

First Council of Constantinople

(SECOND GENERAL COUNCIL.)

This council was called in May, 381, by [Emperor Theodosius](#), to provide for a Catholic succession in the patriarchal See of Constantinople, to confirm the Nicene Faith, to reconcile the [semi-Arians](#) with the Church, and to put an end to the Macedonian heresy.

Originally it was only a council of the Orient; the arguments of [Baronius](#) (ad an. 381, nos. 19, 20) to prove that it was called by Pope Damasus are invalid (Hefele-Leclercq, Hist. des Conciles, Paris, 1908, II, 4). It was attended by 150 Catholic and 36 heretical ([Semi-Arian](#), Macedonian) bishops, and was presided over by Meletius of Antioch; after his death, by the successive Patriarchs of Constantinople, [St. Gregory Nazianzen](#) and Nectarius.

Its first measure was to confirm [St. Gregory Nazianzen](#) as Bishop of Constantinople. The Acts of the council have almost entirely disappeared, and its proceedings are known chiefly through the accounts of the ecclesiastical historians Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret. There is good reason to believe that it drew up a formal treatise (*tomos*) on the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity, also against [Apollinarianism](#); this important document has been lost, with the exception of the first canon of the council and its famous [creed](#) (Nicaeano-Constantinopolitanum). The latter is traditionally held to be an enlargement of the Nicene Creed, with emphasis on the Divinity of the Holy Spirit. It seems, however, to be of earlier origin, and was probably composed (369-73) by St. Cyril of Jerusalem as an expression of the faith of that Church (Bois), though its adoption by this council gave it special authority, both as a baptismal creed and as a theological formula. Recently Harnack (Realencyklopadie für prot. Theol. und Kirche, 3rd ed., XI, 12-28) has maintained, on apparently inconclusive grounds, that not till after the Council of Chalcedon (451) was this creed (a Jerusalem formula with Nicene additions) attributed to the Fathers of this council. At Chalcedon, indeed, it was twice recited and appears twice in the Acts of that council; it was also read and accepted at the Sixth General Council, held at Constantinople in 680. The very ancient Latin version of its text (Mansi, Coll. Conc., III, 567) is by Dionysius Exiguus.

The Greeks recognize seven [canons](#), but the oldest Latin versions have only four; the other three are very probably (Hefele) later additions.

- The first canon is an important dogmatic condemnation of all shades of [Arianism](#), also of Macedonianism and Apollinarianism.
- The second canon renews the Nicene legislation imposing upon the bishops the observance of diocesan and patriarchal limits.
- The fourth canon declares invalid the consecration of Maximus, the Cynic philosopher and rival of [St. Gregory of Nazianzus](#), as Bishop of Constantinople.
- The famous third canon declares that because Constantinople is New Rome the bishop of that city should have a pre-eminence of honour after the Bishop of Old Rome. Baronius wrongly maintained the non-authenticity of this canon, while some [medieval](#) Greeks maintained (an equally erroneous thesis) that it declared the bishop of the royal city in all things the equal of the pope. The purely human reason of Rome's ancient authority, suggested by this canon, was never admitted by the Apostolic See, which always based its claim to supremacy on the succession of St. Peter. Nor did Rome easily acknowledge this unjustifiable reordering of rank among the ancient patriarchates of the East. It was rejected by the papal legates at Chalcedon. [St. Leo the Great](#) (Ep. cvi in P.L., LIV, 1003, 1005) declared that this canon has never been submitted to the Apostolic See and that it was a violation of

the Nicene order. At the Eighth General Council in 869 the Roman legates (Mansi, XVI, 174) acknowledged Constantinople as second in patriarchal rank. In 1215, at the Fourth Lateran Council (op. cit., XXII, 991), this was formally admitted for the new Latin patriarch, and in 1439, at the Council of Florence, for the Greek patriarch (Hefele-Leclercq, Hist. des Conciles, II, 25-27). The Roman *correctores* of Gratian (1582), at dist. xxii, c. 3, insert the words: "canon hic ex iis est quos apostolica Romana sedes a principio et longo post tempore non recipit."

At the close of this council Emperor Theodosius issued an imperial decree (30 July) declaring that the churches should be restored to those bishops who confessed the equal Divinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and who held communion with Nectarius of Constantinople and other important Oriental prelates whom he named. The ecumenical character of this council seems to date, among the Greeks, from the Council of Chalcedon (451). According to Photius (Mansi, III, 596) Pope Damasus approved it, but if any part of the council were approved by this pope it could have been only the aforesaid creed. In the latter half of the fifth century the successors of [Leo the Great](#) are silent as to this council. Its mention in the so-called "Decretum Gelasii", towards the end of the fifth century, is not original but a later insertion in that text (Hefele). [Gregory the Great](#), following the example of Vigilius and [Pelagius II](#), recognized it as one of the four general councils, but only in its dogmatic utterances (P.G., LXXVII, 468, 893).