

The first seven Ecumenical Councils

Main article: *First seven Ecumenical Councils*

- **1. First Council of Nicaea** (325) repudiated Arianism, declared that Christ is "of the same homoousios as the Father", and adopted the original Nicene Creed, fixed Easter date; recognized primacy of the sees of Rome, Alexandria and Antioch and granted the See of Jerusalem a position of honor.
- **2. First Council of Constantinople** (381) repudiated Arianism and Macedonianism, declared that Christ is "born of the Father before all time", revised the Nicene Creed in regard to the Holy Spirit
- **3. Council of Ephesus** (431) repudiated Nestorianism, proclaimed the Virgin Mary as the Theotokos ("Birth-giver to God", "God-bearer", "Mother of God"), repudiated Pelagianism, and reaffirmed the Nicene Creed.

This and all following councils are not recognized by the Assyrian Church of the East.

- **Second Council of Ephesus** (449) declared Eutyches orthodox and attacked his opponents.
Though originally convened as an Ecumenical council, this council is not recognized as Ecumenical and denounced as a Robber Council by the Chalcedonians (Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Protestants).
- **4. Council of Chalcedon** (451) repudiated the Eutychian doctrine of monophysitism, adopted the Chalcedonian Creed, which described the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ, human and divine. Reinstated those deposed in 449 and deposed Dioscorus of Alexandria. Elevation of the bishoprics of Constantinople and Jerusalem to the status of patriarchates. This is also the last council explicitly recognised by the Anglican Communion.

This and all following councils are rejected by the Oriental Orthodoxy.

- **5. Second Council of Constantinople** (553) repudiated the Three Chapters as Nestorian, condemned Origen of Alexandria, decreed the Theopaschite Formula.
- **6. Third Council of Constantinople** (680-681) repudiated Monothelitism and Monoenergism.
 - **Quinisext Council**, also called Council in Trullo ¹²¹ (692) addressed matters of discipline (in amendment to the 5th and 6th councils) and established the Pentarchy.
The Ecumenical status of this council was repudiated by the western churches.
- **7. Second Council of Nicaea** (787) restored the veneration of icons (condemned at the Council of Hieria, 754) and repudiated iconoclasm.

This council is rejected by some Protestant denominations, which condemn the veneration of icons

Arian controversy

The synod of Nicaea, Constantine and the condemnation and burning of Arian books, illustration from a northern Italian compendium of canon law, ca. 825. The Arian controversy was a Christological dispute that began in Alexandria between the followers of Arius (the *Arians*) and the followers of St. Alexander of Alexandria (now known as Homoousians). Alexander and his followers believed that the Son was of the *same substance* as the Father, co-eternal with him. The Arians believed that they were different and that the Son, though he may be the most perfect of creations, was only a creation of God the Father. A third group (now known as Homoiousians) later tried to make a compromise position, saying that the Father and the Son were of *similar substance*.^[25]

For about two months, the two sides argued and debated,^[26] with each appealing to Scripture to justify their respective positions. According to many accounts, debate became so heated that at one point, Arius was slapped in the face by Nicholas of Myra, who would later be canonized and became better known as "Santa Claus".^[27]

Much of the debate hinged on the difference between being "born" or "created" and being "begotten". Arians saw these as essentially the same; followers of Alexander did not. The exact meaning of many of the words used in the debates at Nicaea were still unclear to speakers of other languages. Greek words like "essence" (*ousia*), "substance" (*hypostasis*), "nature" (*physis*), "person" (*prosopon*) bore a variety of meanings drawn from pre-Christian philosophers, which could not but entail misunderstandings until they were cleared up. The word *homoousia*, in particular, was initially disliked by many bishops because of its associations with Gnosticheretics (who used it in their theology), and because it had been condemned at the 264–268 Synods of Antioch.

Position of Arius (Arianism)

Arius maintained that the Son of God was a Creature, made from nothing; and that he was God's First Production, before all ages. Thus, said the Arians, only the Son was directly created and begotten of God; and therefore there was a time that He had no existence. Arius believed the Son Jesus was capable of His own free will of right and wrong, and that "were He in the truest sense a son, He must have come after the Father, therefore the time obviously was when He was not, and hence He was a finite being,"^[28] and was under God the Father. The Arians appealed to Scripture, quoting verses such as John 14:28: "the Father is greater than I". And also Colossians 1:15: "Firstborn of all creation."

Position of St. Alexander (Homoousianism)

Homoousians countered the Arians' argument, saying that the Father's fatherhood, like all of his attributes, is eternal. Thus, the Father was always a father, and that the Son, therefore, always existed with him. Homoousians believed that to follow the Arian view destroyed the unity of the Godhead, and made the Son unequal to the Father, in contravention of the Scriptures ("I and the Father are one"; John 10:30). Further on it says "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me"; John 17:21.

The Homoiousian compromise proposal

The Homoiousians proposed that God and the Son were alike, but not the same, in substance. This compromise position did not gain much support and eventually the idea was dropped.

Result of the debate

The Council declared that the Father and the Son are of the same substance and are co-eternal, basing the declaration in the claim that this was a formulation of traditional Christian belief handed down from the Apostles. Under Constantine's influence^[29], this belief was expressed by the bishops in what would be known thereafter as the Nicene Creed.



Promulgation of canon law

The council promulgated twenty new church laws, called canons, (though the exact number is subject to debate), that is, unchanging rules of discipline. The twenty as listed in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers are as follows:^[41]

1. prohibition of self-castration

2. establishment of a minimum term for catechumen (persons studying for baptism)
3. prohibition of the presence in the house of a cleric of a younger woman who might bring him under suspicion (the so called virgines subintroductae)
4. ordination of a bishop in the presence of at least three provincial bishops and confirmation by the Metropolitan bishop
5. provision for two provincial synods to be held annually
6. exceptional authority acknowledged for the patriarchs of Alexandria and Rome (the Pope), for their respective regions
7. recognition of the honorary rights of the see of Jerusalem
8. provision for agreement with the Novatianists, an early sect
- 9–14. provision for mild procedure against the lapsed during the persecution under Licinius
- 15–16. prohibition of the removal of priests
17. prohibition of usury among the clergy
18. precedence of bishops and presbyters before deacons in receiving the Eucharist (Holy Communion)
19. declaration of the invalidity of baptism by Paulian heretics
20. prohibition of kneeling during the liturgy on Sundays and during the Pentecost (the fifty days after Easter). Standing was the normative posture for prayer at this time, as it still is among the Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholics.^[42]

The **First Council of Ephesus** was the third ecumenical council of the early Christian Church, held in 431 at the Church of Mary in Ephesus, Asia Minor. The council was called amid a dispute over the teachings of Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople. Nestorius' doctrine, Nestorianism, which emphasized the disunity between Christ's human and divine natures, had brought him into conflict with other church leaders, most notably Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria. Nestorius himself had requested the council, hoping to prove his orthodoxy, but in the end his teachings were condemned as heresy.

Contention over Nestorius' teachings, which he developed during his studies at the School of Antioch, largely revolved around his rejection of the long-used title Theotokos ("Mother of God") for the Virgin Mary. His enemy, Cyril of Alexandria, appealed to Pope Celestine I, charging Nestorius with heresy. The Pope agreed and gave Cyril his authority to serve a notice to Nestorius to recant his views or else be excommunicated. Before the summons arrived, Nestorius convinced the Emperor Theodosius II to hold a general council, a platform to argue their opposing views. Approximately 250 bishops were present. The proceedings were conducted in a heated atmosphere of confrontation and recriminations. It is believed to have been the Third Ecumenical Council by the Oriental Orthodox, the Eastern Orthodox, the Roman Catholics, and a number of other Western Christian groups. The council's rejection of Nestorius precipitated the Nestorian Schism, in which a number of churches broke with the Orthodox Church and became what was later known as the Church of the East. It is still rejected by the heirs to the Nestorian movement in the Assyrian Church of the East.

Nestorianism emphasized the dual natures of Christ. Patriarch Nestorius tried to answer a question considered unsolved: "How can Jesus Christ, being part man, not be partially a sinner as well, since man is by definition a sinner since the Fall". To solve that he taught that Mary, the mother of Jesus gave birth to the incarnate Christ, not the divine Logos who existed before Mary and indeed before time itself. The Logos occupied the part of the human soul (the part of man that was stained by the Fall). But wouldn't the absence of a human soul make Jesus less human? No, Nestorius answered because the human soul was based on the archetype of the Logos only to become polluted by the Fall, therefore Jesus was "more" human for having the Logos and not "less". Consequently, Mary should be called *Christotokos*, Greek for the "birth giver of Christ" and not Theotokos, Greek for the "birth giver of God". Cyril argued that Nestorianism split Jesus in half and denied that he was both human and divine. This was essentially a Christological controversy.

The **Council of Chalcedon** is considered by the Roman Catholics, the Eastern Orthodox, the Old Catholics, and various other Western Christian groups to have been the **Fourth Ecumenical Council**. It was held from 8 October to 1 November 451 at Chalcedon (a city of Bithynia in Asia Minor). The ancient city has been absorbed by greater Istanbul and is now the neighbourhood of Kadıköy, on the Asian side of the Bosphorus.

The Council of Chalcedon was convened by Flavian's successor, Anatolius, at Pope Leo I's urging, to set aside the 449 Second Council of Ephesus, better known as the Robber Council. The Council of Chalcedon repudiated the idea that Jesus had only one nature, and stated that Christ has two natures in one person.

The Chalcedonian Creed describes the "full humanity and full divinity" of Jesus, the second person of the Holy Trinity. The council also issued 27 disciplinary canons governing church administration and authority. In the famous 28th canon passed by the council, the bishops sought to raise the See of Constantinople (New Rome) in stature, claiming that Constantinople enjoyed honor and authority similar to that of the See of (older) Rome. Pope Leo's legate opposed the canon but in 453 Leo confirmed all the canons, except the 28th.

As one of the Ecumenical Councils in Chalcedonian Christianity, the Council of Chalcedon is recognized as infallible in its dogmatic definitions by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches (then one church). Most Protestants also consider the concept of the Trinity as defined by these councils to be orthodox doctrine to which they adhere. However, the Council resulted in a major schism, with those who refused to accept its teaching, now known as Oriental Orthodoxy, being accused of monophysitism. The Oriental Orthodox churches reject the "monophysite" label and instead describe themselves as miaphysite. This council is the last council that is recognised by the Anglican Communion.

The **Novatianists** following Novatus, or **Novatian**, held a strict view that refused readmission to communion of **Lapsi**, those baptized Christians who had denied their faith or performed the formalities of a ritual sacrifice to the pagan gods, under the pressures of the persecution sanctioned by Emperor **Decius**, in AD 250. They were declared **heretical**.

Monarchianism: Oneness of God

Adoptionism: Christ adopted

Mandaean Gnosis is characterized by nine features, which appear in various forms in other gnostic sects:^[5]

1. A supreme formless Entity, the expression of which in time and space is creation of spiritual, **etheric**, and material worlds and beings. Production of these is delegated by It to a creator or creators who originated in It. The cosmos is created by Archetypal Man, who produces it in similitude to his own shape.
2. **Dualism**: a cosmic Father and Mother, Light and Darkness, Right and Left, **syzygy** in cosmic and microcosmic form.
3. As a feature of this dualism, counter-types, a world of ideas.
4. The soul is portrayed as an exile, a captive: home and origin being the supreme Entity to which the soul eventually returns.
5. Planets and stars influence **fate** and human beings, and are also places of detention after death.

Self-discipline and abstinence in some form and degree is a part of religious practice within many religious and spiritual traditions. A more dedicated ascetical lifestyle is associated particularly with **monks**, **yogis** or **priests**, but any individual may choose to lead an ascetic life. **Shakyamuni Gautama** (who left a more severe ascetism to seek a reasoned "middle way" of balanced life), **Mahavir Swami**, **Anthony the Great** (St. Anthony of the Desert), **Francis of Assisi**, and **Mahatma Gandhi** can all be considered ascetics. Many of these men left their families, possessions, and homes to live a **mendicant** life, and in the eyes of their followers demonstrated great spiritual attainment, or **enlightenment**.

Although most of the original writings of the founding **prophet Mani** (c. 216–276 AD) have been lost, numerous translations and fragmentary texts have survived. Manichaeism taught an elaborate **cosmology** describing the struggle between a good, spiritual world of light, and an evil, material world of darkness. Through an ongoing process which takes place in human history, light is gradually removed from the world of matter and returned to the world of light from which it came.

Manichaeism thrived between the third and seventh centuries, and at its height was one of the most widespread religions in the world. Manichaean churches and scriptures existed as far east as **China** and as far west as the **Roman Empire**.^[1] Manichaeism appears to have faded away after the 14th century in southern China.^[2]

Sabellianism, (also known as **modalism**, **modalistic monarchianism**, or **modal monarchism**) is the **nontrinitarian** belief that the Heavenly Father, Resurrected Son and Holy Spirit are different *modes* or *aspects* of one God, as perceived by *the believer*, rather than three distinct persons in *God Himself*. The term Sabellianism comes from **Sabellius**, a theologian and priest from the third century.

The Macedonians were a Christian sect of the 4th century AD, named after Bishop Macedonius I of Constantinople. They professed a belief similar^[1]^[dubious – discuss] to that of Arianism, but apparently denying the divinity of the Holy Spirit,^[2] and regarding the substance of Jesus Christ as being the same in kind as that of God the Father. They are regarded to have taught that the Holy Spirit was a creation of the Son, and a servant of the Father and the Son. This is what prompted the addition of “And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who proceedeth from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son is equally worshipped and glorified, Who spake by the Prophets,” into the Nicene Creed at the second ecumenical council.^[3] They were regarded as a heretical sect by the mainstream Church. The sect's members were also known as *pneumatomachians*, the “spirit fighters.”

Nestorianism is a Christological doctrine advanced by Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople from 428–431. The doctrine, which was informed by Nestorius's studies under Theodore of Mopsuestia at the School of Antioch, emphasizes the disunion between the human and divine natures of Jesus. Nestorius' teachings brought him into conflict with some other prominent church leaders, most notably Cyril of Alexandria, who criticized especially his rejection of the title *Theotokos* ("Mother of God") for the Virgin Mary. Nestorius and his teachings were eventually condemned as heresy at the First Council of Ephesus in 431 and the Council of Chalcedon in 451, leading to the Nestorian Schism in which churches supporting Nestorius broke with the rest of the Christian Church. Afterward many of Nestorius' supporters relocated to Sassanid Persia, where they affiliated with the local Christian community, known as the Church of the East. Over the next decades the Church of the East became increasingly Nestorian in doctrine, leading it to be known alternately as the Nestorian Church.

Pelagianism is a theological theory named after Pelagius (AD 354 – AD 420/440), although ironically he denied, at least at some point in his life, many of the doctrines associated with his name. It is the belief that original sin did not taint Human nature and that mortal will is still capable of choosing good or evil without special Divine aid. Thus, Adam's sin was "to set a bad example" for his progeny, but his actions did not have the other consequences imputed to Original Sin. Pelagianism views the role of Jesus as "setting a good example" for the rest of humanity (thus counteracting Adam's bad example) as well as providing an atonement for our sins. In short, humanity has full control, and thus full responsibility, for obeying the Gospel in addition to full responsibility for every sin (the latter insisted upon by both proponents and opponents of Pelagianism). According to Pelagian doctrine, because men are sinners by choice, they are therefore criminals who need the atonement of Jesus Christ. Sinners are not victims, they are criminals who need pardon.

Monothelitism (a Greek loanword meaning "one will") is a particular teaching about how the divine and human relate in the person of Jesus, known as a Christological doctrine, that formally emerged in Armenia and Syria in 629 AD.^[1] Specifically, Monothelitism teaches that Jesus Christ had two natures but only one will. This is contrary to the more common Christology that Jesus Christ has two wills (human and divine) corresponding to his two natures. Monothelitism is a development of the Monophysite position in the Christological debates. It enjoyed considerable support in the 7th century before being rejected as heretical.

