

The Church in Crisis: A History of the General Councils: 325-1870

CHAPTER 3. The General Council of Ephesus, 431

One of the minor activities of the General Council of 381 was to provide a new bishop for the see it thought worthy of the second place in the Church, in place of Gregory of Nazianzen who had been forced out. The bishops chose an old retired veteran of the high places of the imperial administration-- Nectarius. He ruled for sixteen years, and gave general satisfaction. And it is recorded that, in his quiet and peaceful way, this practiced administrator began to turn the new primacy of honour into something very like a primacy of fact. It gradually became the fashion to send appeals of various kinds to Constantinople, and for the bishop there to deal with them as though to do so were part of his jurisdiction. When Nectarius died, in 397, the question who should succeed him was, then, something to interest the whole East.

The personage who moved immediately was the bishop of Alexandria, Theophilus. He had a candidate, one of his own priests, one of his chief confidants in fact. But the court had a candidate also--the court being no longer the emperor who had called the council in 381, Theodosius,[1] but the minister Eutropius who governed in the name of Theodosius' youthful successor, Arcadius. The court had its way, and brought from Antioch an ascetic personage, the monk John, famed as the great preacher of the day, known to later ages thereby as Chrysostom, the man with the tongue of gold. He was consecrated, by Theophilus, in February 398. But Theophilus went home bitter, it is thought. Alexandria had failed to place its man in 397, as it had failed on the like occasion in 381, in the time of its late bishop Timothy; and it was only the threats of Eutropius--that there were serious charges on file against Theophilus--that had brought that bishop to accept the appointment of the monk from Antioch.

A few words about the actual power of the bishop of Alexandria will revive some of the faded colour of the tragic history that is to follow. He was, first of all, more absolutely lord, in all matters of daily life, of the

bishops dependent on him than was, at that time, any other bishop in the Church; and of these dependent bishops there were something like one hundred. He chose them all, and he personally consecrated them, the metropolitans no less than their suffragans. He was also, whether himself a monk or not, a kind of supreme patriarch of the monks, in this country where the monastic life had begun--and he thereby enjoyed unique prestige in the whole monastic world. He was immensely wealthy, with revenues coming from such extraordinary sources as his see's monopoly of the right to sell salt, and nitrates and papyrus, and all the various lugubrious paraphernalia needed in funerals. Alexandria, until Constantinople rose to the fullness of its promise, was the wonder city of the whole Roman world, the greatest of all trade centres, the queen of the Mediterranean. And of nothing was the great city prouder than of its see. The bishop of Alexandria moved in an habitual popularity and power that made of him a kind of native king, with mobs willing to demonstrate in his favour at a moment's notice. For forty-five years the see had had in Athanasius a saint for its bishop, a saint whose endless contests with the never much loved imperial government, whose many exiles, and inflexible fidelity to Nicaea, had achieved for his successors a position the like of which has probably never been known. This, in the hands of a saint! But Theophilus was far from being a saint. The saint, now, was at Constantinople, and in a world of Theophilus' kind he was soon to be hopelessly lost.

These considerations, the space given to them, rather--and to the story of St. John Chrysostom--in a study of the councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon, is due to the simple facts that rivalry between the two sees, Alexandria and Constantinople, ceaseless after 381, mattered very greatly in the history of these councils; that Alexandria sought endlessly to control Constantinople; that at Ephesus in 431 and again in 449 a bishop of Alexandria was the very willing agent of the deposition and excommunication of a bishop of Constantinople; and that at Chalcedon, in 451, the all but impossible happened and a bishop of Alexandria was

deposed and excommunicated; and Alexandria--civic, popular Alexandria no less than the clerical world and the monks--never forgot this, and never forgave it. And it being the fifth century and not the twentieth, the more human side of these grave ecclesiastical contentions ultimately brought down to ruin the wealthiest province of the empire.

Chrysostom, as he is commonly called, the first effective bishop his see had known for many years, found abundance of employment for his zeal, and inevitably made as many enemies as friends; wealthy enemies and highly placed, clergy among them, and even the young empress. The first occasion of his clash with the bishop of Alexandria was the kind reception he gave to alleged victims of Theophilus' harsh rule. This was some three years after his appointment. On the heels of these fugitives there came other monks, sent by Theophilus, with counter-accusations of heresy. But they failed to prove their case, before the emperor, and were themselves condemned. And the fugitives brought it about that Theophilus was summoned to answer their charges in person. He arrived (403) with a cohort of twenty-nine of his bishops in attendance, blaming Chrysostom for all that had happened, and swearing openly that he had come to the capital "to depose John."

And this is what his familiarity with the great world, his political skill and his lavish expenditure, actually achieved. John, when bidden by the emperor to summon a council for the trial of Theophilus had refused: Alexandria lay outside his jurisdiction. He now, in turn, was bidden by the emperor to take his trial, Theophilus his judge with his twenty-nine suffragans and a chance half-dozen visiting bishops picked up in the capital--the group called the "Synod of The Oak," from the country seat at Chalcedon where these bishops met.

John again refused to acknowledge an uncanonical jurisdiction. Whereupon, for his refusal to appear, he was condemned and deposed. The ultimate outcome of these proceedings was his exile to the farthest limits of the empire; and his treatment was so harsh that he died of it (407).

Theophilus celebrated his victory by composing a book against John filled, it would seem, with all manner of hideous calumnies. And in John's place there ruled one of the priests of Constantinople whom the saint had had to censure.

These bare facts, which seemingly all writers accept, are sufficient witness to the existence of malevolence at Alexandria, and to the corruption of life at the court of a Christian emperor. The other feature of this story is the action of the pope,[2] when the full account of these deeds reached him--letters from Theophilus (wholly misleading), from John (a full account, down to the day he wrote) and the minutes of the Synod of The Oak. This last the pope refused to accept as a council at all. Its sentence on John was mere words. He took John to be still the lawful bishop of Constantinople, and when he was asked to recognise Atticus, put in John's place, he refused, and broke off relations with both Alexandria and Antioch who had recognised him.

Theophilus was still out of communion when he died (412). His successor, a nephew, Cyril, began his long career as bishop equally under the ban. Antioch was the first see to surrender and make the symbolic submission, by restoring John's name "to the diptychs"--placing him in the list of deceased bishops officially prayed for. Then Atticus did the same, explaining fearfully to Alexandria that he really had no choice but to do this. Cyril, very young, as self-confident and absolute as was ever his uncle, stubbornly -- even passionately? -- refused. "You might as well ask to put Judas back in the company of the Apostles," he wrote. Cyril had been with his uncle at The Oak. But in the end, he too restored John's name. It was fifteen years or so since these terrible scenes of episcopal vindictiveness. But the saint's body had now been brought back with honour to his cathedral, and in a kind of public "amende" for the crime of the emperor Arcadius in banishing him, his son, Theodosius II, knelt before the coffin and kissed it. And between Rome and all the major sees of the East there was communion and peace.

The new troubles came then, as it were, out of a blue sky. Alexandria and Constantinople had long made their peace with Rome. And when Atticus died in 424 the new bishop, an elderly civil servant, managed the affairs of the turbulent capital so as to please all parties, his clergy, the monks, and the court. But with the appointment of Nestorius as his successor, in April 428, the peace was suddenly, and very rudely, broken. Like St. John Chrysostom the new bishop was a monk from Antioch. There he, too, had been a famous preacher, whose appointed task was the public explanation of the Scriptures. And he began his new career with a great oration, in which he called on the emperor to root out the remnants of the many heresies, pockets of which still existed in Constantinople.

In the new controversy which this sermon heralded, the natural characters of Nestorius and of Cyril of Alexandria play a great part--not more so perhaps than the personalities of such chiefs always play, but for once we are well supplied with evidence about this. As to the precise point on which Nestorius soon fell foul of all his world, he is himself our earliest witness--in two letters to the pope, Celestine I (422-31), written in the early months of his administration. He is explaining to the pope the difficulties he has to face in his war against the heretics, and he proceeds to say that one very serious matter is the unconscious heresy of good Catholics, of monks and even some of his clergy, about the meaning of the belief that Christ is God. They are confused in their minds about the great mystery that Christ is both God and man, and they speak as though what is human in Christ was divine. They talk, for example, of God having been born, and of God being buried, and invoke the most holy virgin Mary as the "God-bringing-forth," the mother of God (using the Greek word that expresses this so succinctly, Theotokos). They should, of course, be more careful in their speech, and say she is Christotokos--the one who brought forth Christ, the mother of Christ. "The Virgin," he told the pope, "is certainly Christotokos: she is not Theotokos." In speaking and acting as they do these Catholics are reviving, says Nestorius, "the corruption of Arius and Apollinaris," heretics notoriously condemned long ago. And

Nestorius speaks feelingly of “the fight which I have to put up over this.”[3]

By the time Nestorius had written these letters, his public support of preachers whom he brought in to “correct” his ignorant clergy, and his own sermons, his prohibition of the use of the word Theotokos and the punishments he meted out to the disobedient, had set the capital in an uproar. And the trouble was crossing the seas. For the news of his ill treatment of the monks had spread to the land which was the centre of the monastic movement, Egypt, and when the Egyptian monks laid the theological problem before their bishop, Cyril--the accusation that the traditional Catholic piety towards the God-man and his mother was heretical--there entered the field the very unusual combination of a first-rate theologian who was also a finished man of affairs and an experienced politician. Cyril wrote, for his monks, a theological defence of the tradition which was necessarily a severe denunciation of Nestorius.[4] This was sometime after the Easter of 429, and the “reply” was presently circulating in Constantinople. And Cyril also wrote to Nestorius.

In the events of the next two years the natural man in Cyril was to reveal itself fairly often. What of the same in Nestorius? What was it that so suddenly moved him to attack what was not a local piety peculiar to the city where he had just begun to live but, as the event showed (and as Nestorius must have known), a general, traditional way of regarding this doctrine? His own first letters on the subject are a curious mixture of orthodoxy and of novel statements, “startling to pious ears,” as a later day would have said; statements capable indeed of being explained as in harmony with the tradition, but until so explained, and especially when set out in criticism of current practice, justifiably causing real suspicion that the speaker was himself a heretic--a man, that is to say, out to propagate a new, personal, antitraditional version of fundamental belief. What prompted all this? The vanity of the learned man who has found out something the generality do not know? the possession of key-knowledge

that will “make all the difference”? the desire of a gifted man, promoted suddenly from obscurity to one of the highest places in the world of his time, to make his mark, to set all things right? For his point that, although Theotokos, rightly understood, is perfectly orthodox, it is better to use his own new word Christotokos, the suitable place to air this--a first time--might have been a conference of theologians or bishops. But Nestorius chose to do it in sermons to the multitudes that filled his cathedral, and not in terms of learned, anxious speculation, but in blood- and-thunder denunciation of universally practiced piety. There is a levity about the action which, given the gravity of the issue, is itself surely scandalous. And was Nestorius a really honest, straightforward type? In his first correspondence with the pope, when he tells of his problem with Pelagian refugees from Italy, he is even naively devious, and the pope in his reply points this out very bluntly. And once the major forces had been brought in against him, Cyril of Alexandria and the verdict of Rome, he certainly shows himself, in his manoeuvres with the court, a twister of the first order: Trop habile Nestorius.[6]

When Cyril wrote directly to Nestorius, in February 430, seemingly, he said how surprised he was that he should disturb the peace of mind of the faithful by such very controvertible statements. Nestorius in return attacked the explanation Cyril had given the monks, called it untraditional, and said explicitly that it was the Apollinarian heresy all over again. Cyril had given him the news that Rome considered his views scandalous, and Nestorius ended his letter with a hint that the court was on his side. Cyril was not unaware that at Constantinople there were clerics from Egypt, gone there with a case against their chief bishop, and that Nestorius was taking care of these enemies. It was with reference to this situation that Cyril wrote to his agents in the capital, about this time: “This poor fellow does not imagine, surely, that I am going to allow myself to be judged by him, whoever the accusers are that he can stir up against me! It will be the other way round. I shall know well enough how

to force him back to the defensive.”[6] The temperature is rising rapidly, on both shores of the Mediterranean.

It was now that Cyril first approached the court on the matter of Nestorius, sending explanations of the point at issue to the emperor, his wife and sisters.

The next move was a council in Egypt, sometime after Easter 430, and an elaborate report to the pope on the part of Cyril--his answer to the Roman query whether certain sermons that have come to the pope were really Nestorius' sermons.[7] Cyril's reply was a "skilfully written letter"[8] describing the situation at Constantinople, saying that all the bishops of the East are united in their anxiety about these errors of Nestorius. He is quite isolated in his denial that the Virgin is Theotokos, but flatters himself that he will bring the rest round, "so greatly has the power[9] of his see infatuated him." The bishops will not publicly break off relations with Nestorius without consulting the pope. "Deign then to make known to us what seems good to you, and whether we ought either to remain in communion with him or to declare publicly that no one should remain in communion with a man who thinks and teaches so erroneously." The pope's reply, Cyril recommends, should be sent to all the bishops of the East.

With this letter went copies of Nestorius' sermons (and a Latin translation of them), then the Cyril-Nestorius correspondence, then a list drawn up by Cyril of the errors said to be taught by Nestorius, and a compendium of texts from the classic theologians of the past on the doctrine called in question.

When this dossier reached Rome, Pope Celestine set it before a specially summoned gathering of bishops, and on August 11, 430, he wrote his judgment. This he sent, in the first place, to Cyril. In this letter the pope speaks of Cyril's communication as a consolation amid his grief at the sermons Nestorius had been preaching. Already, that is, before receiving Cyril's letter, the pope had handed over these sermons to one of the great

scholars of the day, the bilingual John Cassian, to be the basis of a book against Nestorius. But Cyril's letter, the pope continues, suggests how to cure this terrible evil. To the question about remaining in communion with the bishop of Constantinople, the pope replies that those whom Nestorius had excommunicated because they opposed him remain, nevertheless, in full communion, and those who obstinately follow the path that leads away from the apostolic teaching cannot be "in communion with us," i.e., the pope. Nestorius, he instructs Cyril, is to be summoned to make a written recantation of his errors, and to declare that his belief about the birth of Christ is what the church of Rome believes, the church of Alexandria, and the universal church. And Cyril is charged with the execution of this decision. He is to act in the pope's place, and, speaking with all the authority of the pope's see, is to demand this retraction of Nestorius, to be made in writing, within ten days of the notice given. If within this time Nestorius has not complied he is to be declared expelled from the church.

To the bishops of Antioch, Jerusalem, Thessalonica, and Philippi[10] the pope also wrote letters which follow the same line as that to Cyril, but make no mention of the commission to act which the pope had sent him. The pope merely says, with great gravity, "The sentence we pronounce, which is even more the sentence of our master Christ who is God, is..." and so on, as in the letter to Cyril.

We possess, besides the letter to Cyril, the letter which the pope wrote, that same day, to Nestorius. In this Celestine explains that lack of scholars who could translate the bishop's letters and sermons had delayed his reply, then came the dossier sent from Alexandria, which has been studied. The pope tells the bishop of Constantinople that his letters are "full of evident blasphemies." The sermons, for all their obscurity, plainly teach heresy. What a dreadful mistake it was to make Nestorius a bishop! The sheep have, indeed, been handed over to the wolf. And now, those whose lack of foresight brought this about are calling on the pope to help them out of

the difficulty. The pope does not point out to Nestorius the particular places where he has gone astray, list any of “your many impious declarations, which the whole church rejects.” But, as he tells him, this present letter is a final warning. The bishop of Alexandria is in the right, in this controversy. “Brother, if you wish to be with us... openly show that you think as we think.” “Our sentence is this,” and the letter ends with a demand for a written declaration that Nestorius believes the very thing he has repudiated, with a notice of ten days allowed, and a warning that noncompliance means immediate excommunication. Celestine then tells him that all the papers concerning the process have been sent to Alexandria, that he has commissioned Cyril to act in his name and to inform him, Nestorius, and the other bishops what the pope has decided.

A letter, in much the same terms, also went from the pope to the clergy and faithful people of the capital. But the pope did not write to the emperor.

What the normal time was for a public letter to go from Rome to Alexandria, in the fifth century, and thence on to Constantinople, a business involving sea-journeys of something like a thousand miles, it is not easy to say. But it is surprising that not until December 7 was Nestorius officially summoned by Cyril to recant. And the bishop of Alexandria did not carry out his task in person--as, presumably, the pope designed. He sent the ultimatum by four of his suffragan bishops. Nor did he content himself with sending the pope’s letters of commission, his own credentials in the matter. Before moving, he had called a synod of the bishops of Egypt, and he now sent on to Nestorius their synodal letter condemning his teaching. Finally, to make the expected retractation doubly sure, Cyril had drafted twelve statements about the heresies Nestorius was alleged to support, statements all of which ended: “Whoever believes this, may he be anathema,” i.e., accursed.[10a] These Nestorius was to sign.

But in the long interval between August 11 and December 7 much had happened at Constantinople and elsewhere. Nestorius had had a correspondence with the bishop of Antioch, who urged him, in very plain language, to do as he was asked, and not to cause trouble merely about a word he disliked (Theotokos) but which he admitted could bear an orthodox meaning, and to which many saints and doctors of the past had given sanction by themselves using it. "Don't lose your head," wrote the Antiochean. Ten days! "It will not take you twenty-four hours to give the needed answer.... Ask advice of men you can trust. Ask them to tell you the facts, not just what they think will please you.... You have the whole of the East against you, as well as Egypt." Nestorius, in his reply to this surely good friend, hedged. He gave no explicit answer, merely saying he had not been rightly understood, that if his book forbade the use of the famous word it was because heretics were using it, with an heretical meaning. And that now he will just wait for the council,[11] which will settle this, and all other problems. As to Cyril, it is he who is the troublemaker. "As to the Egyptian's insolence, it will scarcely surprise you, for you have many evidences of it, old and new." [12]

On November 19, the emperor had summoned a General Council of the Church, for certain vaguely described purposes, the summons said, but actually, no one doubted, to settle this controversy between Constantinople and Alexandria and--in the expectation of Nestorius--to be the scene of the trial for heresy (Apollinarianism) of Cyril. The council was to meet at Ephesus, at Pentecost (June 7) 431.

When Cyril's four bishops reached Constantinople, December 7, Nestorius refused to receive them. John of Antioch, in the letter just mentioned, had passed on to Nestorius copies of the pope's letter condemning him, and also of a letter he (John) had received from Cyril. Long before Cyril's four bishops walked into the sanctuary of the cathedral at Constantinople, that December Sunday, to hand over the ultimatum, Nestorius had known all about it. And he had not been idle. It

was from Nestorius, it is often said, that the council idea had come. And in the emperor's letter inviting Cyril to the council there was much to make it evident that the glorification of Alexandria was no part of the programme. Cyril's writing separate letters to the emperor, the empress, and the princesses was here declared to be an attempt to divide the imperial family, and the bishop was ordered--not invited--to attend the council, under severe penalties.[13] On the other hand, the emperor's act had changed the whole situation for Nestorius. In summoning the council Theodosius had forbidden all and every ecclesiastical change, no matter by whom, until the council had concluded. And when Nestorius now wrote to the pope of the crimes that were to be brought against Cyril when the council met, he made light of the theological controversy, gave not a hint that he knew of the pope's judgment, but wrote that Cyril, he hears, is preparing a "Faith in danger" campaign, in the hope of distracting the council from his own anxieties.

The pope made no difficulty about the emperor's plan to call a council, nor about the prohibition which--in fact--had called a halt to the summons to Nestorius. And when Cyril wrote to ask whether Nestorius was now to be treated as excommunicated, for the ten days had long since gone by, the pope in reply quoted the Scripture that God wills not the death of a sinner, but rather that he be converted and live. And Cyril is exhorted to work for peace with the rest of the bishops.

The date of this letter is May 7, 431--one month before the day appointed for the council, five months from the day Cyril's deputation tried to deliver the ultimatum to Nestorius. And in those five months the twelve anathemas of Cyril, so to call them, had time to circulate; and--in the vast territories where the influence of Antioch was strong--they had raised issues which now quite overshadowed the differences between Cyril and Nestorius, or between Rome and Nestorius even. In the eyes of these Antiochean theologians the language in which the bishop of Alexandria had framed his statements revealed him as a pure Apollinarian. And John

of Antioch had organised a party to make this clear at the council, and had in the meantime induced two bishops--one of them held to be Cyril's equal as a scholarly writer, Theodoret of Cyrrhus[14]--to come out with public refutations of the Alexandrian's "heresies." And this group wrote to the bishops of the West for support, to Milan, for example, to Aquileia, and to Ravenna.

How much of this was known to Pope Celestine, when he wrote his letter of May 7, we do not know. But he surely knew that minds were inflamed, and as he gave Cyril the news that he was not himself able to make the journey to Ephesus, he urged "the Egyptian" to be moderate, to remember that what the pope wanted was that Nestorius should be won back. We must not, said the pope, again scripturally, be of those "swift to shed blood."

The day after this letter was written the pope signed the instructions for the three legates who were to represent him at the council. They were told to act throughout with Cyril and to watch carefully that the authority of the Apostolic See was duly respected. And, finally, the pope sent a letter to the council. It is a moving document, in which Celestine reminds the bishops of the beloved apostle St. John, whose remains lie in the church at Ephesus where they are meeting, and reminds them that they are the successors of the twelve apostles, privileged to preserve what their labours had established. The pope speaks plainly about the Nestorian novelties: they are treason to the faith. He exhorts the bishops to unanimity, and to be courageous in act. Then he presents his legates, who will take part in the council and will tell the bishops, "the things which we decided at Rome were to be done." "Nor do we doubt your assent to all this," the pope goes on, "when it is seen how all that is done has been ordered for the security of the whole church." [14a]

To the legates the pope entrusted a letter for the emperor, announcing that he would be represented at the council by legates, and praying he would give no encouragement to these novel ideas now causing such trouble, the

work of men who would reduce the idea of God to the limits of what a finite intelligence could explore. The pope leaves it in no doubt, in this as in the other letter, that Nestorius is already condemned; if the pope consents to the case being discussed once more, this is in the hope that the unfortunate man will retract.

The emperor had not convoked every single bishop of the empire to the council, but only a certain number from each of the fifty-nine provinces of his own jurisdiction, the choice being left to the metropolitans. In all, something like 230 or 250 ultimately arrived at Ephesus. Cyril came in a few days before the appointed date. He found Nestorius already established. He had been at Ephesus since Easter, with a small group of sympathetic prelates. Cyril had brought with him fifty Egyptian bishops. Sometime after Pentecost the (anti-Nestorius) bishop of Jerusalem arrived with fifteen supporters, and later came news from the Antiocheans, forty-six in all, that they had been delayed by accidents. This last group had chosen to travel by the land route, a thousand miles and more of difficult and--as it happened--famine-stricken country.

The most numerous group at the council was the bishops of what we, today, call Asia Minor, the nineteen provinces that then made up the (civil) dioceses of Asia and Pontus, and the district called Proconsular Asia which was subject to the emperor's direct rule. It was in this last that Ephesus itself was situated. In Asia Minor there were, in all, something like three hundred sees. It was the most Catholicized territory of all the empire. Something like a hundred of these bishops came to the council. The bishop of Ephesus, Memnon, acted as their leader, and they were to a man anti-Constantinople--the question of the Theotokos apart. The repeated attempts

Of successive bishops of the capital city, since 381, to turn the primacy of honour then voted it into an effective hold on the only territory not already dominated by Antioch or Alexandria, made the bishops of Ephesus allies of the foe of Constantinople in all these disputes.

Meanwhile the Antiocheans did not arrive, and the bishops waited, for a good two weeks after the appointed day, June 7, in the great city, two hundred of them nearly, each with his retinue, in the scorching latitude of 38 degrees north. Disputes were frequent, fights and riots with the Nestorian minority, in which the town naturally took an interested part.[15] But Cyril made no attempt to meet Nestorius. The two prelates avoided each other. Each, to the other, was a wicked heretic, awaiting his trial and deserved condemnation. And while the bishop of Ephesus forbade the churches of the city to Nestorius, Cyril was free to preach on Nestorius as the enemy of truth, the outcast already condemned by the pope.[16]

On June 21 the long wait was broken. Cyril announced that the next day the council would hold its opening session. Immediately there were protests. From the imperial commissioner, in the first place, Count Candidian, who was charged with the safety of the council, under orders to prevent any but the bishops from entering the church where the meetings would take place,[17] and with keeping order in the council itself, i.e., to see that every bishop who wished to speak was allowed to speak, and to reply to attacks made on him; also to see that no bishop left Ephesus until the council had ended its business. Candidian demanded a delay until the Antiocheans arrived. So did no fewer than sixty-eight bishops, in a written protestation. And Nestorius, with his party, made their protest too, saying the council was no council until all the bishops were assembled. But Cyril stood to his announcement, and on June 22 the council opened--a memorable first session in which much was enacted, and in which still more lay mischievously latent, *suppositos cineri a doloso* indeed.[18]

The question has been raised by what authority Cyril thus opened the council, acting as though he was its acknowledged president. That the mass of the bishops at the time accepted the *fait accompli* without any sign of protest--even the sixty-eight signatories--is certain. It was also

traditional that Alexandria was the first see of the East. Its bishop being present at a General Council, and neither pope nor emperor having named another to preside, he was surely its inevitable president. Nestorius, in the memoirs he wrote, many years later, says: "We expected that he who exercised authority (the emperor, through Candidian) would have chosen the president. No one thought you would have taken it for yourself." But from the 159[19] bishops who were in the church as the day's work began there was not a sign of objection to Cyril.

The first, unallowed-for incident was a protestation, to the council this time, not to Cyril, from Candidian. It was the emperor's will, he said, that there should not be any "fragmentary councils." [20] He was asked to show his instructions and did so. But the bishops stood firm, and begged him to leave, which he did, after a final plea to wait for the absentees, upon whose arrival Nestorius and his party would join the council.

The council then settled down to its business. A notary read a summary of the case against Nestorius, told how Cyril had intervened at Constantinople, and then at Rome, and how "the most holy bishop of the church of Rome, Celestine, has written what it behoved." And the notary announced that all the documents were here and at the disposition of the bishops.

Nestorius was then sent for. Three times--as the Law demanded--he was officially and personally summoned, a deputation going from the council to the place where he lived. He ignored all three citations, and the council passed to the study of his case.

The next act was the reading of the creed of Nicaea, and then of Cyril's letter to Nestorius. Cyril then rose, acknowledging the letter, and to put it to the bishops to vote whether the theology of his letter was in accord with the creed of Nicaea; 125 of the bishops followed him, each making profession of the Nicene faith, and affirming that the letter accorded with Nicaea. A demand was made for Nestorius' reply to the letter. When it was read, and the question put as to its accord with Nicaea, thirty-four

bishops had individually answered in the negative when the patience of the assembly gave out. There was a call for a mass vote, and without a dissident they shouted their views in a series of acclamations: “Whoever does not anathematize Nestorius, let him be anathema. Curses on him. The true faith curses him. The holy council curses him. We all say anathema, to his letter and his views. We all say anathema to the heretic Nestorius.... The whole universal church says anathema to the wicked religion taught by Nestorius.”

The bishop of Jerusalem now asked that the pope’s letter to Nestorius be read. So far not a word had come from the president to say that Rome had condemned Nestorius already, and looked to the council to ratify this. It was in the name of Nicaea that Nestorius had been condemned. The council-- or Cyril--had not merely begun the business before the Antiocheans had come in, but before the arrival of the pope’s representatives also. The Jerusalem proposal, so to speak, was adopted and the pope’s letter was read--and listened to as a matter of routine, one would say, without a single acclamation. Next was read the letter delivered to Nestorius by the four bishops, the letter of the Egyptian synod. But not the now famous twelve anathemas which Cyril had composed in order to stop every retreat for his wily opponent--or perhaps they were read? Historians do not agree. Then, after an account by one of the four bishops of their mission to Nestorius, the notary read out a long collection of texts from all the classic theologians of past days justifying the orthodoxy of the term Theotokos; and followed this with a long selection of passages from Nestorius that were evidence of his errors. Finally, in a solemn resounding sentence, the council deprived Nestorius of his bishopric of Constantinople and ejected him from the ranks of the episcopate; 198 signatures of bishops were attached to the sentence.

In all the day’s proceedings not a single voice had been raised to say that the views of Nestorius were what the faith really was. All that long day crowds had stood round outside the great church, while the interminable

routine had slowly worked to its inevitable end, echoes from within making their way to the streets, no doubt, in the more lively moments. When the result was known there were scenes of the wildest joy, and Cyril, in a pastoral letter written on his return to Alexandria, has left a vivid picture of it all.

“The whole population of the city, from earliest dawn until the evening stood around, in expectation of the council’s decision. And when they heard that the author of the blasphemies had been stripped of his rank, they all began with one voice to praise and glorify God, as for the overthrow of an enemy of the faith. And as we [the bishops] came forth from the Church, they led us with torches to our lodgings, for it was now evening. Throughout the city there was great rejoicing, and many lighted lanterns, and women who walked before us swinging thuribles.”[21]

The Council of Ephesus was now over? No, its history had hardly begun, although, without a shadow of opposition, it had carried out the task for which, in the eyes of all, it had been summoned; and although the justice of what it had done was not questioned, and no move was ever made to reverse the decision. These strange words promise a complicated story. There were to be six more sessions of the council, spread through the month of July, and then, for the mass of the bishops, a long dreary wait of weeks, while, at the capital, rival delegations argued before the emperor about the orthodoxy of Cyril. It was late September, three months after this night of triumph, before the council was dissolved, and the bishops free to begin the long journey back to their sees.

The morrow of the celebrations was taken up with the task of notifying the decision to all the interested parties: letters from Cyril and his bishops to the emperor, and to the clergy and people of Constantinople; a report from Candidian to the emperor; and from Nestorius (who had been officially told his sentence at the conclusion of the session) a complaint about the way his friends had been dealt with.

The next day, June 24, the Antiocheans arrived. They speedily learnt all that had happened, and were soon officially notified of the sentence against Nestorius and ordered, by Cyril, not to communicate with him in any way. Their immediate reaction was to form themselves into a council-along with some of the bishops who had held aloof from the great session of the twenty-second They gave Count Candidian audience and he, as well as protesting against what was then done, gave a full account of all the events of the week. It was then the turn of those bishops to speak, against whom Memnon had closed all his churches, shutting them out in this way from the liturgy at the great feast of Pentecost. There was speech of Cyril's autocratic conduct, of the heresy which his twelve anathemas contained and, finally, John of Antioch who presided over the gathering proposed a sentence that Cyril and Memnon be deposed as the authors of the heresies contained in the anathemas, the heresies of Arius and Apollinaris, and all the bishops be excommunicated who had allowed themselves to be led away by these chiefs. Notice of this sentence was served on all concerned, and once more the elaborate business gone through of officially informing the emperor and all the ecclesiastical world of the capital.

When these letters were despatched, whether June 26 or 28, the previous despatches to the emperor can hardly yet have reached Constantinople. His answer to Candidian's report on the session of June 22 is, in fact, dated June 29. It is a severe condemnation of all Cyril's proceedings. The emperor regards all that was done as of no effect, and orders the bishops to meet again, in accord, this time, with the instructions given to the count. None is to leave until this new discussion has taken place. And one of the highest officials of the court, it is announced, is on his way to regulate matters.

By the time this communication had reached Ephesus, something else had happened: the three Roman legates had arrived, the two bishops Arcadius and Projectus, and the priest Philip. In accord with the instructions given them, ten or eleven weeks before, they joined themselves to Cyril. On July

10, all the bishops who had taken part in the act of June 22 came together once more in session. The difference in the procedure is evident, notable, significant. Cyril presided,[22] and the session opened with a demand from the legates that the pope's letter to the council, which they had brought with them, should be read. This was done, and one of the legates then said, "We have satisfied what custom demands, namely, that first of all, the letters from the Apostolic See be read in Latin." They were next read in Greek--a translation brought by the legates.[23]

And now there were acclamations from the council. The papal sentence had anticipated the bishops' own vote. The counteraction of John of Antioch against themselves for their support of Cyril, the emperor's gesture of repudiation, were, perhaps, the lighter for this wholehearted confirmation. "Celestine," they called, "is the new Paul. Cyril is the new Paul. Celestine is the guardian of the faith. Celestine agrees with the council. There is one Celestine, one Cyril, one faith of the council, one faith of the world-wide church." And then one of the papal legates intervened to point out that what Celestine's letter had said was that it was the council's business to carry out what he at Rome had decided should be done. And another legate, acknowledging the acclamations, said in a terse phrase, "The members have joined themselves to the head, for your beatitude is not ignorant that the head of the whole faith, and furthermore of the Apostles, is the blessed apostle Peter." And then this legate, the priest Philip, asked for the official record of what had been done on June 22, So as to be able to confirm the sentence passed, according to the instructions of "our blessed pope."

At the session of the following day the same legate pronounced that the judgment of June 22 had been made "canonically and in accordance with ecclesiastical learning"; and, "conformably with the instructions of the most holy pope, Celestine," the judgment was confirmed. Whereupon the minutes of the session and the sentence against Nestorius were read, following which the legate Philip made a speech in which occurs this

passage, that has never ceased to be quoted since: “No one doubts, nay it is a thing known now for centuries, that the holy and most blessed Peter, the prince and head of the Apostles, the pillar of the faith and the foundation on which the Catholic Church is built, received from Our Lord, Jesus Christ, the saviour and redeemer of the human race, the keys of the kingdom, and that to him there was given the power of binding and of loosing from sin; who, down to this day, and for evermore, lives and exercises judgment in his successors.”[24]

In the report of these last proceedings made by the bishops to the emperor, the principal part which the Roman see has played in the condemnation of Nestorius, “before the present council was summoned,” is stressed, and the fact that Cyril had been charged by the pope to act in his place. But the bishops do not excuse themselves for--once more--ignoring the emperor’s commands as to what they shall do and how. In their letter notifying again to the clergy of Constantinople the deposition of their bishop, the next signature, after Cyril’s is that of Philip, “priest of the church of the Apostles,”[26] then comes that of the bishop of Jerusalem, and next of the other two Roman legates.

It remained to resolve the council’s situation vis-a-vis the Antioch group who, now nearly three weeks since, had declared these two hundred or so bishops excommunicated, and no council. John of Antioch and his adherents were now, three times, formally summoned to appear before the council, and upon their final refusal they were all solemnly excommunicated (July 17). And, once again, pope and emperor were formally notified of all that had been done.

At Constantinople there were general rejoicings at the news that Nestorius’ reign was over. But the emperor still refused to recognise the work done as it had been done. He did not reprove the bishops for ignoring his orders of June 29, and he wrote as though all the bishops then at Ephesus were one body--a single letter addressed to all.[26] But he confirmed all three depositions, i.e., of Nestorius and of Cyril and of the

bishop of Ephesus. All the other acts he condemned. The faith as defined at Nicaea sufficed, he said. His new envoy, Count John, who brought the letter, would further instruct the bishops about “our divinity’s plan for the faith.” And the bishops were bidden return to their sees.

When the count arrived, with this somewhat confused, and confusing, decree, it must have been the beginning of August. He had all the bishops brought together in a single assembly to hear his news, their leaders with them. The effect was a general riot, Nestorius and Cyril had to be removed before order was restored. That evening they, with Memnon of Ephesus, were placed under arrest. “If I see the pious bishops to be irritable and irreconcilable (though what causes their rage and exasperation is a mystery to me), and if I find it necessary to take other measures, I shall as soon as possible give your majesty news of this”; so the count reported to Theodosius.

There were, of course, protestations to the court from the council. And Cyril, who knew well the world of Constantinople, made immediate use of the vast wealth of his see. “At the court every man had his price, and Cyril did not stop to count the price.”[27] We have a list of the valuable presents that flowed in, carpets (of various sizes), furnishings, valuable silks, jewels, ivory chairs, ostriches, and good plain golden coin. Of this last, one group of fifteen high personages “touched,” between them, the equivalent of nearly a million dollars. “Il est certain que Cyrille a paye tres cher.”[28] No less effectively, he influenced the monks, and an abbot who in forty-eight years had never left his cell headed a great demonstration, that all the town turned out to cheer as it made its way to the palace. And the abbot solemnly warned Theodosius of the sin he committed when he interfered with the council’s action.

What the emperor decided was to hold a conference, which both sides would attend. Eight delegates from each party came to the palace at Chalcedon, the town directly across the Bosphorus from the capital. The legate Philip went with the party of the council. John of Antioch led the

other group. Cyril was still under arrest; nor did any pleas on his behalf at Chalcedon overcome the emperor's determination not to see him. The conference began on September 4.[29] There were five meetings in all, and we have no record of what took place except what has survived of letters to the bishops still kicking their heels at Ephesus from their friends in the delegations--or rather in the delegation of John of Antioch's party, one of whom was the great Theodoret. The emperor's decision--presuming it was his office to decide--was sensible enough. He refused to condemn Cyril for his twelve anathemas, would not even have them examined; refused to accept the Antioch policy that no more needed to be said than to repeat the definition of Nicaea; and he utterly refused to reconsider the personal question of Nestorius. "Don't talk to me of that fellow," he said. "He has shown the sort he is." As to the excommunicated John of Antioch and his party "Never so long as I live will I condemn them," said the emperor in his edict. "When they appeared before me none were able to prove anything against them." Cyril and Memnon were tacitly allowed to keep their sees. The bishops were allowed to go home. The great council was over.

NOTES

1. He had died January 17, 395, the last man to rule the whole Roman world as sole emperor; and he died a man in the prime of life.
2. St. Innocent 1, 402-17.
3. Batiffol, Msgr. Pierre, *Le Siege Apostolique*, 359-451, 343.
4. Whom, however, Cyril does not name.
5. Batiffol, as before, 361; also, 343.
6. Batiffol, as before, 348, n. 5. St. Cyril's Letters, no. X. Also quoted Bardy, *Les debuts du Nestorianisme*, F. and M., vol. 4, p. 172, n. 2.
7. Batiffol, as before, 349, n. 1.
8. Bardy, 172, fort habilement redigee.

9. The word translated by “power” is *dunameis*. When the pope passes to state his decision to the clergy and faithful of Constantinople (August 11, 30) and says, “The authority of our see has decided,” the noun used is *authentia*--i.e., supreme authority, where the other term *dunameis* is “high rank,” or “resources.”

10. In the province of Macedonia (and therefore directly subject to the Holy See), 70 miles east of Thessalonica, 240 due west of Constantinople.

10a. Barry, no. 18, prints a translation of the synodal letter and the anathemas.

11. Announced since John of Antioch’s letter.

12. For this correspondence, Batiffol, as before, 361-62.

13. Cf. Newman on the emperor, “distrustful of Cyril”: “Theodosius disliked Cyril; he thought him proud and overbearing, a restless agitator and an intriguer and he told him so in a letter that has come down to us.” *Trials of Theodoret*, in *Historical Sketches*, II, 348. It seems safe to date this essay, first printed in 1873, in the 1860s.

14. Whom John had already called in to induce Nestorius to admit the orthodoxy of the use of the word *Theotokos*.

14a. These three letters are in Jaffe, nos. 377, 378, 379.

15. The leading prelates brought each his own bodyguard; Cyril, sailors from Alexandria, Nestorius, gladiators from the circus.

16. Newman, as before, 349-50.

17. The great church called *Maria Theotokos*.

18. “Beneath ashes deceptively cool.” The reference is to Horace’s famous warning to historians, *Odes*, II, 1.

19. “Round about 160,” says Bardy, *F. and M.*, 4, 180. The exact figure is a matter of dispute.

20. Nolle particulures quasdam synodos fieri. Batiffol, as before, 371.

21 The text of this letter, Greek and Latin, is printed in Kirch, *Enchiridion Fontium Hist. Ecclesiasticae Antiquae*, pp. 461-62.

22. And the official record of the proceedings notes that he does so “taking the place of Celestine, the most holy and most reverend chief-bishop of the church of the Romans.”

23. The term used by the legate for his native Latin tongue is interesting-
-Romana oratio. Mansi, IV, p. 1288.

24 Text, Greek and Latin, in Denzinger, no. 112.

25. The Roman basilica of this title.

26. To fifty-three, rather, by name, belonging to all parties; to the pope and the bishop of Thessalonica, also, who did not attend the council; and to St. Augustine, dead now eleven months.

27. Batiffol, Msgr. Pierre, *Le Siege Apostolique*, 359-451, p. 388.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 389. See also Bardy, p. 188.

29. Bardy says September 11, p. 190.