

ECUMENICAL COUNCIL OF EPHESUS

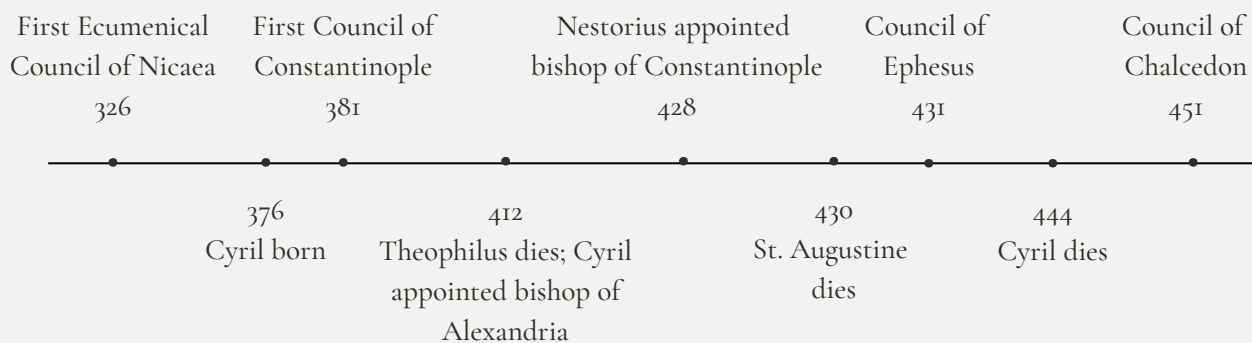


History

The Council of Ephesus was the third ecumenical council, and the earliest council for which we still have the Greek, Latin, and fragmented Coptic minutes of the proceedings. Its theological outcome was good and a landmark for the Church's confession of Christ's person. However, the procedure of the council was less than ecumenical in nature, leaving greater division between the Eastern and Western theological schools. In fact, initially two separate councils were held, one by the school centered on Antioch and one centered around Alexandria, each condemning the position of the other. On the one side was Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople, and Theodosius II, on the other was Cyril of Alexandria and backing him Pope Celestine I. Both councils were accepted, but in the end Theodosius II upheld Cyril's council, and Nestorius was condemned on June 22nd, 431.

While interpersonal conflict played a significant role in the controversy, the heart of the theological issue was Nestorius' teaching regarding the natures of Christ, and his inability to call Mary the *Theotokos* or God-bearer. So while Nestorius would say that Jesus was God, he divided, even if subtly, Christ into two separate subjects, teaching that his divine and human natures could act separately. As a result, Nestorius could say that Jesus died on the cross and that Jesus is God, but not that God died on the cross. Cyril and the orthodox Christians insisted on a single-subject Christology and reaffirmed the Nicene Creed, which confessed Jesus' oneness as both God and man. So when Jesus died on the cross, God died on the cross. The theological term used and accepted is the "hypostatic union" of Jesus' divinity and humanity held in one person, Christ Jesus.

Timeline



Leading Characters



CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

Cyril was born in 376 and received an education in Alexandria before entering the monastery and following in his uncle Theodosius' footsteps to become bishop of Alexandria. Known for being an uncompromising theologian, Cyril and the school of Alexandria succeeded in leading the Church in reaffirming the creed of Nicaea and more clearly articulating the person of Christ. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod remembers Cyril on the day of his death, June 27th.

NESTORIUS

Nestorius was born in 388 and appointed bishop of Constantinople in 428, Nestorius was finally deposed and his teaching condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Nestorius rejected calling Mary the God-bearer *Theotokos* and held that she was merely the Christ-bearer, which led him to falsely separate the two natures in Christ.



Sources

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Portret van Nestorius, Romeyn de Hooghe, Netherlands, 1688.