

Matters in theology had been argued over, heretics had been pointed out, errors had been denounced...but a lasting triumph over any of these things was difficult. New or novel ideas would emerge with great frequency and if the teaching were championed by a popular or gifted teacher, it could last a long time and exert considerable evil influence. But with the coming of a legal status and with the demonstration of effect in a council situation, there existed a method of dealing with poor or novel teachers that promised unity to the church. Error could now be dealt with in a way nearly universal.

The leaders of the time thought they saw a foundation for this in the Jerusalem council of apostolic times although admittedly there were some differences as well. But the idea of a politically supported and theologically agreed upon stand for all the professed community had great support and very few detractors at this time

b. The Great Councils

There were seven great councils. Of these, the first three are thought binding by the entire church. The last four have not been received by the churches known as monophysite churches...the decision of the fourth and subsequent councils went against them. A chart of these councils with pertinent information is found on page 47.

c. Council pronouncements

The councils had plenty of stuff to discuss and they divided their pronouncements into two categories:

(1) A horos was a statement that was deemed to fully extract and present the biblical material that it was complete and beyond change. They (horoi) were thought of as the last words of truth and were often rendered into a credal form. There are not many of them.

(2) A canon was a law or statement defining an ecclesiastical opinion. As such it was not thought infallible. It was binding at the time of issuance but might be supplemented or even corrected by a later council. There are tons of these and to become an authority in canonical law...is not an easy thing to do

You will be interested in reading--about now--chapter 33 (31) in the Westminster Confession: Of Synods and Councils. With just a little effort you can see how the framers of our standards were trying to give the church a credible role in the framing of policy and teaching but at the same time were anxious that the decisions, etc., not supercede the Bible. It is a delicate problem..and a rope walked with difficulty. But protestant realism suggests that we must attempt it. To despise the findings of the church is an act of ignorance...to worship them is an act of blasphemy.