

Significance:

The Council of Ephesus played a crucial role in shaping Christian doctrine regarding the person of Jesus Christ and the role of Mary in salvation history. It is considered a foundational event in the development of Christian theology.

Introduction

Nestorius, who had been condemned in a council at Rome on 11 August 430, asked the emperor Theodosius II to summon this council. The emperor therefore decided to summon it together with his co-emperor Valentinian III and with the agreement of Pope Celestine I. Theodosius's letter of 19 November 430 requested all those who had been summoned to be present at Ephesus on 7 June 431, the feast of Pentecost.

On 22 June, however,

- before the arrival either of the Roman legates or the eastern bishops led by John of Antioch,
- Cyril of Alexandria began the council.
- Nestorius was summoned three times but did not come.
- His teaching was examined and judgment passed upon it, which 197 bishops subscribed at once and others later accepted. Shortly afterwards John of Antioch and the easterners arrived: they refused communion with Cyril and set up another council. The Roman legates (the bishops Arcadius and Projectus and the priest Philip), on arriving, joined Cyril and confirmed the sentence against Nestorius. Then the council in its fifth session on 17 July excommunicated John and his party. The documents of the Cyrilline council, the only one which is ecumenical, are included below and are as follows.

1. The central dogmatic act of the council is its judgment about whether the second letter of Cyril to Nestorius, or Nestorius's second letter to Cyril, was in conformity with the Nicene creed which was recited at the opening of the council's proceedings.

Cyril's letter was declared by the fathers to be in agreement with Nicaea,

Nestorius's was condemned

Both are here printed. Mention is made of Cyril's letter in the definition of Chalcedon.

2. The 12 anathemas and the preceding explanatory letter, which had been produced by Cyril and the synod of Alexandria in 430 and sent to Nestorius, were read at Ephesus and included in the proceedings.

3. The decision about Nestorius.

4. The letter of the council advising all the bishops, clergy and people about the condemnation of John of Antioch; and some paragraphs dealing with the discipline of the Nestorian party.
5. A decree on the faith, approved in the sixth session on 22 July, which confirmed the Nicene creed, ordered adherence to that alone and forbade the production of new creeds.
6. A definition against the Messalians.
7. A decree about the autonomy of the church of Cyprus.

Both councils sent legates to the emperor Theodosius, who approved neither and sent the bishops away. Nestorius had already been given permission to revisit his monastery at Antioch, and on 25 October 431 Maximianus was ordained patriarch at Constantinople. The decrees of the council were approved by Pope Sixtus III shortly after his own ordination on 31 July 432.

The reconciliation between the Cyrilline party and the eastern bishops was not easy. In the end, on 23 April 433, Cyril and John of Antioch made peace. John's profession of faith was accepted by Cyril and became the doctrinal formula of union. It is included here, together with Cyril's letter in which he at some length praises John's profession and accepts it, adding to it some explanation about his own expressions; this letter is mentioned in the definition of Chalcedon. Shortly afterwards, probably in 436, Nestorius was definitely sent into exile by the emperor .

The judgment against Nestorius

The holy synod said: As, in addition to all else, the excellent Nestorius has declined to obey our summons and has not received the holy and God-fearing bishops we sent to him, we have of necessity started upon an investigation of his impieties. We have found him out thinking and speaking in an impious fashion, from his letters, from his writings that have been read out, and from the things that he has recently said in this metropolis which have been witnessed to by others; and as a result we have been compelled of necessity both by the canons and by the letter of our most holy father and fellow servant Celestine, bishop of the church of the Romans, to issue this sad condemnation against him, though we do so with many tears. Our lord Jesus Christ, who has been blasphemed by him, has determined through this most holy synod that the same Nestorius should be stripped of his episcopal dignity and removed from the college of priests.