

Doctrinal Authority in the African Ecclesiology of the Sixth Century : Ferrandus and Facundus

When Irenaeus expressed the thought that there could be no more than four Gospels because there were four winds and four corners of the earth, he was consciously engaged in a struggle against other claimants for the status of Gospel. When Gregory the Great¹ wrote that he honored the four councils as the four Gospels, he felt it necessary to add that he honored as well the fifth council. This fifth council was proving to be a considerable embarrassment since it had become the occasion of severe controversy and perduring schism in the West. It is the purpose of this study to investigate the concept of doctrinal authority found in the works of some of the African participants in this controversy concerning the condemnation of the so-called Three Chapters². The principal person studied will be Facundus, bishop of Hermiane, and author of the lengthy *Defence of the Three Chapters*³.

1. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haereses* III.11.8, SC 211.160. Gregory I, Synodical Letter of Feb. 591. *MGH, Epp.* 1, 36 See Y. Congar, « La Primauté des quatre premiers conciles œcuméniques », *Le Concile et les Conciles* (Paris, 1960) 75-109.

2. For accounts of the Three Chapters episode, see E. Amann « Trois-Chapitres », *DTC* XV-2, cc. 1868-1924, (c. 1950); E. Schwartz, « Zur Kirchenpolitik Justinians », *Gesammelte Schriften* IV : Zur Geschichte der alten Kirche und ihres Recht. (Berlin, 1960) 276-328. (Original 1940); R. Haacke « Die kaiserliche Politik in den Auseinandersetzungen um Chalkedon (451-553) », in *Das Konzil von Chalkedon II* (Würzburg, 1954) 95-177. Recent works on the II Council of Constantinople include : F. X. Murphy and P. Sherwood, *Constantinople II & III*, (Paris, 1974) (*Histoire des Conciles œcuméniques* 3); E. Chrysos, *Die Bischofslisten des 5. ökumenischen Konzils*, (Bonn, 1966); E. Zettl, *Die Bestätigung des 5. ökumenischen Konzils durch Papst Vigilius*, (Bonn, 1974). The last named work was not available to me.

3. On the African reaction, see W. Pewesin, *Imperium, Ecclesia Universalis, Rom.* Der Kampf der afrikanischen Kirche um die Mitte des 6. Jahrhunderts,

With the Byzantine reconquest of 533-4, the African Church had only recently been freed from the century-long oppression of the Vandal kingdom. Yet amazingly, it was able to gather together the shreds of its brilliant tradition and to constitute within a very few years the heart of the Western opposition to the campaign of the emperor Justinian (527-565) who sought to heal the wounds of the Eastern empire by condemning the Three Chapters.

From the time of Tertullian through the era of Cyprian, Optatus and Augustine, the African Church had presented certain characteristics⁴: viz., a continuing reliance on the conciliar form for settling questions, a deep respect for the Roman Church combined with a jealously guarded autonomy, a considerable degree of obstinacy, sometimes crossing the line to fanaticism, a trait seen most clearly in an individual like Tertullian or a movement like Donatism. Donatism had been largely, though not entirely, overcome through the concerted efforts of Augustine and Aurelius at the beginning of the fifth century, culminating in the conference of Carthage in 411. Looked at realistically, the victory was assured more by the threats of imperial power than by the force of Augustine's preaching and reasoning. And the victory was short-lived. As Augustine lay dying in August of 430, the besieging Vandals were extending their conquest to the whole of Latin North Africa and setting the stage for the terrible and cruel Arian overlordship chronicled by Victor of Vita that was to last until the coming of Belisarius and relief from the East.

Even during that trying period, Africa was not without representatives of its honored theological tradition, notably Fulgentius of Ruspe. His disciple, Ferrandus, a deacon of Carthage, was to be a connecting link between the trials under the Vandals and the controversy that was to involve North Africa so soon after the regaining of its freedom. It was rather an esoteric controversy in a far away place concerning people of whom the Africans knew little that was to engulf their Church in yet another round of travail. If African churchmen knew little of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrrhus and Ibas of Edessa, they did care very much for the integrity of the Council of Chalcedon and the doctrinal tradition. It was they more than any of the Westerners who once again would see through the superficial issues to the

published in *Geistige Grundlagen römischer Kirchenpolitik*, (Stuttgart, 1937). This is the most complete study on the subject. More recently, H. J. Sieben, « Zur Entwicklung der Konzilsidee » Part 7 : Pápste und afrikanische Theologen des 5. und 6. Jahrhunderts über Konzilsautorität, *Theologie und Philosophie* 49 (1974) 37-71; R. Markus, « Reflections on Religious Dissent in North Africa in the Byzantine Period », *Studies in Church History*, Vol. 3 (Leyden, 1966) 140-49.

4. On the earlier tradition, see: W. Marschall, *Karthago und Rom*, (Stuttgart, 1971); R. Evans, *One and Holy*, *The Church in Latin Patristic Thought*, (London 1972); R. Devreesse, « L'Eglise d'Afrique durant l'occupation byzantine », *Mélanges Hist.* 57 (1940) 152.

core questions and eloquently and stubbornly come to the defence of what they believed must not be allowed to go by default.

From the very beginning, Justinian got a clear idea of the type of response to his trial balloon he could expect from the Africans. First, there was the brief letter of bishop Pontianus of Thenae⁵ in Byzacena, written perhaps as a reply on behalf of the bishops of his province to the emperor's initial condemnation of the Three Chapters. While stressing that the issues were generally unknown in Africa, the bishop warned that no good would come of investigating and condemning men long dead. On the contrary, the whole thing was a ruse on the part of the enemies of the council of Chalcedon to resurrect their own hopes. He asked the emperor to leave well enough alone, to preserve the peace of the Church lest in attacking the dead, he end by destroying the living as well.

This respectful but firm reply was only the beginning of the African opposition to the ecclesiastical policies of their erstwhile liberator. Shortly thereafter, the Roman deacons, Pelagius and Anatolius, concerned with the ominous developments in the East, wrote to the leading Western theologian of the time, Ferrandus, spiritual heir of Fulgentius, asking for his analysis of the situation (*Ep.* 6).

Expressing a fair amount of hesitancy in speaking out, Ferrandus concluded that the West, out of loyalty to Chalcedon, had no choice but to resist the imperial manoeuvring. In another letter (*Ep.* 7), he expressed his view that the laity must keep their rightful place, i.e., it is the laity who are taught and the bishops who teach. As a lay person, the civil ruler, however exalted, must never be so bold as to seek to teach the Church or to make judgments about matters already decided by the clergy. As a faithful disciple of the Church, the prince is to consult the Church and be swift in obeying the priests⁶.

It must be the clerical leaders of the Church who decide such questions. These leaders must not yield to pressure to reverse or impugn the decisions of the past. The preaching of the Gospel is imperilled by such proceedings while the people are scandalized and schisms are generated by innovations and changing customs. Condemnation of the past is not only presumptuous but downright dangerous. Ferrandus clearly foresaw that the only result would be still more discord. If the council of Chalcedon could be called into question, what could remain secure and unshaken? What would be the next to be attacked? Nicaea⁷?

5. *PL* 67.997-8. (Hereafter all *PL* references are to Vol. 67.)

6. *Ep.* 7.16, 17/944-5. Ferrandus mirrors the Western views expressed clearly by Pope Gelasius (492-6) at the end of the previous century. That Justinian saw the situation in such a light is unlikely. See J. Meyendorff, « Justinian, the Empire and the Church », *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 22 (1968) 49.

7. *Ep.* 6.2/922D; *Ep.* 7.17/946A; *Ep.* 6.5, 7/925A, 926A.

For Ferrandus such a line of argumentation was not based on simple expediency. There lies behind it a definite view of the authority of councils, albeit not clearly expressed. Similarly, there is more here than mere veneration for the great men of the past. That veneration has begun to be expressed increasingly in the category of structures of doctrinal authority, the most prestigious of which is the general council. Putting it very clearly, he writes : « All of the council of Chalcedon, simply because it is the whole council of Chalcedon, is true. No part of it is to be condemned. Whatever has been said, done or decided and confirmed there, we know the same has been done by the ineffable and hidden power of the Holy Spirit⁸. » The Fathers have spoken by the Spirit ; to rescind their commands would be to insult the Spirit.

The Christian ideal should be to accept with simple faith what the universal Catholic Church teaches. The humble Christian should be reader to learn than to teach. What the Church has taught or a council has decided has precedence over what any individual person, however outstanding, has written. No one person should wish to prescribe what the Church should follow but, rather, hold what the Church teaches. This cautionary sentiment against conceding too much authority to one person can be applied to an earlier, prestigious author like Cyril of Alexandria whose patronage was being invoked by those who attacked the Three Chapters. The same thought may also be interpreted as another, more veiled reference to the inappropriateness of imperial intervention in such matters. Or it may even be applied to Pope Vigilius (537-555) who, it was already apparent, would be under severe pressure to conform to the imperial policy. If the last suggestion has some validity, it would not be the first time that African circles had used such a phrase in dealing with Rome⁹.

Ferrandus rates the authority of councils very highly indeed. They rank, for him, immediately after the divine precepts found in the canonical books. Like them, the *patrum decreta* of the general councils are to be embraced and preserved. « The law of the Fathers shines in the canonical books ; the counsel of the Mother is contained in the universal councils¹⁰. » But of which councils are these things true ? There have been councils which were in fact later repudiated, as for example, Ephesus II (449).

To the attempted solution of this problem, Ferrandus brings the idea of confirmation in the sense of acceptance or reception by Rome, by the world Church and by posterity. When he began his letter by

8. Ep. 6.3/923C. « Totum concilium Chalcedonense, cum est. totum concilium Chalcedonense, verum est... »

9. See the letter of the Council of Carthage of 424 to Pope Celestine. CCL 149.171 (Ed. C. Munier, 1974). Also Pewesin, *op. cit.* 34.

10. Ep. 6.9/927B. « Lex enim patris fulget... in canonicis libris ; consilium matris in universalibus conciliis continetur... »

disclaiming the role of teacher, he advised that the teaching of the bishops be canvassed, starting with the bishop of Rome and going on to the other bishops in the Church¹¹. Councils come after Scripture in authority, especially councils which have been accepted by Rome. What the holy bishops have concluded, what has been brought to the memory of St. Peter, examined and confirmed, this is to be followed and embraced. As in the reading of the Scriptures, we do not always comprehend what we read, but must nevertheless accept it in obedience, so in the matter of a council's decisions, what a council has decided and what time has confirmed and a devout posterity guarded—this leaves no room or need for doubt and hesitation¹².

It is useless to claim that such an authoritative decision of the past needs to be reconsidered. Where could greater judges be found? The definitions of a council, in which the legates of the Apostolic See sat and gave their consent, have received a *robur invictum*. If this can be overturned, then nothing is safe. It would be a waste of time to try to settle any question. What is decided at any given time would inevitably be reconsidered and overthrown in the future¹³.

A further factor in determining the doctrinal significance of a council of the past is its acceptance by the world Church and, in particular, its reception by posterity. The decisions of the council of Chalcedon have long since been accepted by the churches of both East and West. "Whatever is once decided in council and assembly of the holy Fathers must thereby obtain perpetual confirmation¹⁴." Any attempt to reconsider the *acta* of Chalcedon would be a threat to the *robur inflexibile* which such a definition of faith should have.

Ferrandus paints a rather roseate picture of the conclusion of Chalcedon nearly a century before. All were in agreement. Departing in fraternal peace, they went back to their own churches, in concord, without hatred or envy, to bear common witness to the truth. The business of the council had been concluded successfully with the agreement of the Apostolic See « holding the primacy of the universal Church » and of the bishops of the other venerable sees, all concerned with the pastoral well-being of the Lord's sheepfold¹⁵. If this idealized view of the council and its aftermath were accurate, then it might be asked why there was so much difficulty in Ferrandus' own time.

11. Cf. Gelasius, *Ep.* 26.6. A. Thiel, *Epp. Rom. Pont.* (1868) 400-or. Also Sieben, *art. cit.* 44. It should be remembered that, despite his disclaimers, he answered the questions put to him, even though the clerics asking the questions were the co-workers of the bishop of Rome! This shows the leading position of Ferrandus as a theologian as well as the increasingly difficult position of Vigilius.

12. *Ep.* 6.7/926BC.

13. *Ep.* 6.6/925BC.

14. *Ep.* 6.2/922B. « Quidquid semel statuitur in concilio et congregatione sanctorum Patrum, perpetuam debet obtinere jugiter firmitatem. »

15. *Ep.* 6.5/924CD. « ... sedes apostolica, primatum tenens universalis Ecclesiae... »

Summing up, we find that Ferrandus is approaching the point at which the general council is in itself an organ of doctrinal authority which cannot be questioned or reconsidered because such a structure is authoritative in itself. It is inspired by God (using the term "inspiration" less precisely). Yet Ferrandus is aware that there have been councils which have been rejected. Thus he must add qualifications¹⁶. The authoritative councils are those which the see of Rome has accepted and approved, councils which the world Church has accepted and have been received in general unanimity for years, nearly a century in the case of Chalcedon.

The *doctrina fidelis* of the bishops takes its place immediately after the divinely inspired Scriptures though the former must be verified by its ultimate acceptance by the people of God. Writing to Severus, a *scholasticus* of Constantinople, he asked that controversy be quieted and that uncertainty be borne with until the authority of the universal Church should decide. Ferrandus' basic appeal is similar to the consensus argument of Vincent of Lerins. Yet a shift is perceptible, a shift in emphasis from the idea that a council is to verify the apostolicity of doctrine to the notion that a council is authoritative in itself and that what it teaches, because it is a council, is by that fact the teaching of the Apostles. The whole council of Chalcedon is true because it is the council of Chalcedon¹⁷.

Ferrandus did not long survive the writing of the letter. He had set the stage for the great confrontation but he was not to see its unfolding or outcome. The championing of the African cause was taken up with great skill and zeal by Facundus, bishop of Hermiane, a village usually located near the southern *limes* of Byzacena. Unlike Ferrandus, Facundus went to Constantinople and participated in the conference of some seventy Western bishops assembled by Pope Vigilius soon after his arrival in the imperial city (Jan., 547). Facundus' lengthy *Defence of the Three Chapters* was probably written at this time although it may not have been published until his return to Africa¹⁸. In his preface, written after he had come to some awareness of Vigilius' duplicity, Facundus describes how the Pope, perhaps finding Facundus' exposition too threatening, abruptly adjourned the session and asked for the bishops' opinions in writing.

Facundus' *Defence* is reviewed here principally to study his ideas on doctrinal authority, especially structures of doctrinal authority. Perhaps sensing Vigilius' difficulties, his appeal to Roman authority is somewhat

16. See Pewesin, 42. Sieben, (51) is correct in calling Ferrandus a traditionalist. But it would not be amiss to call him a conciliarist as well, provided we can abstract for the moment from the 15th century connotations of anti-papalism.

17. *Ep.* 7.16/945A. See Note 8.

18. On the question of dates, E. Chrysos, « Zur Datierung und Tendenz der Werke des Facundus von Hermiane », *Kleronomia* 1 (1969) 311-324.

more muted than is Ferrandus' but this lengthy exposition was written before the fifth ecumenical council had been held. The two brief works from the pen of Facundus after the Defence, especially the *Contra Mociannum* are concerned with his defence of his own increasingly isolated position and as such do not treat of the questions that are of particular interest here. Nevertheless there is a great deal that is of value for the history of the development of doctrinal authority.

A large proportion of the *Defence* is taken up with questions of history. What did Theodore of Mopsuestia or Theodoret of Cyrillus teach? Did the council of Chalcedon approve of Ibas' letter or not? Here Facundus demonstrates an appreciable degree of good sense in approaching historical questions. In his eyes, as in the eyes of the West as a whole, Justinian's policy was politically inspired pure and simple. That legitimate theological concern about the Chalcedonian settlement and its subsequent history were involved in Justinian's actions was probably not seen or, if faintly recognized, not credited¹⁹. Facundus, like Ferrandus, argues that it is a political move and that it is a threat to the Chalcedonian integrity, an attempted subversion of the council.

It is sheer arrogance to attempt to call to judgment and condemnation the men of the past who were approved in their own time. These men bent all their efforts to answer the questions of their own day. They can hardly be blamed for not foreseeing the questions of the future. They do not need or deserve a judge now but they are entitled to a respectful and benign interpreter. They were human and may have erred occasionally. If a statement of theirs seems arguable, we must be slow to condemn but must investigate as best we can to ascertain what was intended. Mere literal interpretation is unfair. This was not the way Athanasius dealt with some obscure statements of Dionysius. Similarly Cyril is not blamed for not attacking Eutyches for Eutyches had not yet come on the scene. In seeking to learn Leo's judgment on the letter of Ibas, one could not do better than to accept Pope Gelasius (492-6) as his authentic interpreter²⁰.

Facundus also appeals to the past as he views the conduct of Justinian in this affair and finds it dangerous. Bishops find themselves alternately enriched by gifts or coerced into agreeing to what they otherwise would never accept as the government seeks to engender a false appearance of unanimity. This was not the way of the pious emperors of the past

19. See Meyendorff, *art. cit.* Also cf. the remark of Procopius, in his *Anecdota* (The Secret History) XIII.7 « For in his (Justinian's) eagerness to gather all men into one belief as to Christ, he kept destroying the rest of mankind in senseless fashion, and that too while acting with a pretence of piety... His single interest was the ceaseless destruction of men... » Lœb ed. v. 6, 158.

20. *Defensio*, 8.4.25/CC 90A. 243; 11.6.1-2/348; 11.7.24/358; 10.5.7-8/316; 1.5.36/35; 5.4.29/154. Hereafter all CC references are to the *Defensio* unless otherwise specified. All Facundus references are to CC Vol. 90A.

like Marcian, Leo or the two Theodosii. Marcian of blessed memory was a true son of the Church who followed the decrees of the bishops and did not attempt to undo the work of a council. "He knew when to use the power of a ruler and when to show the obedience of a Christian²¹. »

If Uzzah was punished for inadvertently touching the Ark (2 Sam 6. 6-7), what will happen to one who tries to tamper with the decision of a council ? The emperor must not usurp authority over the Church entrusted to priests alone. The union of *regnum* and *sacerdotium* in the person of the (pagan) emperor is no longer fitting for the Christian empire. The emperor is merely *unus laicus*, one who has the authority and duty to enforce the decrees of the bishops in a council but who is subject to the rulers of the Church if he is a Christian in more than name. As always in such circumstances, Facundus is loath to make a direct accusation against a reigning emperor. But his many references to the conduct of past emperors make his intent perfectly clear²².

The persistent theme of Facundus is that the past cannot be changed or even brought into disrepute. Efforts to revise the decisions of Chalcedon are not simply foolish but also extremely perilous. Such a summoning of the past before a tribunal of the present is a measure of unconscionable presumption. These people who wish to appear more learned and more religious by slandering those who have gone before and sleep in the peace of the Church are succeeding only in disrupting the present and future peace of the Church. This strife will do no good for the Church or the empire²³.

He is spending a great deal of time and effort, Facundus explains, to prevent people from attacking the dead because in reality they are attacking the Church under the guise of revisionism. Can we really believe that we are wiser or more religious than the men of the past ? Some men today evidently seek praise or notoriety as heresy hunters by defaming those who helped to preserve the teaching of the Church in their own time. Such people should fear the final Judgment when some of the very ones they cheerfully condemn today will rise up as their judges²⁴.

The glib condemnations by the zealots of the present may be done in pursuance of their own aims but they do not seem to act with a real awareness of the consequences. How many people of the past are being condemned in reality ? In fact, the whole Church of the past is

21. 4.4.16/126 ; 2.3.17-18/53 ; 3.5.13/93 ; 8.3.7/236 ; 12.2.23-24/381 ; 12.3.1/381. « Cognovit ille quibus in causis uteretur principis potestate, et in quibus exhiberet obedientiam Christiani. »

22. 12.3.14-37/384-89 ; 2.1.5/42-3.

23. 8.2-3/232-35.

24. 10.1.1-2/295 ; 10.2.3-4/301-02 ; 11.7.43/363 ; 11.1.25-6/333 ; 12.5.20/398.

under attack. Are there not characters in the Old Testament whom we do not imitate in all things yet who are praised in the Scriptures and in the Church's tradition ? Surely, at the very least, the same can be done in the Church for those who remained and died in the unity of the Church. They may not have been faultless but let their faults be covered by time and charity. When a charge of unorthodoxy is made we must always seek to fathom the intentions of the accused. Even if, in certain cases the apostolic rule seems to have been violated, it may be asked why these men were not condemned before now. Contemporary heretical slanderers of the Fathers seize upon doubtful or obscure sayings and twist them by a malevolent interpretation. They usurp God's authority while true Catholic minds interpret in a fair and charitable way the writings of the blessed men of the past or at least pass over these things in silence²⁵.

The good Christian is content with the authority of the Fathers. They are the lights of the Church. If these lights do not always shine as brightly as might be expected, is it their shortcomings or our own ? Their light is hindered by the clouds in our own minds. If the letter of Ibas is to be blamed, can we refrain from making the same judgment about the letters of other Fathers ? Should we not thrust into the limelight some of the less savory activities of Theophilus against Chrysostom and some of the things Cyril said against that great saint ? Yet even Cyril said he disapproved of condemning the dead, wishing to leave this to God alone. Other approved authors have said the same things as Theodore of Mopsuestia. In fact, Theodore looks a good deal better than Dionysius of Alexandria²⁶. Yet these authors are not attacked because the real target of the calumniators is the council, not any individual.

Is any worthwhile purpose being accomplished by this campaign against the dead ? Even the Apostles were imperfect in the faith yet were certainly not heretics. It is contumacy, not simple error that constitutes heresy. Facundus insists with frequency that material heresy (to use the later term) does not suffice for condemnation. Those who are docile and ready to submit cannot be labelled heretics. They are better called disciples to be perfected. If all material heretics of past and present were condemned, who would be left to be judged Catholic ? The key distinction must be sought in the humility of the person who is willing to accept correction as against the obstinate pride of the heretic that will not bend²⁷.

The numerous objections against attacking specific figures of the past

25. 10.2.3-4/301-302 ; 12.1.28-43/370-73 ; 9.5.1-5/285-6 ; 6.5.34/189.

26. 5.5.8/157-8 ; 6.5.46/192 ; 6.5.32-3/188-89 ; 1.1.4/4-6 ; 3.6.39/101 ; 10.4.32-3/314-15 ; 10.5.19/319.

27. 12.1.24-27/369-70 ; 11.6.23-4/353. Heresy as obstinacy in error is frequently referred to : 8.7.3-4/254-55 ; 10.2.10/303 ; 10.4.28,30/314 ; 11.7.47/364.

and the historical or charitable reasons for refusing to agree to such proceedings are made within the general context of Facundus' view that judging, reconsidering or revising the decisions of the past is a thoroughly undesirable and dangerous procedure. It is the role of each new generation to subject itself to the past, not to subject the past to its judgment. We are subject to the authority of the Fathers with calm and humble hearts²⁸.

We know and teach that the Church has never consented to the blasphemies of the heretics and has never fallen away from the love that is in Christ. Beyond such general assurances, Facundus has recourse to what seem to be pragmatic appeals, e.g. if Chalcedon is questioned, is reviewed as incomplete or even doubtful, then what from the past can remain unchallenged and unchanged? No conciliar decree can long survive such a sustained assault. The whole Church will be endlessly shaken and stirred by the repeated reconsidering of all controversies. In short, to go against the testimony of the holy Fathers and the council of Chalcedon is not an option open to Catholics. Those who are leading this campaign, by their very efforts, betray their real features and their hidden purpose²⁹.

Why is revision not an option? It is not merely that such a course is undesirable for practical reasons. Facundus believes that the Fathers in general and the council of Chalcedon in particular have taught the truth and have faithfully handed on the teaching of Christ. Yet he has also admitted that not even the most eminent Father was completely and unfailingly correct in everything he did or said. Athanasius was wrong about some of the people he recommended. The bishops of Palestine accepted Pelagius. Pope Zosimus received Pelagius and Celestius as good Catholics. He was admonished by the African bishops and accepted it. Cyril of Alexandria said a number of very unfortunate things about John Chrysostom. Cyprian as well as Theodore of Mopsuestia were in error about matters which the Church had not yet settled³⁰.

It seems then that there is a hierarchy of doctrinal authority for Facundus. First of all, the council is superior to the individual opinion of any Father. A council is summoned for the securing of the faith and peace of the whole Church. The authority of a general council is so great that no Catholic can legitimately resist it. It provides an anchor amid the waves of heretical storms. The council is not a completely autonomous structure but, like the Church itself, is subject to the rule of faith it has received from the past. Divine authority, reason and the testimonies of the Fathers all play a role in its decisions. Since the Church is so dependent on councils, God gives the bishops a single heart and

28. 6.5.46/192.

29. 9.5.6-7/286; 2.6.6-7/65; 4.4.1-2/123; 8.7.33/261.

30. 7.3.5-7/198-99; 4.1.8/105; 10.3.5-7/306-07.

soul so that the truth will prevail over the opinions of any individual, however outstanding. Above all, the civil power must not interfere in the process. Councils which, as in the time of Constantius II (337-361), were coerced have proclaimed false doctrines but to no avail. Such a procedure succeeds only in bringing all authority into disrepute. Thus to expect or to try to bring about any such change or reversal in a council like Chalcedon is erroneous as well as vain, an effort which deserves censure, for the Church is gravely offended by it³¹.

If a council is held that is duly constituted and free from unlawful pressure, then it speaks with divine authority. Such a council was Chalcedon which always followed the rule (*forma*) of Scripture. It demands obedience, humility and submission of will to its decisions. Even those of outstanding ability, who are the teachers of the Church, must yield to its authority, just as the Apostles yielded to the authority of Christ even when they did not understand. In a council, God is present and in some sense reveals the truth to the Fathers as he promised. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18. 20).

The council defines or confirms some truth on the authority of the divine Scriptures and the testimonies of the Fathers. We seek confirmation of our beliefs, not from our own reason but from the authority of a holy council. If Chalcedon accepted the letter of Ibas, this alone should be sufficient authority for posterity to accept it as well. The authority of such a council cannot be impugned. Those who would seek to do so must bring forward overwhelming evidence. This evidence must be as clear and as certain to a person as his own existence³²!

We defer to such councils in all things even in what is not clear in them. These councils are authoritative in themselves demanding adherence not by explaining and convincing, but simply in virtue of their authoritative nature. They rule on matters that cannot be grasped by reason alone so that we believe something on authority, not because our minds have been persuaded by arguments. If this were not so, then it would be useless to hold councils because men would keep demanding explanations instead of accepting the authoritative rulings of the councils.

Before the council ruled on the subject of the orthodoxy of the letter of Ibas, one might reason that if the letter could be proved to be orthodox, then the council should accept it. *After* the council approved the letter, faith demands that the letter be judged orthodox, all other considerations being put aside, *because* the council has accepted it. The problematic and angle of approach are one thing before the council's decision, but

31. I.5.23-4/32-3; 10.3.12/307-08; 5.5.18-9/160; 2.3.23/54; 8.7.21-2/258; 12.3.27/387-88; 2.6.24/69.

32. 6.1.10/162-3; 12.1.35/371; 8.7.20/258; 1.6.18/40; 12.2.1/376; 5.2.27-8/139; 10.1.10/296-7.

after the council's decision, the whole order is changed around. Chalcedon is confirmed because its judgments were fashioned by the authority of the Scriptures and the testimonies of the most ancient Fathers³³.

The authority of a council is weighty indeed but can this be said of just any council? Are there not councils which posterity has ultimately rejected? If there are acceptable councils and unacceptable ones, what is the criterion for making such a distinction? Facundus' answer is: consensus and reception. Those councils are authoritative which are accepted by the Church and approved by the Roman see.

The statements of individual Fathers, even one as prestigious as Cyril, cannot be preferred to the decrees of a council which the universal Church has accepted. That which has been kept inviolate and received by the consensus of the whole Church for almost a century does not need to be reconsidered. The present attack on Chalcedon is a foolish attempt by heretics to persuade people that the council really was Nestorian. They are one hundred years too late since the whole Church has already accepted its decrees as authoritative. In short, the council of Chalcedon cannot be questioned now because it has been accepted by the Church for so long. « Nam et ipsa multum roboris auctoritati addit antiquitas³⁴. »

Recent years have seen a growing amount of theological and canonical speculation revolving around the idea of reception³⁵. Facundus' ideas can be related to this stream of thought. But several problems can be mentioned in connection with these ideas. These same difficulties relate to the utility, if not the basic correctness, of the whole idea of reception. If the acceptance by the Church as a whole is the criterion of the truth of a council's teaching, does it follow, as Facundus wished to claim, that everything decided by such a gathering and accepted by the Church, is somehow guaranteed as free from objection? Further, the utility of the idea of reception is weakened considerably when one thinks of the length of time that must elapse before the judgment of acceptance by the universal Church can be made honestly and realistically. In the case at hand, nearly a century has elapsed, Facundus argues, and such a judgment can be made. This is a judgment presumably rejected by his opponents. Finally, there is the problem of ascertaining whether or not a council has in fact been accepted by the Church. Does the universal Church accept a council when a sizable part of that Church goes into schism precisely because it refuses to accept it? In fact, almost every council has been rejected by some part of the Church. Refusal to accept Chalcedon and attempts to reverse that decision

33. 12.2.6/377; 5.5.3-6/157; 1.3.27/17.

34. 7.6.7/213.

35. See for example: Y. Congar, « Reception as an ecclesiological Reality », *Concilium*, Vol. 7, n. 8 (Sept. 1972) 43-68 (British ed.).

were the ultimate reason why there was a 'Three Chapters controversy at all³⁶.

Reception by the Church is not the only criterion of conciliar authority for Facundus. Reception by the Church of Rome is another important one. Here several facets must be distinguished. For Facundus, as for most of the African writers before him, Rome is the first see of Christendom. Yet a good deal of his argument against the proposed revision of Chalcedon appeals to the prestige of one Pope, Leo the Great (440-461). The question remains: to what extent is his argument an appeal to Rome as an authority in itself and to what extent is the appeal to the authority of one outstanding figure of the past, Pope Leo? What is the authority of Vigilius, the contemporary Pope?

The admission of error on the part of Pope Zosimus in the Pelagius/Celestius case has already been mentioned. Elsewhere, commenting on an alleged letter of Pope Julius (337-352) used to support dubious doctrines, he questions the authenticity of the letter, but notes as well that such testimony, even if authentic, would not outweigh the *evidentissima Patrum testimonia*³⁷. Or, in other words, he applies to a Pope his belief that the testimony of many, (e.g. a council) is to be preferred to the doubtful testimony of an individual.

Vigilius is the *primus inter primos Christianos sacerdos*, holding the *prima et maxima potestas*³⁸. The Apostolic See corrects those who scorn the wisdom of the Fathers in so far as they stray from the faith. Such action by Rome is not unusual. Other leading bishops such as Mennas of Constantinople and Zoilus of Alexandria were well aware of this when they expressed their hesitations in condemning the Three Chapters in accordance with the emperor's command. Mennas, for example, gave his written approval to the imperial decree on the condition that the bishop of Rome also approve. Zoilus was very careful to send word to Vigilius in Sicily that his own assent had been coerced. Concerning an earlier dispute, Cyril is blamed for refusing to restore the name of Chrysostom to the diptychs despite the judgment of Rome in the latter's favor³⁹.

Given the authority and prestige of the Roman See, Facundus writes with surprise that the heretics are bold enough or foolish enough to ask for and expect to receive from Pope Vigilius a decision favoring a review and revision of the work of Pope Leo approving the council of Chalcedon. One wonders whether he speaks more with certainty or with hope. The detractors of Chalcedon say they have consulted Pope Vigilius and are awaiting his response. Do they honestly expect any

36. See the various articles of the second volume of *Das Konzil von Chalkedon*.

37. 7.3.6-7/199; 1.5.18/31.

38. 4.3.6/122; 2.6.2/64.

39. 4.4.1-5, 8-9/123-25; 4.1.9/105-06; 6.5.27/188; 8.6.7/252.

kind of reply that would differ from or even contradict what Leo decided a century ago? "This man (Vigilius) has received the first and greatest power, not for the overthrow of previous decisions but to defend and avenge them...⁴⁰" He can do nothing against the truth; on the contrary, he can do more than his fellow bishops. Surely they are not going to find in Vigilius a supporter of their supposed doubts and questions but a punisher for their transgressions. Leo has left no room for doubts or questions. Do they seriously believe that Leo's fourteenth successor, the "holy Vigilius" could bring in a different verdict⁴¹?

All this, of course, is said against the background that Facundus is not yet aware of Vigilius' secret agreement to condemn the Three Chapters. It is difficult to estimate with what degree of conviction Facundus wrote these words. Did he intend them principally for Vigilius' own eyes, reminding him of the consequences should he have any ideas of giving in to Justinian?

Facundus manifests a pride in the steadfastness and no nonsense attitude of the Western Church by way of contrast with the East. The West condemns heresies immediately while in the East argument about them goes on seemingly without end. In the previous century, many of the eastern bishops had followed Dioscuros into the heresy of Eutyches. Let them now follow the correct views of the Latins! Let the East learn from and appreciate the piety and constancy of the Latin Church, taught and confirmed by God's own teaching⁴².

In line with this pride in the unsophisticated orthodoxy of the West, Facundus builds his principal defence of Chalcedon on the prestige of Leo the Great, a truly apostolic man who stated plainly that nothing need be added to the perfection of the council of Chalcedon. He was a true and faithful fighter for the Church, who did not fear the onslaught of heresy. In attacking the council, the heretics are seeking to undermine the honored position of this man. He repeats the last theme, as if by doing so, to drive home the enormity of what the revisionists are attempting to do⁴³.

In defence of the letter of Ibas, in particular, it suffices to say that "... so great a council and the instigator of that council, the apostolic man, the one most noted in the world for true doctrine, approved it⁴⁴." Finally, Leo himself made it explicit and clear that there could be no lawful reconsideration of the council's decisions as confirmed by Rome.

40. 2.6.2/64. « Quia ille, non in destructionem paternae sententiae, sed potius in defensionem atque ultionem, primam accepit et maximam potestatem... »

41. 2.6.12/66.

42. 1.4.38/26; 5.3.34/146; 9.5.42/294.

43. 2.5.4, 8, 11/61-63; 3.1.4/71; 3.3.3/80; 5.4.41/156; 3.6.44/102; 3.2.25/79.

44. 5.5.1/156. « ... quod eam tanta synodus, et ipsius auctor synodi, vir apostolicus, et in doctrina veritatis toto orbe notissimus, approbavit.

Like the sun in the sky radiating light and like a clear trumpet call, Leo made known the authority of his position that no change could be made in the divinely constituted judgments of Chalcedon⁴⁵.

After building up his case for irreversibility, Facundus recognizes the lack of scruples or reverence of the opposition. While making a pretence of consulting Vigilius, they had in fact already decided what they would do and were taking steps to procure a coerced "consensus". But the West would remain steadfast. Its will had been made known very clearly to Vigilius before his arrival in Constantinople. Upon the advice and example of Datius of Milan and his own apocrisiarius, Stephen, Vigilius refused communion with Mennas of Constantinople upon his arrival in that city. The eastern agitators will not give up their pressure, however, as they besiege the first bishop with public petitions. Others, less subtly are threatened with exile and prison if they will not conform⁴⁶.

As Facundus would soon be aware, his lengthy research and considerable effort were largely in vain as far as Vigilius goes. From this detailed plea, what indications can be seen about Facundus' ideas on doctrinal authority in the Church? First, the authority of the general council stands out, a council approved by Rome and accepted by posterity. Councils, presumably those not approved by Rome, have gone wrong. Others have been widely accepted in their own time but ultimately rejected. In Facundus' view, one supposes, a general council could not be erroneous in teaching if it were accepted both by Rome and by the Church as a whole over the long run. As we have already commented, the difficulty with the idea of reception is that it is verifiable only after a long period of time and thus is not much help for the immediate controversy as Facundus would realize in his continuing opposition to the revisionists even *after* Justinian's council had made its decisions and had been accepted by Popes Vigilius and Pelagius.

Roman acceptance or rejection of conciliar decisions was a much more immediately usable and available criterion. Yet Facundus had already cited errors by Pope Zosimus and a possible error by Pope Julius. Remembering the African idea that the judgment of one man was not to be preferred to a conciliar decision, one seems to find in Facundus' view of Roman approbation precisely that and no more. That is to say, when he speaks of Roman approval, he is speaking of confirmation of a decision already essentially made by the council itself. The decision of a council rejected by a Pope is, presumably, not acceptable but, abstracting from the case of obvious contradiction, the decision of a general council in itself is more prestigious and authoritative than the decision of a Pope by himself⁴⁷.

45. 12.2.11-15/378-79.

46. 4.3.1,4-7/121-23; 3.3.7/81.

47. It must be kept in mind that in the early centuries, Roman decisions were usually made within the context of a Roman synod.

Facundus is extremely laudatory of Pope Leo. But, then, Leo not only confirmed Chalcedon but was instrumental in bringing the council about and in stressing afterwards that it could not be reviewed, the very position Facundus is insisting upon. The bishop of Hermiane is also very respectful of Rome's position in the world Church. But this too is not unusual for the Africans nor really by this time for any one else in the Church. The Roman Church is the *mundi cacumen*, the "top of the world", as Fulgentius put it, but what this might mean in practice was interpreted in widely different ways⁴⁸.

The African ambivalence toward Rome is a continuing trait of that part of the Church. Thus, when Facundus extols Leo, it seems that the emphasis is more on the prestige of Leo than on that of Rome, though, of course, the two cannot be separated completely. If Facundus were so completely assured that Vigilius could not really go astray because of his office, then one may wonder why he spent so much time and energy trying to show Vigilius and his advisers that he had no alternative but to support the Three Chapters and thus to uphold the authority of Chalcedon and Leo. In reading Facundus' assurances that the detractors of Theodore, Theodoret and Ibas were wasting their time in approaching Vigilius, one gets the feeling that our author is whistling in the dark. Finally, we conclude from Facundus' major work that for him the general council is the supreme authority for the Church and that its decisions are binding and irreversible when they are approved by Rome and accepted by the Church as a whole over a long period of years.

All this, of course, was before Vigilius' initial public condemnation of the Three Chapters (April 548) and all the sad history of the fifth ecumenical council. Following the opinion of Professor Chrysos, we assume that the *Defensio* was written in Constantinople before the first *Judicatum* but was published after it. In 550, the council of Africa broke relations with Vigilius over his public stance⁴⁹. More African bishops were summoned to Constantinople where they were either exiled for refusing to give in or brow-beaten or bribed into submission to the will of Justinian. Facundus evidently remained in hiding a long time, unable to do much to stop the march of events but letting his inflexible opposition be known. Two brief works from this later period survive: the *Liber contra Mocianum*, written (again following Chrysos) not long after the African publication of the *Defensio*, and a short *Epistola* from a much later date, perhaps c. 570.

The earlier work is largely defensive in nature. An African *scholasticus*, Mocianus, employed in Constantinople, doubtless with imperial connections, reproaches the Africans for their actions. Condemning

48. Fulgentius of Ruspe, *Ep. 17 de Incarnatione et gratia* CC91A. 580.

49. Victor of Tunnunum, *Chronicle ann. 550*, MGH *Auct. Ant.* Vol. 11, *Chronica Minora* Pt. 2, ed. Th. Mommsen. 202.

the past is no doubt undesirable but schism is even less desirable and, in any event, not justified in this case. He further reproaches the Africans for exhibiting a neo-Donatism, recalling Augustine's exhortations that evils should be tolerated for the greater good of the unity of the Church. In reply, Facundus brings up again a number of the arguments previously used in his earlier work to show the error of the imperial policy. From the past he cites the opinions of Hilary of Poitiers that bishops who attack an ecumenical council should be condemned. If Cyprian was not condemned for his views on heretical baptism, then neither should Theodore of Mopsuestia be condemned⁵⁰.

Augustine's views, argues Facundus, are twisted by Mocianus to serve his own purposes. In more recent history, he notes, Rome itself broke off relations with Constantinople in the Acacian controversy and its aftermath. Rome was also concerned with unity but the principle was more important. Unity is not to be purchased at any price. In a real sense, the African Church did not cut itself off from those who were impugning Chalcedon, rather it ceased to communicate with those who had already cut themselves off by their actions. If Africa is to be blamed at all, perhaps it should be for the slowness with which its actions were taken. Finally, the African Church was not alone in taking offense at the stand of Vigilius⁵¹.

Facundus is especially caustic about the Pope's dissembling at the conference of Western bishops in Constantinople when he, Facundus, first expounded his detailed defence of the Three Chapters. By the time of this later work, Facundus knew the truth. Vigilius' pleas of coercion or ignorance are not credible. Communion must not be maintained with such liars. There can be no *pax* in the Church when that *pax* will undermine the Church itself. The Church is subverted when the decrees of other bishops can destroy the general statutes of the Church's faith. Facundus maintains that he cannot remain silent when men like Vigilius, out of ambition or greed, are making rulings that are a threat to the true faith⁵².

Some years later, when through force and threats, Justinian's position, bolstered by a council, had been imposed upon the Church and Facundus' own position had become ever more isolated and his cause an increasingly forlorn one, he wrote his *Epistola*. In this last work, both Vigilius and his successor, Pelagius, are reviled as *praevaricatores*. Primasius of Hadrumetum, one of the African bishops who after suffering imprisonment in Constantinople, conformed along with Vigilius and was rewar-

50. *Liber contra Mocianum Scholasticum* 29/407; 57/413.

51. *C.M.* 13,16/404; 22/406.

52. *C.M.* 42/410; 37-38/409. See Pewesin 147-8. Under direct pressure from the imperial government, the councils of Africa proconsularis and Numidia in 554 and 555 respectively, abandoned the African policy of opposition. See Victor *Chronicle* for those years, *MGH Auct. Ant.* Vol. II, 203-04.

ded with the office of primate of the province of Byzacena, is mocked by Facundus as the *praecipuus doctor Acephalorum*. Repeating his old arguments with renewed vehemence, he reminds them that the authority of Chalcedon has pronounced the Three Chapters orthodox. Those who have succumbed to the government's blandishments are betraying the past. It is not the cause of the Three Chapters that is being argued but the condemnation of all the bishops from the time of the Apostles and their immediate successors up to the council of Chalcedon⁵³.

Professor Markus has noted the possible relationship between the Donatist movement and the African opposition to the policies of Justinian⁵⁴. There is no direct continuity of teaching of course, but there is a considerable similarity of tone. Although even here, we may well ask ourselves if schismatic groups or lonely defenders of lost causes do not manifest a similar attitude, becoming more strident, the less likely the success of their views. The Catholic *pax et fides* do not remain within the walls of church buildings which are maintained by a government which drives the real Catholics out of those churches. Facundus and the dwindling number of those who still refuse to condemn the Three Chapters are the Catholic Church. They shall never resume communion with the criminals who are doing the condemning. At baptism, Christians entered into a covenant with God, a covenant which must not be transgressed. Anyone who destroys the least iota of that covenant has lost his faith in God, indeed has lost God Himself. With a parting exhortation to his adversaries to repent and return to the "Catholic Church" on pain of eternal damnation, Facundus closes his work and disappears from history, his own ultimate fate unknown⁵⁵.

Facundus' efforts seem in the end to have been in vain. One can only wonder about how his own view on the ecclesial structures of doctrinal authority may have been modified through his experiences of frustration in his later life. The council whose doctrine and authority he defended and extolled as irreversible he found (at least in his own view) contradicted by a new council. The added criterion of Roman approval he found unacceptably fulfilled when the unfortunate Vigilius, after much vacillation to be sure, approved the decisions of the later council. Vigilius' successor, Pelagius, first wrote a defence of the Three Chapters, heavily dependent on Facundus' own work; then, having become Pope (and presumably this was the emperor's condition for his becoming Pope), repudiated the Three Chapters and accepted the new council. The criterion of Roman confirmation of conciliar decisions also proved a broken reed. Finally, as acceptance of the fifth ecumenical council

53. *Epistula Fidei Catholicae* 6-7/420; 16/422; 25-26/424-25.

54. See R. Markus, *art. cit.* in note 3 of this article.

55. *Epistula*, 52/432; 4/419; 11-12/421; 59/433-34.

spread, even Facundus' ultimate criterion of reception by the universal Church seemed threatened. Perhaps he took refuge in the hope that authentic reception must be thought of in terms of decades and centuries so that eventually his view would win out when the imperial power of coercion had passed from the scene. In that long interim period before his undoubted ultimate vindication, Facundus, like many dissenters before and after him, would have to be content with the assurance that, though the rest of the world might stray, he alone was loyal to the end.

Robert B. ENO, S.S.
The Catholic University of
America, Washington, D.C.