

JUSTIN I (c.450-527)

A byzantine emperor who worked for orthodoxy and the reunion of Rome and Constantinople. He was born about 450 in Bederiana (in modern Yugoslavia). Of peasant stock, he followed his father into the Roman army, fighting with distinction against the Isaurian rebels in 498, the Persians from 502 to 505, and the rebel general Vitalian in 514. He became captain of the imperial guard.

On the death of Emperor [Anastasius](#) on 8 July 518, Justin was proclaimed emperor. It soon became clear that his religious policy would be radically different from the anti-Chalcedonic stance (see CHALCEDON, COUNCIL OF) of his predecessor. In this Justin was following popular opinion in Constantinople, parts of Syria, and Jerusalem, which increasingly demanded the unequivocal assertion of the canonical status of the Council of Chalcedon, the removal of the Monophysite patriarch SEVERUS OF ANTIOCH from his see, and the restoration of communion with Rome broken by the ACACIAN SCHISM in 482. The first two demands were easily met. Regarded by the sixth-century historian Theodorus Lector as a “blazing zealot” on behalf of Chalcedon, Justin had Severus deposed as early as 20 July.

Ending the Acacian Schism took longer, since Pope Hormisdas was determined to use the situation to gain every possible advantage for the papacy. Between 7 September 518, when Justin informed the pope of his steps to end the conflict (*Collectio Avellana*, nos. 143, 146), and 28 March 519, when patriarch John, of Constantinople, signed the papal letter, tortuous negotiations took place (see Vasiliev, 1950, pp. 166ff). The papal legates who arrived in the capital on 25 March insisted that the price of ending the schism must be the [condemnation](#) not only of Acacius patriarch of Constantinople (471-489), but also of his four successors and the emperors ZENO and Anastasius.

The weak handling of the negotiation by Patriarch John allowed the

papacy to gain a tactical victory over the claims of Constantinople, which caused lasting bitterness in the East. However, Justin himself had directed the course of the negotiations (*Collectio Avellana*, no. 161), and kept supreme authority in ecclesiastical (as opposed to doctrinal) matters in his hands. He did not intend to see his patriarch humiliated, and John was the first patriarch of [Constantinople](#) to use the later much disputed title “ecumenical patriarch.” All the anathemas except that directed against Acacius were quickly allowed to lapse.

Justin had [intended](#) the return of the ecclesiastical situation to the status quo before Acacius and the consequent reunion of Rome and Constantinople. On 7 September 518, Justin’s nephew, the already powerful Count JUSTINIAN (who later became emperor), had written to Hormisdas, informing him that his presence in [Constantinople](#) was awaited “without delay.” There was no question in the emperor’s mind of subjecting his own authority or that of his patriarch to the papacy. He was concerned, as Zeno had been, with the religious unity of the empire, except that he saw this unity not in terms of Zeno’s HENOTICON but in terms of the canonical status of the four ecumenical councils and the unity of Rome and Constantinople, the Old and New Rome.

Between 521 and 523 Justin took stern [measures](#) to enforce the new ecclesiastical order. In [Asia](#) Minor, Syria, and Mesopotamia, some fifty-five bishops were expelled (the names of fifty are listed in the *Chronicon ad annum 846 pertinens*, pp. 171-173), including strong anti-Chalcedonians such as Philoxenus of Maboug and John of Tella. Such massive uprooting of clergy supported by a strong current of religious loyalties in the East made the establishment of an anti-Chalcedonian hierarchy inevitable. During Justin’s reign the first tentative steps were taken toward the formation of the Monophysite church, independent of Byzantine orthodoxy.

In Egypt, however, Justin’s [measures](#) had little effect. According to Zacharias Rhetor (*Historia ecclesiastica* 8.5), “the see of Alexandria was

hardly disturbed, and Timothy succeeded Dioscorus [in 517] and he neither retired nor accepted the synod [of Chalcedon] in the days of Justin." Alexandria became a haven for anti-Chalcedonian exiles, including Severus and the [bishop](#) JULIAN OF HALICARNASSUS. The Egyptian church remained united against the *Tome* of Pope [LEO](#) I and Chalcedon, as Severus justly claimed (*Severus Select Letters* 8.11).

In one important particular, also, Justin showed that the major interests of the empire overrode ecclesiastical policy. In the early years of the sixth century, missions known collectively as those of the Nine Saints had arrived in Ethiopia, preaching an anti-Chalcedonian [faith](#) and practicing a monastic order based on the Pachomian Rule. By Justin's reign, Ethiopia and its dependent territory of Yemen were in the anti-Chalcedonian camp. Yemen, however, was also an area where Roman and Persian influences clashed; and in 523, when war broke out between the Yemeni Jews supported by Persia and the Christians, Justin supported the Christian cause.

The defense of Najran and the massacre of Christians that resulted from its fall in 523 were avenged by an Ethiopian army supplied and victualled by Justin, using TIMOTHY III, patriarch of Alexandria, as his intermediary with the Ethiopian court. Christianity was not threatened again in Yemen until the reign of Justin II in the late sixth century.

In 526, the final year of his reign, Pope John I visited [Constantinople](#) as an emissary of Theodoric the Ostrogoth. The Pope was permitted to crown the emperor, but otherwise the preeminence of the patriarch in the imperial capital was maintained (see Vasiliev, 1950, pp. 212-21).

Justin's short reign had an importance disproportionate to its length. His policies showed that the Latin-speaking provinces still counted in the empire. The unity of the two Romes and the canonical status of Chalcedon were affirmed as the cornerstones of imperial ecclesiastical policy. There could be no return to the anti-Chalcedonian policy of

Emperor Anastasius. Alexandria and the Coptic Christians were left on the sidelines, and Alexandria was to find that its claim to be “the city of the orthodox” could be sustained only outside the orbit of Byzantine and Latin Christianity.

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