthodoxy had the approval of the church-state, any other opposing group consequently had no rights whatsoever in both spheres of God's power. In this frame of mind, the joining of forces was validated by appealing to divine authority itself.

CONCLUSION

The struggle to define divine authority was not only a problem of the past; it is still much alive today. Right after the last Vatican "ecumenical" council (1962-65), books were printed raising again the question of divine authority in Christianity (FEHMERS, 1969; HOYT, 1967). In one of them, Daniel Callahan, at the time editor of the Roman Catholic journal Commonweal, questions the validity of the historical definition of heresy and orthodoxy in Christianity today. He asks why these terms should be used if Christianity is now not a united group but a diverse one (HOYT, 1967, p. 3-5).[53]

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families were imprisoned and publicly beaten with rods because they opposed the new bishop" (VON HEFELE, 1896, p. 48,49).

[52] This can be clearly seen in the persecuted Athanasius, who later called for the condemnation of his opponents. "The hindrance, however, with which he [Athanasius] met, especially the obstinacy and malice of individuals, compelled him to adopt severer measures, and to invoke the secular arm against the recusants. That this is the case is shown by the complaints which many of his opponents, especially Meletians, brought before the Synod of Tyre as through him, that is, by the secular arm at his demand, they were condemned to all sorts of severe punishments, especially imprisonment and corporal chastisement".

[53] For an assessment of the questions about the definition of orthodoxy and heresy, see Christie-Murray (1989, chapter 1).

This is a clear reaction to the ecumenical movements and the pluralistic attacks of postmodernity to Catholicism and Christianity as a whole. But I would go further than did Callahan. Was Christianity united at all at any moment of its history? Or, more specifically, in its formative periods during the first four centuries? The first two parts of this paper tried to demonstrate through historical overview that the church was never wholly united.

But is such universal unity really necessary in order to represent the truth? If not, how does divine authority act in the Church? Or further, what is the Church? As I probed into the quest of divine authority in the four ecumenical councils, I found that, although those questions are not easily answered, they are extremely important to the Christian faith because the answers to those questions involve how humans relate to truth and divine revelation.

All those questions are part of the struggle between Seventh-day Adventists and Roman Catholicism and their definition of divine authority. While Seventh-day Adventists reject an absolute or infallible authority of God in history through the church councils, Catholics state bluntly that this is exactly the case. Each group accuses the other of being in error, or without Christ, the ultimate revealer of truth.

Since early Christianity, the issue of divine authority was correctly attached to the person of Jesus Christ, the incarnated truth, and later to the Holy Spirit. This paper suggested that in Jesus the subjective and objective nature of divine authority and truth was present. However, after His ascension and the coming of the Spirit it became more subjective. Since the problems that divide the church were very much objective/concrete, relying on a subjective authority was hard.

During the persecution times of the first three centuries, the church did not develop a notion of divine authority and the guidance of the Holy Spirit into all truth. But with the rise of Constantine and the imperial church, Cyprian's ideas and a hierarchical authority gained force boosted by the common idea of divine inspiration in the "secular" power. Accepting the belief that imperial government exercised the power of God just as the church, the ecumenical councils started defining divine authority as an objective power found in an institution.

Despite the tensions in these 130 years between Nicaea and Chalcedon, which is the delimitation of this paper, there was one common idea: the belief that divine authority was on the side of the state and the church acting together. Surely, for them the kingdom of God was connected

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somehow with the kingdom of this world. Therefore, the use of force was legitimate to establish the truth (orthodoxy) and annihilate error (heresy). However, by using force, the church was trying to control the divine authority of the Holy Spirit in an attempt to please God by establishing the truth with its own hands.

But as Johnston admonished, humans cannot establish divine truth by themselves, for who can control the Spirit of God? The story of Ananias and Saphyra and of Simon, the magician, in the book of Acts, gives the same advice. Humans tried to control the power of God always for their own selfish use, but as those stories reveal, such attitude is not the right (orthodox) one.[54]

The hard lesson I learned is that divine authority cannot be controlled by humans, despite their claims. History attested that when they try to do it, violence and not unity is the result, which is clearly not a fruit of the Spirit. For when things are done hastily in the name of God, history has shown that it creates desperate solutions to correct divisions. In our quest to understand divine authority, I think the Adventists as a community of God needs time for its growth, and meanwhile allow his work to be wrought in his time. At last, as Holmes suggested, all truth and authority is God's, not ours.

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[54]   Acts 5:1-11 and 8:14-25. Notice Peter's answer in both accounts, but especially the one given in the episode in Samaria, where he stated that the attitude of controlling the Spirit is "not right in the sight of God" (8:21, NKJV).

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