

## The Participation of the Bishops from the Macedonian Provinces at the Fifth Ecumenical Council

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*Abstract: The sixth century, seen through the prism of Ecclesiastical history, was a period filled with debates of both theological and dogmatic nature. These debates later on developed into new religious divisions, which resulted in the convening of the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553. The convening of this Council was meant to put an end to these debate and to pave the way for establishment of Church unity. The background of these theological disputes were the political and religious conflicts between Rome and Constantinople. The participation of the bishops of the Macedonian Provinces is the main subject of interest in this research.*

Key words: bishops, province of Macedonia, Fifth Ecumenical Council

The sixth century, seen through the prism of Ecclesiastical history, was a period filled with debates of both theological and dogmatic nature. These debates later on developed into new religious divisions, which resulted in the convening of the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553. The convening of this Council was meant to put an end to these debate and to pave the way for establishment of Church unity. The background of these theological disputes were the political and religious conflicts between Rome and Constantinople.

The first half of the sixth century, denoted by the rule of the Emperor Justinian I (527-565), represented a new phase in the history of the Byzantine Empire; as well as in the history of the Late Antique and Early Medieval Church. Justinian has seen in Byzantium not just the successor of the former Roman Empire, he also saw a Christian Empire united in faith. Therefore, the first years of his rise to power were marked with his attempts to compromise with the supporters of Monophysitism. The ultimate aim was to sway the Monophysits towards acceptance of the decisions made by the Fourth Ecumenical Council held at Chalcedon in 451 and thus, to return them in the folds of the Ecumenical Church.<sup>1</sup> He considered that his Imperial authority was enough to impose a solution which would lead to the reconciliation of the Monophysites and the Orthodox Church.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Although convicted by the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon, Monophysitism continued to exist in Palestine, Egypt and Syria. (John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (London: Fordham University Press, 1999), 45)

<sup>2</sup> James Allan Evans, *The Emperor Justinian and the Byzantine Empire* (London: Greenwood Press, 2005), 75.

The issue of the Monophysitism's restoration was arisen after the earthquake that shook Constantinople in November, 533. This natural disaster was interpreted by part of the Capitol's populations as a God's message to return to the teaching of Monophysites. Two years later, after the death of the Constantinopolitan Patriarch Epiphanius, the See of Constantinople was given to Anthimus (535-536), a supporter of Miaphysitism.

The election of Anthimus for the new Patriarch of Constantinople was the reason for reactions by the Pope Agapetus I (535-536.) His pressure resulted into the decision of Justinian to replace Anthimus on the patriarchal throne. Menas (536-552), as one devoted to the Hypostatic union, was elected for Patriarch.<sup>3</sup>

In the interim, Agapetus I died during his stay at Constantinople; an event manipulated expertly by Theodora to interfere with the election of the new pope. She favoured a candidate who would lead a reasonable policy against the Monophysites.<sup>4</sup>

Vigilius (537-555) was elected as the new Pope; during his pontifical reign the discussions on Monophysitism and Nestorianism were gaining renewed popularity. The works of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus, and Ibas of Edessa were of particular interest. Emperor Justinian I took part in these debates, with the intention to ease the tensions and to find a compromised solution. He issued an edict, in late 543 or early 544, which condemned the Three Chapters.<sup>5</sup> This was an attempt to reconcile the Non-Chalcedonian Christians with the Chalcedonian Eastern Orthodoxy.

The act of condemning the Three Chapters brought satisfaction for the Monophysite churches in the provinces of Syria and Egypt, if not for a brief period. Yet, in the same time, it reinforced the resistance amidst other Churches who accepted the provisions of the Council of Chalcedon.<sup>6</sup> The Constantinopolitan Patriarch Menas (536-552) was the first who refused to sign the Act. However, he signed the Act later on, with the condition to be signed also by the Roman Pope. This was followed, nit with certain reservation, by the Patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem signing the Act. They were accompanied by almost all of the Eastern Bishops.<sup>7</sup>

The Bishops of the West were quite the opposing party, they uncompromisingly were against the Edict of Justinian. Pope Vigilius stalled his response, faced with the negative pressure. He arrived in Constantinople in 546, with the intention to plead against the condemnation of the Three Chapters; upon this both the Emperor Justinian<sup>8</sup> and Patriarch Menas<sup>9</sup> were made aware. The Patriarch responded by deleting the name of Vigilius from the diptych, while the Emperor began pressuring the Pope against his plead. This resulted into forcing the Pope to

<sup>3</sup> Georges Florovsky, *The Byzantine Fathers of The Sixth to Eighth Century* (Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1987) 104; Епископ Николај (Велимировиќ), *Охридски пролог: житија, размислувања и беседи* (Охрид: Канео 2009), 456 [Bishop Nikolaj (Velimirovic), *Prologue of Ohrid: hagiographies, contemplations and speeches* (Ohrid: Канео, 2009), 456]

<sup>4</sup> Антон Владимировиќ Карташов, *Васељенски Сабори, том II* (Београд: ФИДЕБ, 1995), 12. [Anton Vladimirovic Kartasov, *Ecumenical Councils, vol. II* (Belgrade: FIDEB, 1995), 12]

<sup>5</sup> The term "condemnation of the Three Chapters" is attributed to the condemnation of a certain person and his writings, in this case the work of Theodore of Mopsuestia, certain writings of Theodoret of Cyrus and Ibas's of Edessa letter to Maris, bishop of Hardaschir in Persia. (Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom, revised, illustrated paperback edition*. (London: Princeton University Press and Fontana, 1989), 55.

<sup>6</sup> The writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus and Ibas of Edessa had not been convicted of any Ecumenical Council and that it was used as an argument by opponents of condemnation of the Three Chapters.

<sup>7</sup> Тото Коев и Георги Бакалов, *Въведение в християнството* (София: Булвест – 2000, 1992), 122 [Toto Koev and Georgi Bakalov, *Introduction to Christianity* (Sofia: Bulvest – 2000, 1992), 122]

<sup>8</sup> *Epistola (olim IV) Vigili Papae Ad Justinianum*, col. 0021D – col.0025B (PL 69)

<sup>9</sup> *Epistola (olim V) Vigili Papae Ad Mennam*, col. 0025C - col. 0026D (PL 69)

relent and his name was once again added to diptych. Although all of the five Patriarchs who signed the Act of condemning the Three Chapters, the real situation was quite different. The divisions in the Ecumenical Church continued to exist. Some of the bishops owed their alliance to Rome and the Roman Pope did not want to accept a compromised solution, under no circumstances. Thus, the need for another Ecumenical Council has arisen, where the issues over the condemnation of the Three Chapters should be answered in a manner approved by the entire Ecumenical Church.

The preparations for the Council denoted that each of the five patriarchs to be represented by an equal number of delegates. Yet, this clashed the interests of the Pope who, compared by other four patriarchs which were clearly under profound influence by Justinian, felt himself unbiased.<sup>10</sup> The Pope decided not to attend the Council, knowing beforehand that he would be outvoted and he decided to stop his plea against the condemnation of the Three Chapters.

The attitude of the Pope brought into question the ecumenical character of the Council, once put into wider context. His example was followed by almost all of the bishops under his jurisdiction. Among the ones who refused to take seat at the Council were Benenat, the Archbishop of Iustiniana Prima and Helius, the Bishop of the Thessalonian Vicariate. They sent their representatives: Phocas, the Bishop of Stobi and Benignus, the Bishop of Heraclea Lyncestis.<sup>11</sup>

The Fifth Ecumenical Council began with work in 5<sup>th</sup> of May 553, in Constantinople and ended in the same year in 2<sup>nd</sup> of June.

The Fifth Ecumenical Council was convened at 5<sup>th</sup> of May 553 and ended in the same year, on 2<sup>nd</sup> of June. The meetings of the Council were presided by Constantinopolitan Patriarch Eutyches.<sup>12</sup> The opening ceremony was attended by 150 delegates, and in the nearly month-long convening their number had risen to 164 bishops.

At the beginning of the Council, four Macedonian bishops took part: Benignus from Heraclea Lyncestis as a representative of the absent Thessalonian bishop<sup>13</sup>, followed by Phocas from Stobi as representative of the absent Archbishop of Iustiniana Prima<sup>14</sup> as well as Alexander

<sup>10</sup> During the preparation of the council, in 552 Patriarch Menas died and on his place was elected Eutyches (552-565). In 552, during the preparation of the Council, the Patriarch Menas died and Eutyches was elected as his successor (552-565.) His was a formidable supporter of Justinian's policy to condemn the Three Chapters (Evagrius Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, IV, 38, ed. Edward Walford [London 1846], reprint 2008); cf. *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, IV, 38, translated with an introduction by Michael Whitby (Liverpool: 2000).

<sup>11</sup> *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova Amplissima Collectio*, tomus IX, ed. Joannes Dominicus Mansi (Florentiae: 1760), 173 – 192; cf. Блага Алексова, “Старохристијанските црковни центри во Македонија”, во *Старохристијанската археологија во Македонија – Прилози од научен собир* (Скопје: 2003), 17 [Blaga Aleksova, “Old Christian church centers in Macedonia”, in *The Old Christian Archaeology in Macedonia - Contributions from scientific meeting* (Skopje: 2003), 17]

<sup>12</sup> *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova Amplissima Collectio*, 173; cf. Карташов, *Васељенски Сабори II*, 25 [Kartasov, *Ecumenical Councils II*, 25]; Коев и Бакалов, *Въведение в християнството*, 123 [Коев and Balakalov, *Introduction to Christianity*, 123]; Рајко Братоџ, “Ранохристијанската црква во Македонија и нејзините односи со Рим”, *Македонско наследство, година V, број 13* (Скопје 2000), 68 [Rajko Bratož, “Early Christian church in Macedonia and its relations with Rome”, *Macedonian heritage, year V, No. 13* (Skopje 2000), 68]; Радомир Поповић, *Рано хришћанство на Балкану пре досељења Словена (Србија, Повардарје, Црна Гора)* (Београд: 1995), 89 [Radomir Popovic, *Early Christianity before the arrival of the Slavs in the Balkans* (Serbia, Vardar Valley, Montenegro) (Belgrade: 1995), 89]; Момир Јовић, *Рано хришћанство на Балкану* (Ниш: 1994), 65 [Momir Jovic, *Early Christianity in the Balkans* (Nis: 1994), 65].

<sup>13</sup> „...Benigno religiosissimo episcopo Heracliae Pelagoniae vicem agente Heliae beatissimi episcopi Thessalonicensis...” (*Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova Amplissima Collectio*, 173)

<sup>14</sup> *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova Amplissima Collectio*, 192.

of Amphipolis, and Sabinianus of Zappara.<sup>15</sup> Two of these bishops, Phocas and Benignus, are mentioned as part of the delegation that left for Chalcedon on 7<sup>th</sup> of May 553, to ask the Pope to join the Council.<sup>16</sup>

In the context of participation of the Macedonian bishops on the Fifth Ecumenical Council, it is important to note that the signature of Benignus stands seventh on the list of the Council's participants.<sup>17</sup> This speaks quite clearly on the high level of esteem in which the Thessalonian bishop was held by the Christian community of the mid-sixth century; it is very obvious that Thessalonica, as the See of the Papal Vicariate, remained strong during the reign of Justinian.

The name of Helius – bishop of Thessaloniki – is signed on another document which is directly connected with the maintenance of the Fifth Ecumenical Council and it was published by Pope Vigilius. Namely, although Vigilius refused to attend to the Council, on the pretext of holding his judgment for the decisions made on this Council, on 14<sup>th</sup> of May 553, he issued a document known as *Constitutum de tribus capitulis*<sup>18</sup>, which states his own interpretation of the Three Chapters. Among the ones who signed this document is the name of the Thessalonian bishop Helius.<sup>19</sup> We are on the opinion that this is a proof toward the implication that Helius was present in Constantinople, but did not attend the Council out of loyalty towards the Pope. Instead, he named Benignus as his representative.

Put into this perspective, we can understand the information contained in the Acts of the Fifth Ecumenical Council, which says that the bishops of Zappare, Naissus, and Iustiniana Secunda, who were under the jurisdiction of the Archbishopric of Iustiniana Prima, refused to participate in the further sessions of the Council, under the pretext that their archbishop is not present.<sup>20</sup> Thus, they expressed their solidarity towards Benenat, who refused to participate on his own behalf in the Council. In this context, it is very plausible that Benenat, just as his Helius, may have been present in Constantinople during the convening of the Council, without being an active participant.

However, despite the resistance of the Pope and the bishops of the West, the Fifth Ecumenical Council completed its convening by deciding to condemn the Three Chapters.<sup>21</sup> This was fully in favour with Justinian's Church policy, so he has responded immediately by signing the Acts of the Council. He even put a request to the Pope and all of his subordinate Bishops to do the same. Again, we have the initial negative response by the Pope, which resulted with the Constantinopolitan Patriarch deleting his name from the diptych. After six months of intensive diplomatic influence, the Pope reconsidered the acceptance of the decisions of the Fifth Ecumenical Council condemning the Three Chapters.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova Amplissima Collectio*, 175; cf. Блага Алексова, “Старохристијанските црковни центри”, 18 [Blaga Aleksova, “Old Christian church centers”, 18.].

<sup>16</sup> *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova Amplissima Collectio*, 214.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, 173.

<sup>18</sup> *Constitutum de tribus capitulis* contains 60 items which give interpretation of the writings of Theodore of Mopuestia qualifying them as dogmatically correct (*Constitutum Vigilii Papae De Tribus Capitulis*, col. 0067C - col. 0114B [PL 69]; cf. *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova Amplissima Collectio*, 173)

<sup>19</sup> *Constitutum Vigilii Papae De Tribus Capitulis*, col. 0067C – col. 0114B (PL 69); *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova Amplissima Collectio*, 173.

<sup>20</sup> *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova Amplissima Collectio*, 191; cf. Фанула Папазоглу, *Македонски градови у римско доба* (Скопје: 1957), 447 [Fanula Papazoglu, *Macedonian cities during the Roman period* (Skopje 1957), 447]; Анета Шукарова, *Јустинијана Прима* (Скопје: 1994), 122 [Aneta Šukarova, *Justiniana Prima* (Skopje: 1994), 122]; *Ibidem*, “Јустинијана Прима како црковен, политичко – административен и воено – стратешки центар”, *Гласник ИНИ, год. XXXIV, бр. 1–2* (Скопје: 1990), 73 [*Ibidem*, “Justiniana Prima as Ecclesial, political - administrative and military - strategic center”, *Journal of INI, year XXXIV, no. 1-2* (Skopje 1990), 73].

<sup>21</sup> *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova Amplissima Collectio*, 371 – 389.

<sup>22</sup> *Epistola Decretalis Vigilii Papae Pro Confirmatione Quintae Synodi Oecumenicae*, col. 0121 - col. 0127 (PL

The decisions adopted at the Fifth Ecumenical Council caused resistance in the whole of Prefecture of Illyricum, including the two Macedonian provinces. According to Rajko Bratož<sup>23</sup>, not before 559 the resistance of the Illyricum bishops towards the decisions of the Fifth Ecumenical Council were overcome. They followed Rome's policy towards the Ecumenical character of the Council of Constantinople in 553 and thus accepted the conviction of the Three Chapters.

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69); *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova Amplissima Collectio, tomus IX*, "De Vigili Decreto Pro Confirmatione V. Synodi", 219-432. Going back to Rome in 552, the Pope Vigilius died in Syracuse (Theophanis, *Chronographia*, AM 6045, 194, col. 502 [PG 108]). His successor Pelagius I (555-560) immediately after his ordination stated that he accept all decisions of the Fifth Ecumenical Council.

<sup>23</sup> Rajko Bratož, "Ранохристијанската црква", 70 [Rajko Bratož, "Early Christian church", 70]

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