

Acta Sanctæ Sedis

Pope Pius XII

Encyclical Letter *Sempiternus Rex Christus* on the Council of Chalcedon

8. A special synod was called at Constantinople; St. Flavian, bishop of that city, presided; Eutyches, who had been vigorously spreading his errors throughout the monasteries, was accused of heresy by Bishop Eusebius of Dorylæum, and condemned. He considered that an injury had been done to him who had withstood the growth of the Nestorian heresy, and appealed to the judgement of some of the bishops placed in higher authority. And so, St. Leo the Great, bishop of the Apostolic See, also received letters of appeal of this kind. No one could have been more suitable and capable for the refutation of Eutyches' error. His solid and shining virtues, his zealous watch equally over peace and religion, his strenuous defense of the dignity of the Roman see, his skill in the spoken word and equally in the management of affairs, have won for him the admiration of all succeeding ages. Moreover, he was accustomed in his allocutions and letters to maintain with great piety and pious greatness that the mystery on the one person and two natures in Christ could never be preached sufficiently. 'The Catholic Church lives by this faith, and is nourished by it, that in Jesus Christ neither is the humanity believed with the true Divinity, nor the divinity without true humanity.'

9. The Archimandrite Eutyches, however, was not confident of the patronage of the Roman Pontiff. So he craftily made use of his friend Chrysaphius, who was a favorite of the emperor, to persuade Theodosius II to take his part and to summon another council at Ephesus under the presidency of Dioscorus, bishop of Alexandria. This man, who as both a friend to himself and an enemy to Flavian, bishop of Constantinople, deceived by a similarity of terms, gave it out that, like his predecessor Cyril, he was determined to defend with all his power that, as there was one person in Christ, so after the 'unification', there was also one nature in Christ. For the sake of peace, St. Leo the Great sent delegates to the council. Among other letters, they brought to the council two epistles, one addressed to the synod, and the other containing a perfect and full developed doctrine in which the errors of Eutyches were refuted, addressed to Flavian.

10. But at this synod of Ephesus, which St. Leo rightly called a 'Robbers' council', Dioscorus and Eutyches carried off everything with a high hand. The first places in the council were denied to the apostolic delegates; the letter of the pope were not allowed to be read, the votes of the bishops were extorted by threats and stratagems; among others Flavian was accused of heresy, deprived of his pastoral ministry and thrown into prison, where he died. The rash fury of Dioscorus even went to the length of criminally hurling an excommunication at the Apostolic See itself. As soon as St. Leo learnt from the deacon Hilary of the evil deeds of this council, he condemned and annulled all the decrees and decisions made by it. His grief at these crimes was greatly increased by the frequent appeals to his authority made by the numerous bishops who had been deposed.

11. Worthy of mention are the lines written by Flavian and by Theodoret of Cyrus to the chief pastor of the Church.

These are Flavian's words: 'After the unjust sentence which it pleased Dioscorus to pronounce against me, everything, as if by some prearranged pact, turned against me; when I appealed to the throne of the prince of the apostles, the Apostolic See, and to the holy synod which is under the authority of your Holiness, a large number of soldiers surrounded me, prevented my taking refuge at the altar, and tried to drag me from the church.' Theodoret wrote as follows: 'If Paul, the preacher of truth...betook himself to the great Peter, much more do we who are weak and lowly turn to the Apostolic See, that we may obtain from you a remedy for the ulcers of the Church. For it is your part to direct us in all things. I await the decision of the Apostolic See... above all that I may learn whether I ought to accept this unjust decision or not: for it is your decision that I await.'

12. Leo then urged Theodosius and Pulcheria in many letters to wipe out this stain. He proposed that they should remedy this sad state of affairs by summoning a council in Italy to reverse the decrees made at Ephesus. When the Emperor Valentine III, his mother Galla and his wife Eudoxia were entering St. Peter's Basilica, he received them accompanied by an assembly of bishops, and besought them with sighs and tears to do all they could to remedy the evil condition of the Church. The emperor wrote to his brother emperor [in the east], and the royal ladies joined their entreaties to his. But it was all to no purpose. Theodosius was in the hands of evil counselors and did nothing to amend the evil. However, he died suddenly; his sister Pulcheria succeeded him and took as her consort on the throne and in marriage one Marcian. Both of these persons were distinguished by their renown for wisdom and true religion. Then Anatolius, who had been illegally raised by Dioscorus to the see of Constantinople, accepted the letter which St. Leo wrote to Flavian on the Incarnation of our Lord. The remains of Flavian were brought back to Constantinople with great solemnity. The exiled bishops were restored to their sees, and the general hostility to the heresy of Eutyches grew so strong that there scarcely seemed to be any further need for a council. To this result, the invasions of the barbarians, which were jeopardizing the safety of the Roman Empire, also contributed.

(To be continued)

8th of September, 1951

