

# The Council of Chalcedon

In the fifth century, an archimandrite from a monastery near Constantinople named Eutyches began to spread a new heresy, denying the nature of Our Lord, saying that His body was an ethereal body that passed through the womb of the Virgin Saint Mary.

Subsequently, a local council was convened of seven bishops, led by the Bishop of Constantinople, and supported by the Bishop of Rome, which condemned Eutyches as a heretic. He appealed to the bishops of all Christendom, which led to a second council in Ephesus in 449 AD, attended by 130 bishops, under the leadership of Pope Dioscorus of Alexandria.

Eutyches submitted a full written confession, affirming the Nicene Creed, and he was therefore acquitted. Two years after the council of Ephesus, in AD 451, another Council was convened in Chalcedon. This council was characterized by political factors, leading to prejudices and conspiracies against the Coptic Church of Alexandria, and its Patriarch, Pope Dioscorus.

Politically, Alexandria was only a city under the rule of the Eastern Roman Empire, whose capital was Constantinople, Rome being the capital of the Western Roman Empire. Theologically and ecumenically, however, the patriarchs and popes of Alexandria played a lasting role in the first centuries of Christianity, and thus others envied them and began to create trouble, saying that the Church of Alexandria had nothing to do but to collect bishops for

ecumenical councils and preside over these councils. By the time of the convening of the council of Chalcedon, there was much prejudice against the Coptic Church.

At the council of Chalcedon, the Coptic Church was misquoted, and its teachings were wrongly deemed as being Eutychean. The Patriarch of Alexandria was accused of being Eutychean because he had presided over the second Council of Ephesus which had absolved Eutyches, despite the fact that it was a Coptic Council which had later condemned the heretical teachings of Eutyches once he had returned to them.

When Pope Dioscorus' Orthodoxy could not be questioned, other accusations were raised, focusing on political issues such as the question of preventing Egyptian corn from being sent to other parts of the Empire. Neither Pope Dioscorus nor the civil judges were present when the council at Chalcedon handed down the verdict deposing him, mainly for having excommunicated the bishop of Rome. The verdict was passed down in his absence because he did not appear at the Council session after being summoned three times, although he was under house arrest at the time. Regardless of all this, however, Pope Dioscorus could neither be stripped of ecclesiastical honor nor excommunicated because of his proclaimed Orthodoxy.

In a later session of the Council, at which the Egyptian delegation was not present, the supremacy of the Church of Constantinople and Rome was granted over the Church of Alexandria. The Oriental Orthodox church was labeled "Monophysite" because of its emphasis upon the "One Nature of Christ" (although this title was misinterpreted as covering either one of

the Human or Divine natures of our Lord and ignoring the other), being based on the false assumption that the Fathers accepted the Eutychean view.

Historical facts, and the liturgy and doctrine of the Oriental Orthodox Church prove the true Orthodoxy of the Oriental Orthodox Church, until this day. Furthermore, it is now admitted by those who once accused the Coptic Church of being “Monophysite,” that is believing in only one nature of our Lord Jesus Christ, that it was a misunderstanding arising from a problem of semantics, and the Oriental Orthodox Church is now referred to as “Miaphysite,” that is recognizing both natures of Our Lord, being joined inseparably in the “One Nature of GOD - the Logos Incarnate”.

In the absence of representation of the Church of Alexandria, the Council of Chalcedon passed statements concerning the two natures of Christ and other ecclesiastical laws, which are not accepted by the Coptic Orthodox Church and the other Oriental Churches, such as the Syrian Orthodox, the Armenian Apostolic, the Ethiopian Orthodox, the Indian Orthodox, and the Eritrean Orthodox Churches.

Therefore, the Council of Chalcedon resulted in the first major “Schism” or split, of the undivided Christian Church. Today, however, most scholars have agreed that the unfortunate events and decisions at the Council of Chalcedon were based upon misunderstandings and a misinterpretation of terms and words, rather than a question of Orthodoxy, and agreement has now been reached regarding the Nature of Christ between the Oriental family of Churches and

the Eastern Orthodox Churches, and also the Catholic Church. There are still differences in faith amongst some of the Churches, however, by the Grace of GOD, all Christians and Churches shall become ONE.

Unfortunately, however, the events of the Council of Chalcedon were to have long-standing and far-reaching effects upon the Coptic Orthodox Church, which suffered greatly at the hands of the Chalcedonian rulers, and from that time it remained isolated from the rest of the Christian World, until the 20th century.

Pope Dioscorus of Alexandria was exiled to the island of Gangra, off the coast of Asia Minor, where he died. During his exile, he led many to the Christian Faith, and returned numerous heretics to Orthodoxy. In his See in Alexandria, a Melkite (Greek) Patriarch was imposed but was not accepted by the people of Alexandria, who preferred to remain loyal to their exiled Patriarch. At this time, a wave of persecution arose in Alexandria, during which an estimated 30,000 people lost their lives. The “non-Chalcedonian” Coptic Church continued to suffer persecution at the hands of the Byzantine rulers, and the rift within the Apostolic Churches widened.

For a period of almost 150 years under the rule of nine Byzantine emperors, members of the Oriental Orthodox family experienced periods of fluctuating peace and oppression. After the death of Emperor Anastasius, however, an era of Byzantine persecution and oppression began, lasting almost 120 years. During this period, Patriarchs were banished, others were placed on the

Patriarchal See, Churches were destroyed, and people lost both their lives and possessions.

Emperor Justinian closed all the Churches, placing guards on them, and persecution against the Coptic Church continued. As a result, Egypt and Syria were reduced to an impoverished state while the rest of the Byzantine world enjoyed freedom.