



Throughout Church history, certain councils have defined essential dogmas, such as Nicaea (325 AD) and Ephesus (431 AD). However, other councils, though less well-known, played a crucial role in organizing and disciplining the Church. One such council was the Quinisext Council, held in 692 in Constantinople.

This council, whose name literally means “Fifth-Sixth” (because it was considered an extension of the Fifth and Sixth Ecumenical Councils), aimed primarily to regulate ecclesiastical life through detailed norms. In this article, we will explore its origin, historical context, key decisions, and its impact on today’s Church.

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## 1. Historical Context: Why Was the Council Convened?

The seventh century was a period of intense challenges for Christianity. The Byzantine Empire, under Emperor Justinian II, faced the threat of Islam, which had conquered vast Christian territories in the Middle East and North Africa. At the same time, theological and disciplinary tensions persisted between the Eastern and Western Churches.

The Fifth (553) and Sixth (680-681) Ecumenical Councils had focused on combating heresies such as Monothelitism (the idea that Christ had only a divine will and not a human one). However, they had not issued disciplinary canons, leaving gaps in ecclesiastical legislation.

In response, Justinian II convened the Quinisext Council in Constantinople in 692, aiming to establish clear norms for the Church and consolidate ecclesiastical discipline throughout the Byzantine Empire.

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## 2. Development and Decisions of the Council

The council was attended mainly by Eastern bishops. It issued over 100 canons covering morality, liturgy, and clerical discipline. Below are some of the most significant decisions:

### a) Reaffirmation of Priestly Celibacy... with an Exception

While mandatory priestly celibacy had already been established in the West, the Eastern Church reaffirmed the practice of allowing married priests and deacons to continue their



conjugal life, though bishops were required to remain celibate.

### **b) Regulation of Monastic Life**

The council emphasized that monks must live in strict poverty and obedience. It forbade them from living outside monasteries without permission to prevent disorder.

### **c) Liturgy and Ascetic Practices**

The council ruled that the faithful should not fast on Saturdays (except during Holy Week), contradicting some Western customs. It also prohibited the consumption of blood and food sacrificed to idols, in accordance with the Apostles' decree in Acts 15:29.

### **d) Moral Prohibitions**

The council strongly condemned adultery, usury, and immoral practices, demanding exemplary behavior from both clergy and laity.

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## **3. A Point of Contention: The Conflict with Rome**

One of the most controversial aspects of the Quinisext Council was the approval of certain canons that appeared to reject Western customs, causing friction with the Pope of Rome.

For instance, some Latin liturgical practices were criticized, and it was insisted that Eastern deacons should not wear certain vestments common in the West.

Pope Sergius I (687-701) refused to accept the council in its entirety, though several of its canons were eventually adopted in the Latin Church on an individual basis. This dispute marked another step in the growing divide between East and West, which would culminate in the Great Schism of 1054.

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## **4. What Can We Learn from the Quinisext Council**



## Today?

More than 1,300 years later, the Quinisext Council remains a testament to the Church's ongoing effort to maintain order and holiness in Christian life. What lessons can we draw for our time?

### a) Discipline is Essential in Christian Life

In a world where moral norms are often relativized, the council reminds us that the Christian life requires discipline. St. Paul states this clearly:

*"Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one."* (1 Corinthians 9:25)

### b) The Unity of the Church Must Be Guarded with Love

The differences between East and West at the Quinisext Council teach us that ecclesial unity must be constantly nurtured with humility and charity. Despite tensions, Christ Himself prayed that all His disciples may be one (John 17:21).

### c) The Church Must Respond to the Challenges of Its Time

Just as this council addressed the moral and disciplinary challenges of its era, today the Church must continue to respond to contemporary issues with fidelity to the Gospel.

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## Conclusion: A Council That Still Speaks to Us Today

The Quinisext Council, though less famous than others, left a lasting impact on ecclesiastical discipline. It demonstrated the Church's commitment to maintaining moral and liturgical integrity in times of change and conflict.

Today, in an age of relativism and moral crisis, the Church still needs clear norms and a disciplined life to remain faithful to Christ. This council reminds us that faith is not just about beliefs but also about concrete actions that reflect the Gospel.

May learning more about our ecclesiastical history inspire us to live our Christian vocation



more deeply, with fidelity to Christ and His Church.

**“Let us be firm in faith and discipline, so that one day we may receive the crown of eternal life.” (cf. Rev 2:10)**