

The Second Council of Constantinople

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This period was filled with intrigue involving military conquests, disputed papal elections, excommunications and heresies. Rome fell in 476 and several Teutonic leaders then served as Kings of Italy. Constantinople was now the new capital of the Roman Empire. Papal elections were disputed when Popes named their successor, often against the wishes of the electorate. Papal attitudes vacillated from conciliatory to confrontational towards Monophysites who believed that Jesus became a completely divine being and disagreed strongly with Nestorians who emphasized the human aspect of Jesus. This went as far as excommunicating Patriarchs of Constantinople who accommodated Monophysites. Into this fray enters Pope Virgilius (537-555), described as the most corrupt pope in the history of the Church, who starts by secretly agreeing to placate the Monophysites in order to get elected. Then he agreed privately with all sides and he ended up making an enemy of everyone. He and Menna, the Patriarch of Constantinople, excommunicated each other. Virgilius was also excommunicated by a group of 40 priests back in Rome who believed he had violated the doctrine of Chalcedon. Justinian I humiliated Virgilius by revealing the secret agreements. Meanwhile, away from this turmoil, leaders arose such as St. Benedict, founder of western monasticism, St. Columbas (530-615), a great Irish missionary, and St. Scholastica, sister of St. Benedict, a nun, and leader of a community for women at Plombariola, about five miles from Benedict's abbey at Monte Cassino.

Justinian I 527-565



The eastern emperor Justinian, wishing to placate Monophysites in Egypt, called the 2nd Council of Constantinople and forced the Council to condemn three earlier supporters of Nestorius. These writings were over a century old and the men were already dead! None of these writings had been condemned by the Council of Chalcedon.

St Benedict started twelve communities for monks. He is especially known for writing a Rule containing precepts for his monks. The rule contains a unique spirit of moderation and reasonableness. Benedict did not start the Benedictine Orders that sprung up thru the centuries and based on his Rule. John Henry Newman said that St. Benedict found the world in ruins and his followers quietly restored it.

St. Benedict (480-550)



The *Second Council of Constantinople* didn't move the Church. It condemned three writers who had supported Nestorius.

This sad Council, submitting to the pressure of the emperor in their findings, ironically made the finest statement of all the General Councils for the need for open discussion:

*“The holy fathers, who have gathered at intervals in the four holy councils, have followed the examples of antiquity. They dealt with heresies and current problems by debate in common, since it was established as certain that when the disputed question is set out by each side in common discussion, the light of truth drives out the shadows of lying. The truth cannot be made clear in any other way when there are debates about questions of faith, since everyone requires the assistance of neighbour. As Solomon says in his proverbs” “A brother who helps a brother shall be exalted like a strong city; he shall be as strong as a well established kingdom” (Proverbs 18:19). Again in Ecclesiastes he says: “Two are better than one, for they have a good reward for their toil” (Ecclesiastes 4:9). And the Lord himself says: “Amen I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mathew 18:19)**

* Norman Tanner, “Ecumenical Councils of the Church” ISU Lib: BR200 T36 2001; STA Lib: