

Pope Dioscorus I of Alexandria

<i>Saint Dioscorus the Great</i>	
Our Teacher, H.H. Pope St. Dioscorus I, the Champion of Orthodoxy & 25th Pope of Alexandria	
The Champion of Orthodoxy	
Born	Unknown
Died	454, Gangra Island (Asia Minor)
Venerated in	Oriental Orthodox Churches
Major shrine	St Mark Cathedral (Cairo, Egypt)
Feast	September 17 (Thout 7 in the Coptic Calendar)
Attributes	<i>Perserverance for Orthodoxy</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fiery Zeal for the Oriental Orthodox faith• Humility• Great courage
Controversy	Dealt with Monophysitism (Eutychianism), Nestorianism, Chalcedonians (still a major issue), etc...
Saints Portal	

Pope Dioscorus I of Alexandria was the 25th [Pope of Alexandria \(444 AD–454 AD\)](#)/[Patriarch of Alexandria \(444 AD– 451 AD\)](#) (by different traditions respectively).

Otherwise known as His Holiness **Pope St. Dioscorus the Great**, he died in Asia Minor, at the date of September 17, 454. ^[1] ^[2]

Biography & Ecumenism

Early life

Pope Dioscorus served as the dean of the [Catechetical School of Alexandria](#), and was the personal secretary of [Saint Cyril the Great, Pope of Alexandria](#), whom he accompanied to the [Third Ecumenical Council](#) held at [Ephesus](#), rising to the position of [archdeacon](#).^[3]

Eutyches and Nestorius

In his struggle against [Nestorius](#), [St. Cyril](#) explained the union between the two natures of Christ (His Divinity and His Humanity) as "inward and real without any division, change, or confusion." He rejected the Antiochene theory of "indwelling", or "conjunction", or "close participation" as insufficient to reveal the real unification. He charged that their theory permitted the division of the two hypostasis of Christ just as Nestorius taught.

Thus the traditional Orthodox formula adopted by Cyril and Dioscorus was "ONE INCARNATE NATURE" which translated in Greek to "[MIA PHYSIS](#)" and not "[Mono Physis](#)". They meant by "MIA": one; not "single one", but "unity one"; "out of two natures"; as St. Dioscorus stated. He insisted on "the one nature" of Christ to assert Christ's oneness, as a tool to defend the Church's faith against Nestorianism.

Thus Christ is at once God and man. This supposedly proves Dioscorus to be Orthodox.

On the other hand the Antiochene formula was "Two natures after the union" which is translated to "[DYO PHYSIS](#)". This formula explained Christ as two natures; Son of God, and Son of Man, and that God did not suffer nor did He die. This formula was used in the Council of Chalcedon; thus, many consider Chalcedonians either Heretical or Orthodox.

A struggle occurred between [Eutyches](#) and [Theodoret](#). Eutyches was an [archmandrite](#) of a monastery in Constantinople. He defended the formula "one nature" against that of "two natures". He concluded that the Godhead absorbed the manhood of Christ. Theodoret accused Eutyches and Cyril, and published a long attack on them. The council of Constantinople was held in 448, and Eutyches was condemned and exiled.

[Leo](#), the [Pope of Rome](#), wrote to Eutyches praising his zeal in opposing the Nestorian dualism. But Leo changed his mind, perhaps when he heard that the emperor wrote to Dioscorus calling him to a council to be held to discuss that matter. Leo, who was not part of the conflict between the Alexandrian and the Antiochian Christology, sent the famous Tome (letter) of Leo to Constantinople -- not to work for reconciliation of the parties, but to defame the Alexandrian theologians.^{[1] [4]}

Second Council of Ephesus

Emperor Theodosius II then convened the [Second Council of Ephesus](#) in 449, called the "Robber Synod" by some opponents. He asked Pope Dioscorus to exercise supreme authority over it as president. Eutyches was rehabilitated because he offered to repent (proving him to be Orthodox at the time) and also because Leo, Bishop of Rome wrote to [Archbishop Flavian of Constantinople](#) saying that he should be kind to him, and to accept him if he repented. The outcomes of this council included the reinstatement of Eutychius, the [excommunication](#) of Leo I, and the deposition of Flavian for opposing Monophysitism,^[3] and a declaration of anathema against [Theodoret](#) as well. ^[1]

Council of Chalcedon

Theodosius died on [July 28, 450](#). His sister [Pulcheria](#) and her consort [Marcian](#) were then declared emperors. Pulcheria supported Rome against Alexandria. She gathered signatures for the "Tome" (letter) of Leo to be introduced as the basic paper for a new council to be held at [Chalcedon](#). At the same time, she decided not to let Rome have an attempt at having supreme authority in the church. She refused Leo's demand to hold the council in Italy, but insisted that it would be held in the East. Although the [Council of Chalcedon](#) is believed to have condemned Eutyches, the man with whom it really dealt was St. Dioscorus, for Eutyches was already in North Syria, where he had been exiled before the council met.

[1]

During the council, Pope Dioscorus explained why the Orthodox faith should adopt the formula "One incarnate nature of God the Word". On hearing "one nature", some bishops in the council shouted, "Eutyches says these things also." Here Dioscorus clarified the Alexandrian view, saying, "We do not speak of confusion, neither of division, nor of change." Dioscorus tried to make his position clear: that he did not accept "two natures after the union", but he had no objection to "*From* two natures after the union."

When the judges started the order of the acts of the Council, Paschasinus the Roman delegate said, "We have orders from Rome that Dioscorus should not have a place in this council. If this is violated he should be cast out." When the judges asked about what Dioscorus did, the Roman delegate replied, "He has dared to conduct a council without the authorization of the apostolic see in Rome, a thing which has never happened and which ought not to have happened."

It was the emperor's favor that the council had to draw out Alexandria and declare a new formula to bring the entire Church in the east under the leadership of Constantinople. They used Leo as a tool to accomplish their objective through his enmity to Alexandria, looking upon it as an obstacle in realizing his Roman authority on the Church over the world. Thus, Leo wanted to rid of his most powerful ecclesiastical opponent, probably even more so than Leo himself. *Pope St. Dioscorus* and his entire Church.

The verdict of the commissioners was announced: Pope Dioscorus of Alexandria, [Juvenal of Jerusalem](#), Thalassius of Caesarea, Eusebius of Ancyra, Eutathius of Berytus, and Basil of Seleucia - the men who had been responsible for the decisions of the [Second Council of Ephesus](#), were all deposed. They were not, however, decried as [heretics](#). Pope Dioscorus was exiled to Gangra Island.^[3] It is not clear if St. Dioscorus was condemned because of a theological heresy, but due to political circumstances.^[1]

New formula of faith & Chalcedonian Controversies

Under strong pressure, the bishops of the council accepted a new formula of faith, so that Alexandria would not acquire theological precedence. Yet when the Roman delegates attempted to impose the Catholic "papal authority" upon the universal church (including the [Coptic Pope](#)), silence turned into revolt. Leo announced, in his repeatedly angry letters, his resistance to the council because it regarded Rome and Constantinople as equal. Also, St. Dioscorus would not bow down to Leo's attempts, making Leo evermore desperate. Theologically speaking, Rome was at no point having any power over the [Coptic Pope](#), whether Dioscorus was outspoken or not.

Pope Dioscorus's Period of Exile

After those incidents, a messenger from Constantinople arrived in Alexandria announcing the confirmation of Pope Dioscorus's exile, and the appointment of an Alexandrian priest named [Proterius](#) as an imperial [i.e. alien/foreign/non-Egyptian] patriarch over Alexandria, with the approval of the emperor. He threatened whoever dared to show disobedience. The [Melchite](#) patriarch who was appointed by the emperor became surrounded by soldiers willing to punish those who might resist the imperial command.

In the [Second Council of Ephesus](#), [Eutyches](#) had slyly repented and appeared to show his Orthodoxy. **However**, St. Dioscorus discovered that Eutyches had *openly* reverted back to [Monophysitism](#) after the [Second Council of Ephesus](#). Immediately, Pope Dioscorus excommunicated him ^[5] ^[6] while St. Dioscorus was in exile -- shortly after the [Council of Chalcedon](#). This, some say, is *clear evidence that Dioscorus is not a Monophysite*.

In the year [454](#), Pope Dioscorus died in exile — three years after Chalcedon. When the Copts heard that, they met with the clergymen and elected Timothy, the disciple of Dioscorus, to be the new Patriarch. This became a regular practice of the Coptic Church, who never surrendered to the alien patriarchies. [Proterius](#) angered the Copts, and so he was murdered shortly before Timothy became [Coptic Pope](#). [Pope Timothy II](#) was installed in the year [457](#).

It is interesting to compare the [Coptic and Greek lists of Popes of Alexandria](#), and to observe that the names given there are the same (with some exceptions) until 535.^[7] The permanent schism did not, in fact, happen in the time of Dioscorus, but a century after Chalcedon. In the year [536](#), the Greeks

withdrew their support of the [Coptic Pope](#) in favour of their own Melchite [Patriarch](#). However, the schism that happened during the time of Pope Dioscorus was a major factor in the permanent schism of 536.

Recent Disputes

Dioscorus is considered a [saint](#) by the [Coptic](#), [Syriac](#), and other [Oriental Orthodox](#) churches. His character and stance are subject to contravention between the [Oriental Orthodox Churches](#) on one side, and the [Byzantine Orthodox](#) and [Catholic](#) churches on the other.

For most of the last fifteen centuries he was considered a powerful heretic by the [Eastern Orthodox](#) and [Catholic](#) Churches, though some commentators like Anatolius and [John S. Romanides](#) think that Dioscorus was not deposed at Chalcedon (451) because of the faith, but for his "grave administrative errors at the [Second Council of Ephesus](#)" (449). They claim that these "grave errors" included restoring [Eutyches](#) "the heretic" (though many say that Eutyches was Orthodox at the time, and that Dioscorus excommunicated Eutyches later on anyway ^[8] ^[9] — this due to the fact that *Eutyches had openly returned to [Monophysitism](#)*). These commentators had also noted Dioscorus's attack on [Flavian](#) as "errors" (however, Flavian was possibly a major Nestorian heretic — denying the unity of the Christology), and noted that he (Pope Dioscorus) had excommunicated [Pope Leo](#) of Rome (who supported [Flavian](#) and may be even [Theodoret](#), who is a [Nestorian](#)) and also because at Chalcedon he refused to appear in front of the Council although he was summoned to it three times ^[10]. Other sources claim that he was held under house arrest by Roman legions in order that he should be excommunicated after the three summons went unheeded.

The [Oriental Orthodox Churches](#) were accused by other churches of accepting the [Eutychian doctrine](#) of [Monophysitism](#)— this is denied by these churches ^[11], who sharply reject Monophysitism — they consider Eutyches a heretic — as the other churches do nothing other than say that they have retrieved this heresy prior to the [Second Council of Ephesus](#) ^[12]. But figures large in the differences between those churches and most other populous Christian churches, as well as in the civil strife and friction of the era and afterwards within the [Eastern Roman Empire](#), was the beginning of a disaster-type timeline or era.

Hence, in the mess typical of [schisms](#), according to non-Oriental Orthodox Christian sects, he was a [Coptic Pope](#) turned [heretic](#). Pope Dioscorus excommunicated many other influential bishops who he (and many others) considered Nestorian heretics, including [Patriarch Leo I](#) ^[1].

He was subsequently [excommunicated](#) by the [Roman Catholic Patriarch Leo I](#), most likely in very early 450 AD during the aftermath of the controversial [Second Council of Ephesus](#), which he was charged by the Emperor to preside over with the concurrence of Bishop Leo I.

The other person involved in this controversy apart from Pope Dioscorus is [Leo I](#) with each side considering the other person a heretic. The main factors behind this are still present and it is subject to discussion between the churches.^[13]

In recent research it was suggested that both Dioscorus and Leo are Orthodox because they agree with Pope St. [Cyril of Alexandria](#), especially with his Twelve Chapters, even though both had been considered heretical by the other side ^[14].

In May 1973, after fifteen centuries, [Pope Shenouda III](#) visited [Pope Paul VI of Rome](#) and declared a common faith in the nature of Christ, the issue which caused the schism of the church in the [Council of Chalcedon](#) ^[15] .

A similar declaration was reached between the [Oriental Orthodox Churches](#) and the [Eastern Orthodox Churches](#) in the 1990 in [Geneva](#)^[16] in which both Oriental and Eastern Orthodox churches agreed in condemning the Eutychian and Nestorian heresies and in rejecting interpretations of Councils which do not fully agree with the Hosios of the Third Ecumenical Council and the letter (433) of Cyril of Alexandria to John of Antioch. ^[17]

In this agreement the two families agreed to lift all the anathemas and condemnations of the past which on the basis that the Councils and Fathers previously anathematized or condemned are not heretical. ^[1]

In the summer of 2001, the Coptic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox Patriarchates of Alexandria agreed to mutually recognize baptisms performed in each other's churches ^[18] .