

Background of the Council

Cyril of Alexandria died in 444 and was succeeded by Dioscurus, a man of doubtful ability and difficult disposition. In the meantime Flavian had become bishop of Constantinople. The rivalry between the two bishoprics was keen and Alexandria was feeling smug in that it had won the day at Ephesus. But among the servants of Flavian was an Asia Minor monk, Eutyches, and he was to become the focal point of the next phase of the debate.

Eutyches is quite old when we meet him and the result is that we are not sure of his early life. He and his later interpreters accepted a view of the Person of Christ in which Christ had two distinct natures until the union of the logos and the corpus after which one nature was conferred. The point at which this occurred was less important than the fact of the occurrence and the result was that in the combined Christ the body was so permeated with the Divine Logos that it was unlike ours while the Divine nature was so mingled with the human that it was not just like God. Christ had but one nature, neither exactly human nor divine..a view later called monophysitism. Boiled down to exactness it left Christ the God-Man who was neither exactly God nor exactly man. Yet he could be spoken of as if he were both so long as neither identity was pressed to be what it seemed. The view caused a stir.

Flavian, bishop of Constantinople. took the matter under advisement and found Eutyches guilty of promoting error. He deposed him when he could not persuade him to change his mind. From an ecclesiastical point of view he had this right and the action was defensible in his role as bishop. But in Alexandria, Dioscurus thought the views of Eutyches sounded like those of Cyril and he took the action of Flavian as a challenge to Alexandrian orthodoxy. Actually the view of Eutyches was quite unlike Cyril's and if Dioscurus had not been bruising for a fight he would have seen it. Nevertheless he and his colleagues launched a vigorous verbal and literary assault on Flavian and a profound defense of the ideas of Eutyches.

To implement this protest, Dioscurus called a council of his own making to meet in Ephesus in 449. It was not well attended and was marked by strife. Flavian