

Acta Sanctæ Sedis

Pope Pius XII

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

13. Nevertheless, at the emperor's wish and with the pope's approval, a council was held. Chalcedon was a city of Bithynia near the Thracian Bosphorus, within sight of Constantinople, which was situated on the opposite bank. Here, in the vast suburban basilica of St. Euphremia, virgin and martyr, on the 8th of October, assembled the fathers, who had previously met for this purpose in the city of Nicea. They were about 600 in number, all of the East, except for two exiles from Africa.

14. The book of the gospels was placed in the middle; nineteen representatives of the emperor and the senate took their places before the altar rails. The role of the apostolic delegates had been entrusted to the devout Bishops Paschasinus of Lilybæum in Sicily and Lucentius of Ascoli, and to the priests Boniface and Basil. To these was added Julian bishop of Cosm to aid them by his diligent labors. The delegates of the Roman Pontiff took the first places among the bishops; they were named first, they spoke first, they signed the Acts first, and by virtue of their delegated authority, they confirmed or rejected the decisions of the others. For example, in the case of condemnation of Dioscorus, the delegates ratified it in these words: "The holy and blessed archbishop of great and ancient Rome, Leo, through us and through this holy synod, together with the blessed and praiseworthy Apostle Peter who is the rock and foundation of the Orthodox Faith, has deprived him (Dioscorus) of all episcopal dignity and removed him from every priestly office."

15. Furthermore, the papal delegates not only exercised the authority of presidents, but their right to this honor by presiding was recognized by all the fathers of the council, as was shown clearly by the letter sent by the synod to St. Leo "For you", they wrote, "showed us benevolence in presiding over us in the persons of those who held your place, as the head over the members."

16. It is not necessary for us to relate the whole history of the synod, but we will touch only on the principle points which served to place the truth in full light and to foster the cause of religion. Therefore, since it concerns the dignity of the Apostolic See, we must mention canon XXVIII of this council, by which the next place of honor after the Roman see was granted to Constantinople, as the imperial city. Although there was nothing in this against the divine primacy of jurisdiction of the see of Peter, which indeed was taken for granted, nevertheless, this canon was passed in the absence of the papal legates, and they subsequently objected to it. It was therefore clandestine, surreptitious and lacking in all force of law and, as such, condemned by St. Leo in many letters. Marcian and Pulcheria accepted this rescissory sentence, and even Anatolius wrote to St. Leo excusing his blameworthy boldness: "With regard to the decree laid down by the recent synod of Chalcedon on behalf of the see of Constantinople, let your Beatitude rest assured that this was not my fault. But it was the desire of the reverend clergy of Constantinople... the validity and confirmation of this action being reserved to the authority of your Beatitude.

17. Let us come now to the central point of the whole question, i.e. to the solemn definition of the Catholic faith, by which the pernicious error of Eutyches was rejected and condemned. In the fourth session of the sacred synod the representatives of the emperor asked that a new formula of the faith should be composed. But the papal legate, Paschasinus, expressed the feeling of all when he replied that it was not necessary; the ground, he said was sufficiently covered by the creeds already in use, and the canonical documents approved by the Church; among these the letters of St. Leo to Flavian was the most important. "Thirdly (i.e. after the creeds of Nicea and Constantinople and their explanations by St. Cyril at the council of Ephesus) the writings composed by the holy and apostolic Leo, pope of the universal Church, against the heresies of Nestorius and Eutyches, have already shown what the true faith is. This holy synod likewise holds and follows this same faith."

18. It is useful to note here that this very important letter of St. Leo to Flavian concerning the Incarnation of the Word was read in the third session of the council, and hardly had the voice of the reader ceased, when there went up a unanimous cry: "This is the faith of the fathers, this is the faith of the Apostles. So we all believe, and so believe all orthodox Christians. Let him be anathema who does not believe this. Peter has spoken through Leo."

19. After this all unanimously agreed that the document of the bishop of Rome fully and perfectly concurred with the creeds of Nicea and Constantinople. Nevertheless, in the fifth session at the requests of the representatives of the Emperor Marcian and the senate, a new definition of the faith was worked out by a select committee of the bishops congregated from diverse lands in the basilica of St. Euphremia. It was made up of a prologue, of the creeds of Nicea and Constantinople (which was promulgated for the first time) and of a condemnation of the doctrine of Eutyches. This rule of faith was approved by the unanimous consent of the council.

8th of September, 1951

