

The Council of Chalcedon

451

The middle of the 5th century was chaotic. The Roman Empire was collapsing with barbarian armies at the gates of Rome. Political influence was shifting towards Constantinople. There were new heresies: 1) Docetism taught that the two natures of Christ were really only one, divine, and Christ only 'seemed' to be human; 2) Monophysitism taught that the human nature of Christ disappeared by being absorbed into his divine nature, so that there in essence but one nature. Dioscorus succeeded Cyril as patriarch of Alexandria and convinced Emperor Theodosius II to hold a general Council in Constantinople which was subsequently labeled void by Pope Leo I. After Emperor Theodosius II died, Marcian became the emperor and looked to settle the matter of heresies by calling a General Council to be held at Chalcedon.

Raphael's depiction of *The Meeting between Leo the Great and Attila, the Hun*. Leo, trying to save Rome from destruction, is escorted by Saints Peter and Paul.



Pope Leo I (440-461) met the challenges head on, emerging as Pope, Saint, and Doctor of Church. He was called 'the first real pope' by Hans Kung, a hugely positive statement given Kung's normally antagonistic attitude toward hierarchy. Leo's strong personality brought leadership and bold vision both practical in upholding discipline and theological in writing a 'Tome' that defined Christ's human / divine nature that was adopted by *Chalcedon* as the official doctrine of the Church. Leo emphasized the primacy of the bishop of Rome and his firm leadership allowed the church to emerge as a strong institution within the medieval world.

The Council of *Chalcedon* moved the Church:

- Dioscorus' Council ➡ Rejected the earlier Council convened in Constantinople in 440 by Theodosius II and under Dioscorus' leadership.
- The Heresies ➡ Condemned both Docetism and Monophysitism.
- The Creed ➡ Reaffirmed the Creed of Nicaea & Constantinople.
- Pope Leo I ➡ Praised Leo I, saying that in his words affirming Christ as one Person with two natures, the bishops heard the voice of Peter.

Chalcedon enacted 30 canons, 27 of which were disciplinary. Leo approved all but canon 28 that gave special prerogatives to the See of Constantinople in the East at the expense of Alexandria and roughly equivalent to that of the See of Rome.

Some in the Eastern Church rejected the condemnation of Monophysitism saying the condemnation was not faithful to Cyril's teachings. This rejection would arise in future Councils.