

EUTYCHES

The fifth-century archimandrite in Constantinople whose Christological views had a considerable influence in molding the Christology of the Coptic-Monophysite church. Born perhaps as early as 370 (he tells Pope LEO THE GREAT (440-461) that he had lived a monastic life for seventy years), he was head of a monastic house in the capital by 420, and at the time of the First Council of EPHESUS was known as a staunch supporter of CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. Thereafter he enjoyed honor at the court of [Theodosius](#) II. He was the godfather of the eunuch Chrysaphius, who in 441 became grand chamberlain to the emperor.

His hostility toward all teaching that he regarded as Nestorian did not mellow with age, and on the renewed outbreak of Christological controversy in the East following the election of DIOSCORUS as the patriarch of Alexandria in 444, he quickly threw in his lot with the extreme anti-Nestorians once more dominant in Alexandria. Whether or not he was the opponent of "Orthodoxus" in [Theodoret](#) of Cyrrhus's pamphlet *Eranistes* is uncertain, but by 447 he was suspected by Domnus, archbishop of Antioch, of holding Apollinarian views concerning Christ and to be worthy of condemnation (Facundus of Hermiana, *Pro defensione trium capitulorum* XII.5). Eutyches began to come under displeasure from the new archbishop of Constantinople, Flavian (446-449). In the spring of 448 he protested to Pope Leo that Nestorianism was again raising its head in the capital (Leo, *Letters* 20). In this letter Eutyches described Cyril as "leader and chief of the holy synod at Ephesus," a role with which Leo may not have agreed. The pope merely acknowledged the letter without indicating support (*Letters* 21, 1 June 448).

By the autumn of 448, Flavian had come to regard Eutyches as a menace and a troublemaker in the service of Dioscorus. In November he felt strong enough to arraign him before an assembly of bishops in the capital, the Home Synod. Eutyches' accuser was Eusebius of Dorylaeum,

who as a lawyer had been an ally against Nestorius, but now was bishop of Dorylaeum and a firm supporter of Flavian and the Christology expressed in the Formula of Reunion of April 433. Only after refusing two summonses, on 8 and 17 November, did the archimandrite deign to appear on 22 November, accompanied by a crowd of friendly court officials and monks, and take his stand to answer charges at a session presided over by the patrician Florentius.

Even now it is not clear precisely what Eutyches was teaching. He feared and hated Nestorianism, and hence any suggestion that Jesus Christ was to be acknowledged “in two natures” (of godhead and manhood). However, he lacked the subtlety to clothe his views with an appearance at least of acceptable orthodoxy. In the long debate that took place between him, Flavian, and Florentius, he admitted that Christ was born of the flesh of the Virgin, but refused to say that His flesh was [consubstantial](#) with human flesh. He confessed that there was a union of two natures in Christ, but that union was before the Incarnation.

After the Incarnation there was only one nature, that of the Son of God. It seemed as though Eutyches was suggesting either a mixture of the divine and the human in Christ, as Basil of Seleucia, one of his interlocutors, thought (*Gesta synodi Ephesini ii*, in *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum* 2.II.1, p. 55), or that he imagined that Christ’s flesh was heavenly in nature and hence different from the flesh of human beings. In either event, the incarnate Christ would be divorced from humanity and could play no part in its redemption. Not surprisingly, the Home Synod condemned him as a Valentinian (Gnostic) and/or Apollinarian heretic, deposed him from his status as archimandrite, deprived him of priestly functions, and excommunicated him. Thirty-two bishops and twenty-three archimandrites signed the decree.

Eutyches did not accept the sentence. During the latter part of the debate, he had made a telling point. He pointed out to the president of the court, Florentius, that “Cyril and [Athanasius](#) speak of two natures

before the union but one nature after the union.” Cyril had done so, but the works to which Eutyches was referring were Apollinarian writings that had been placed under the name of Athanasius, Pope Julius, Gregory of Nazianzus, and the third-century pupil of [Origen](#) and missionary, Gregory the Wonderworker. Some of these writings had been accepted, however, at the Council of Ephesus in 431, and this was to prove Eutyches’ trump card against Flavian and Eusebius of Dorylaeum in his next trial of strength, also held at Ephesus.

Eutyches at once appealed his sentence, not only to Rome but also to what he called “the councils” of Rome, Alexandria, Thessalonica, Jerusalem, and Ravenna (but not Antioch), and also to the emperor, denying that he had wished to add anything to the Nicene Creed (action condemned at the Council of Ephesus), that his doctrine was in accord with that taught by “the Fathers,” and that Eusebius of Dorylaeum was personally prejudiced against him. Flavian also wrote to Pope Leo, explaining the reasons for the court’s verdict (Flavian to Leo, *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum*, 2.II.i, p. 22).

During the ensuing months, opinion at Theodosius’ court swung steadily in favor of Eutyches. Chrysaphius had a grudge against Flavian and influenced [Theodosius](#) II against him. Theodosius supported Eutyches’ appeal to Pope Leo, appointed a commission to reexamine the charge against the monk, and finally, on 30 March 449, convoked a judicial episcopal council to meet at Ephesus on 1 August. Dioscorus, Eutyches’ ally, was charged with its organization.

At Rome, Leo first failed to discern anything amiss in Eutyches’ beliefs, and even after Flavian’s prompting was still inclined to dismiss them as the incoherences of an old man (*imperitissimus senex*, *Letters* 47; and *confabulationes eius*, *Letters* 28). He was also annoyed with Flavian for failing to inform him earlier. Only on 13 June did he write the document known as the *Tome* of Leo, condemning Eutyches and setting out the Western view of the recognition of the incarnate Christ in two natures

(perfect godhead and perfect manhood). By this time not only the court but also the majority of clergy, monks, and articulate laity in the eastern provinces of the empire had sided with Eutyches.

At the Second Council of Ephesus, Eutyches was vindicated. To the rapturous applause of the bishops, he produced his “proofs” from the Apollinarian forgeries of [Athanasius](#) and Pope Julius, and these were accepted. “Two natures before the Incarnation, and one after. Is that not what we all believe?” asked Dioscorus. All appeared to agree. Then the monk was avenged. Flavian, Domnus of Antioch, and Eusebius of Dorylaeum were deposed and the [papacy](#) was humiliated, allegedly for seeking to add to the Nicene Creed and causing disturbance in the churches.

Dioscorus and the see of Alexandria were supreme, and the “one nature” Christology vindicated as orthodox. The triumph was short-lived. The death of [Theodosius](#) on 28 July 450 led to a complete reversal of policy at the imperial court. Chrysaphius was executed, and power came into the hands of Empress Pulcheria and her consort, Marcian. Relations between Rome and Constantinople were restored. A new and full ecumenical council was summoned to meet at Chalcedon, on the Asiatic coast of the Bosphorus, on 8 October 451.

At this council, Eutyches shared the fate of his patron, Dioscorus. At the third session of the council (10 October 451), his condemnation was reaffirmed and he was exiled. He died in obscurity in 454 (Leo, *Letters* 134).

By now, however, Eutyches’ muddled views had been elevated to a heresy. “Eutychianism, as well as Nestorianism, was conquered” (Leo, *Letters* 111, compare 110 and 119), and no one was to attempt to overthrow this decision of Chalcedon. “Eutychianism” quickly became a term of abuse. Patriarch Anatolius of Constantinople (450-458), the archdeacon replacing the strongly pro-[Chalcedonian](#) Aetius, was

described by Leo as a “Eutychian” (*Letters* 111), while Eutyches’ supporters among the monks in Jerusalem were branded as Manichees (*Letters* 109).

In the East, Eutyches also served as a convenient whipping boy for those who disapproved of Chalcedon, but not sufficiently to demand its complete rejection. Thus, the encyclical of the usurper Basiliscus (475-476), while accepting both councils of Ephesus as well as the doctrine of Cyril and Dioscorus as canonical, castigated Eutyches alongside Nestorius (see Zacharias Rhetor *Historia ecclesiastica* V.2). In the *Henoticon* of Zeno (July 482), Eutyches was anathematized with Nestorius, though Cyril’s twelve anathemas were pronounced canonical. In the sixth century, SEVERUS OF ANTIOCH was careful to distance himself from any attempt to rehabilitate Eutyches. He accepted Ephesus II not because it vindicated the monk but because it canonized Cyril’s anathemas (Severus *Ad Nephaliium*, ed. Lebon, p. 9 of the translation). Only JULIAN OF HALICARNASSUS, his fellow exile but opponent in Alexandria, had some sympathy for Eutyches, though even he did not seek his rehabilitation.

Eutyches’ theology was too confused and beset by contradictions to command assent. For Christ’s flesh to be of heavenly origin and yet be capable of suffering seemed absurd. It was no more acceptable to the Coptic Monophysite church than to Byzantine Orthodoxy or the Latin West.

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