

arise and a council would arise to meet the problem. Perhaps it was not that simple but that was the idea.

The renderings of the councils would be given thus:

--the council could formulate a doctrine through prayer, study of Scripture, and consideration of tradition and assume its findings were sufficiently accurate to be the rule of the church--forever! Such a formulation would be called a horos (horoi is the plural) and the concept was such that this would be a binding document as to express the actual truth and so could not be changed in future sessions. The horos was to be an accurate appraisal of what the mind of God was on a matter and it was thought that the Lord was not likely to change His mind on the matters given in the Word.

--The council could also determine policy to meet existing situations. As these were more or less temporary, the laws made to meet them are called canons, laws or guidelines to meet a special need or serve a particular function. These could be changed, ratified, or even denied by a later council.

--Likewise the council could make determinations on local issues and offer solutions to regional problems as they might seem needed. This would be in an advisory role but would be precedent for the future.

You will understand that in the case of "horos" the councils pronounced few; in the case of "canons" they gave them out by the legion, so to speak. Councils obviously were the better method of arriving at solutions troubling the entire body but often when the decision was given dissent flowed freely. The council offered maximum fellowship and oneness of purpose for the end in view and while in the scope of history we do not see total success we do see some advances of theological thinking which probably could not have been achieved otherwise.

Generally we number eight councils. The first four are properly called "ecumenical" and the next three are convened with certain elements of the church missing. The eighth is a hotly contested affair and is often not listed at all. Any further councils will be known by the names of the places where they met and there have been none truly ecumenical since the fourth council. Present and mediaeval ecumenism are fragmentary in this regard.