

The Seven “Major” Councils

1. Council of Nicea (325). Established the Trinitarian concept of God. Anti-Adoptionis (Christ not God’s adopted son). To solve the problem created in the Eastern church by Arianism, a heresy first proposed by Arius of Alexandria that affirmed that Christ is not divine but a created being. Pope Sylvester I did not attend the council but was represented by legates. The council condemned Arius and, with reluctance on the part of some, incorporated the nonscriptural word homoousios (“of one substance”) into a creed (the Nicene Creed) to signify the absolute equality of the Son with the Father. Failed to establish a uniform date for Easter. Proper method of consecrating bishops; condemned lending money at interest by clerics; refused to allow bishops, priests, and deacons to move from one church to another. Intended to make a canon enforcing celibacy of the clergy, but it failed to do so when some objected. Confirmed the primacy of Alexandria and Jerusalem [not Rome] over other sees in their respective areas.

Nicaea, Council of. (2007). *Encyclopædia Britannica. Ultimate Reference Suite*. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica. Peterson, 83–89; Gonzalez, 36–38; Nystrom, 90; Dowley, 12, 89, 110, 114, 142–145, 164–174, 198, 248, 415.

2. Council of Constantinople (381). Summoned by the emperor Theodosius I. Promulgated what became known as the Nicene Creed; declared finally the Trinitarian doctrine of the equality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son. The bishop of Constantinople to be precedent over all other bishops except the bishop of Rome, “because Constantinople is the New Rome.” Condemned teachings of Apollinarius (human part of Jesus replaced by the divine part).

Constantinople, Council of. (2007). *Encyclopædia Britannica. Ultimate Reference Suite*. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica. Peterson, 87; Gonzalez, 37, 39; Nystrom, 54, 129, 134, 140, 150 note 79; Dowley, 150, 164, 174–175, 179.

3. Council of Ephesus (431). Condemned Nestorianism (Christ: two natures, two persons). OK to call Mary the mother of God as well as the mother of Jesus: *theotokos*—*θεοτοκος*. Pope Celestine I commissioned Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria, to conduct proceedings against Nestorius, his longtime adversary, whose doctrine of two Persons in Christ the Pope had previously condemned. When the Eastern bishops (more sympathetic to Nestorius) arrived and learned that the council summoned by Emperor Theodosius II had been started without them, they set up a rival synod under John of Antioch and excommunicated Memnon, bishop of Ephesus, along with Cyril. When Pope Celestine pronounced his excommunication of Nestorius and ratified his deposition as bishop of Constantinople, the Emperor abandoned his neutral position and sided with Cyril. Perhaps as a rebuke to the rebels, the council also made the Church of Cyprus independent of the see of Antioch.

Ephesus, councils of. (2007). *Encyclopædia Britannica. Ultimate Reference Suite*. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica. Peterson, p. 87; Gonzalez, 45; Nystrom, 94–95, 134; Dowley, 164, 180, 182.

4. Council of Chalcedon (451) (modern Kadiköy, Turkey.) Largest and best-documented of the early councils. Approved the creed of Nicea (325), the creed of Constantinople (381; subsequently known as the Nicene Creed), two letters of Cyril against Nestorius, which insisted on the unity of divine and human persons in Christ, (two natures in one person is common to most Christian churches today) and the Tome of Pope Leo I confirming two distinct natures in Christ and rejecting the Monophysite doctrine that Christ had only one nature. Declared Jerusalem and Constantinople patriarchates. Gave the church a more stable institutional character.

Chalcedon, Council of. (2007). *Encyclopædia Britannica. Ultimate Reference Suite*. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica. Peterson, 87; Gonzalez, 45; Nystrom, 92, 95–96, 129, 140; Dowley, 164, 174, 183–186, 201, 253.

5. Council of Constantinople II (553). Pope Vigilius opposed the council and took sanctuary in a church from May to December, but he at last yielded and formally ratified the verdicts of the council on Feb. 23, 554. The 14 anathemas issued by the council rejected Nestorianism by insisting yet further upon the unity of the person of Christ in his two natures, divine and human. Condemned the “3 chapters” — three writers in favor of Nestorianism (two separate natures). The only other important act of the council was to ratify an earlier condemnation of Origen. The Western church, devoted as it was to the acts of the Council of Chalcedon, could not bring itself to accept the decrees of the council of 553, even though the pope had accepted them. The opposition hung on in northern Italy until the end of the 7th century. By then the coming of Islām into the eastern Mediterranean and Africa voided possibilities of compromise.

Constantinople, Council of. (2007). Encyclopædia Britannica. *Ultimate Reference Suite*. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica. Peterson, 114; Gonzalez, 45; Nystrom, 134; Dowley, 164.

6. Council of Constantinople III (680–681). Some eastern Christians, forbidden to talk of the concept of one nature of Christ, thought to enforce the unity of the person of Christ by talking of one will (thelema θελημα) and one operation (energeia ενεργεια) from the two natures. Persons holding this view were called Monothelites. Sergius, patriarch of Constantinople, and Honorius I, pope of Rome, appear to have embraced the Monothelite doctrine. The council of 680 condemned the Monothelites, among them Honorius, and asserted two wills and two operations. Pope Honorius declared a heretic.

Constantinople, Council of. (2007). Encyclopædia Britannica. *Ultimate Reference Suite*. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica. Peterson, 118; Gonzalez, 45; Nystrom, 134; Dowley, 164, 186.

7. Council of Nicea II (787). Attempted to resolve the Iconoclastic Controversy. Initiated in 726 when Emperor Leo III issued a decree against the worship of icons. The council declared that icons deserved reverence and veneration but not adoration. OK to use images and icons, but worship is due only to God.

Nicaea, Council of. (2007). Encyclopædia Britannica. *Ultimate Reference Suite*. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica. Gonzalez, 45; Nystrom, 134–135, 144; Dowley, 248, 257.

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Justo L. Gonzalez, *Church History: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996)

Bradley P. & David P. Nystrom, *The History of Christianity: An Introduction* (NY: McGraw-Hill, 2004).

R. Dean Peterson, *A Concise History of Christianity* (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2007).

Ultimate Reference Suite. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2007.