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Early Christian Church Councils

The first Council of the Christian Church took place in Jerusalem and included all of Christ's Apostle's (Acts 15:1-29). Also in attendance were Paul, Barnabus, Silas, Barsabbas and others. This Jerusalem Council is not counted in the ecumenical councils of the Church which began after the Roman persecutions ended, and of which seven are considered binding by both the eastern and western churches.

The first seven ecumenical Councils (and the Council of Jerusalem) were responsible for fighting off various heresy's which threatened to divide and destroy the Church and their decisions gave us the theological tenents most Christians believe about God and Christ today.

Most of these councils were held in the eastern part of the empire, i.e., Jerusalem, Nicea, Ephesus, Constantinople, Chalcedon, etc., and the attendee's, though both eastern and western, were predominantly from churches in those areas.

These Councils were:

- 49 A.D. Council of Jerusalem
- 325 A.D. Council of Nicea
- 381 A.D. First Council of Constantinople
- 431 A.D. Council of Ephesus
- 451 A.D. Council of Chalcedon
- 553 A.D. Second Council of Constantinople
- 680 A.D. Third Council of Constantinople
- 787 A.D. Second Council of Nicea

The first council of Jerusalem exempted all pagan converts from the laws of Judaism.

Since the Church and all the rest of the House of Israel were bound for an exile to Babylon that would last almost 2000 years, this decision had the net effect of exempting all Christians from the laws of the Torah and from virtually all other Jewish restrictions and traditions.

The First Council of Nicea, held in Bithynia in Asia Minor and overseen by the Roman emperor Constantine, proclaimed the true manhood and true divinity of Jesus Christ and decreed the [doctrine of the Trinity](#). It was from this Council that the Nicene Creed was formulated. The Council was held to counter the heresy of Arius who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

In **the First Council of Constantinople**, belief in the Holy Spirit was added to the Nicene Creed.

The Council of Ephesus was held to counter the heresy of Nestorius. This Council reaffirmed the Church's [doctrine of incarnation](#) and its position that the Word of God was made man. Where Nestorius taught that in Jesus there were two separate persons, the Council decreed that in Jesus there was one person with two natures.

Nestorius also taught that Mary was the mother of Christ, but not the mother of God. The Council rejected this idea and upheld the Church's position that Mary was, indeed, the mother of God.

The Council of Chalcedon was held to counter the Monophysite doctrines (which argued against the two natures of Christ) as well as to reaffirm the Church's position in opposing the Nestorians. Chalcedon also clarified the Church's position with respect to its doctrine concerning [the true nature of Christ](#). This Council defined the final elements in the Trinitarian formula by declaring that Christ existed in two natures, without mixture or change, without division or separation, but that His two natures were held in union in one person without losing the separate distinction of either nature. Held in Bythinia in Asia Minor, the Council of Chalcedon was attended by 600 mostly eastern bishops.

The Second Council of Constantinople was held to counter the continuing heresy of the Nestorians

Filioque

In 869 A.D. a fourth Council of Constantinople was held to try to avert a schism which had developed between the western and eastern churches over a western decision to place the phrase 'and from the son' into the Nicaen Creed regarding the procession of the Holy Spirit. The Greeks felt that the Holy Spirit came only from the Father. The Western

Church, bowing to centuries of pressure, finally inserted into the creed the Church's official position that the Holy Spirit came to us through both the Father and the Son. The term used was called 'Filioque'.

The ensuing controversy split the western and eastern churches into two opposing camps, where they have remained ever since.

See Also:

[Church Creeds](#)

[Fundamental Doctrines](#)

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Fundamental Christian Doctrines

The Doctrine of the Trinity

"There are in the Godhead, three persons, one in substance, co-eternal, equal in power, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

Western Church: "The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son."

Eastern Church: "The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father."

The Doctrine of Incarnation

The divine Word which is God is incarnated in Jesus Christ. He is the Word made flesh. (This is also called the "doctrine of the Logos").

The Nature of Christ

"Jesus Christ is true God and true man. He has two natures, one divine and one human. Both are united in one person, and that Person is divine."

See Also:

[Church Councils](#)

[Church Creeds](#)

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The Creeds of the Church

The Apostle's Creed:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Amen.

The Nicene Creed:

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, both seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in

Being with the Father.

Through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven:

By the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered, died, and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in fulfillment of the Scriptures;

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

With the Father and Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

Why Did the Church Develop Creeds?

The word 'creed' comes from the Latin word 'credo', which means 'I believe'. It is a public testimony of faith espousing articles which Christian adherents believe are essential to salvation.

Creeds became necessary to protect the Church from heresies about Jesus which developed in conjunction with the Church. The earliest and one of the most potent of these heresies was Gnosticism. Two others of major importance, both of which came later (sparking ecumenical Church Councils) were Arianism and Nestorianism.

The earliest universally accepted Christian creed is the Apostles Creed. It was formulated by Christian leaders in the first century of the faith, i.e., about the year 100 or before, and is still in use today. This creed protected true believers during the dark days of the catacombs -- the terrible persecutions which dogged Christians throughout the event the Book of Revelation describes as the 'first battle of the End' (Rv.19:11-21).

The Apostle's Creed was followed in the year 325 by the Nicene Creed, which affirmed the doctrine of the Trinitarian nature of God. This creed was the product of the first ecumenical Christian Church Council at Nicea, the first general church council meeting held since the Jerusalem meeting attended by Peter, Paul and all of Christ's Apostles in [49 A.D.](#)

These church councils could be held openly because Constantine, the Roman emperor had ended the persecutions by declaring Christianity legal in the empire. Constantine, himself attended the council meeting at Nicea.

The Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed are essentially alike. They teach one God; the incarnation of His Son, Jesus Christ, and both state the same gift of the Spirit. They describe the same precepts, the same constitution concerning the universal Christian Church, look for the same Second Coming of Christ. Both proclaim the same salvation, both in soul and body.

The Nicene Creed was developed by a council representing all the churches, not only to combat the Arian heresies, but to bring every church of Christianity under the umbrella of one code of belief. Over the previous 300 years, many churches had began codifying and altering the Apostle's Creed into their own individual creeds.

The final form of the Nicene Creed came at the Council of Constantinople which added, "and I believe in the Holy Spirit" to the code in the year 381.

In the year 870 A.D., the creed was altered once again, this time by the Western church, to state that the Holy Spirit came from both God and Jesus Christ. The Eastern church did not accept this doctrine. They believe the Holy Spirit comes only from the Father. So they broke away from the Western Church, a schism which continues to this day.

An excellent posting on the Internet by James E. Kiefer from the CHRISTIA File Archives shows that the early Church creeds were drawn up as much to present an argument against contrary beliefs as to explain our own.

In the early days of Christianity many diverse beliefs flourished, especially Gnosticism, which argued that knowledge of God could be gained by an intellectual pursuit, which, if well researched, allowed the believer access to a secret knowledge attainable only to an intellectual minority.

This elitist approach to God is still applicable today. We can see a very similar concept reborn in the teachings of L. Ron Hubbard's Church of Scientology which sells, in increments, \$15,000 to \$20,000 worth of secret tutorials to those able to buy in and pass the secret tests.

The Nicene Creed, formulated 300 years after the Apostle's Creed (i.e, about 400 A.D.), was designed, according to Mr. Kiefer, not just to affirm the Apostle's Creed, but further, to voice a defined affirmation in the deity of Jesus Christ. This creed was developed to counter the arguments of the Arians who felt that Jesus was under God, not equal to Him.

The Nicene Creed affirms that the Godhead is Triune, and that Jesus is a complete and full member of this Trinity.

Together, these two creeds sum up the core belief of 99% of Christians worldwide.

If you would like to view the Apostle's Creed with Mr. Kiefer's commentaries, please visit his Internet site at the following address:

<http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/history/creed.apostles.txt>

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