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Ecclesiastical politics during the Iconoclastic controversy (726-843): The impact of Eusebian "Imperial Theology" on the justification of imperial policies

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ABSTRACT

As a debate over the legitimacy of the liturgical use of images, the Byzantine Iconoclastic controversy (*ca.* 726-843) had important political and theological implications, which modern scholarship generally tends to treat unconnectedly. The primary object of this study is to explicate the relationship between the political and theological dimensions of the controversy and to reconstruct the debate over images in a comprehensive approach that accounts for both its political and theological dimensions.

The main argument of the thesis is that the question of images was a politico-theological problem and the prospects of 'political expediency' and 'theological propriety' were correlated in the minds of both the Iconoclastic reformers and their Iconodule rivals. Indeed, it was through their respective soteriologies that the two parties gave meaning to the theological and political dimensions of the debate in relationship with their respective theological first principles. Therefore, the Iconoclastic debate is explained as a soteriological dispute where the worldview represented by the traditional Byzantine religio-political ideology and the worldview represented by the proponents of images were set over against each other.

The main contribution of our thesis to modern scholarship of the Byzantine Iconoclastic controversy is to reconstruct the debate in the light of the contending theological paradigms of the two parties, which shaped not only their attitudes towards images but also their political stands in relation to the Byzantine Empire's involvement in ecclesiastical politics. This new synthetic reading explains the debate in reference to two essential theological cornerstones of the Byzantine tradition—the Eusebian "Imperial Theology" and the Christological definition of the council of Chalcedon—both taken as key reference points, against which the political and doctrinal stands of both parties were constructed and interpreted.

RÉSUMÉ

Le débat sur la légitimité de l'usage liturgique d'images que constitue la controverse Iconoclaste Byzantine, (env. 726-843) avait des conséquences politiques et théologiques importantes que la science moderne a généralement tendance à traiter de manière distincte. L'objet principal de cette étude est d'expliquer la relation qui existe entre les dimensions politiques et théologiques de la controverse et de reconstruire le débat sur les images sous une large approche qui prend à la fois en compte ses dimensions politiques et théologiques.

La présent thèse s'appuie sur l'argument suivant : que la question des images était un problème politico-théologique et que les perspectives d'«opportunisme politique» et de «convenance théologique» ont été mises en relation dans l'esprit des réformateurs Iconoclastes et de leurs rivaux Iconodules. En effet, c'était par l'intermédiaire de leurs sotériologies respectives que les dimensions théologiques et politiques revêtirent un sens dans le débat par rapport à leurs principes théologiques premiers. Par conséquent, le débat Iconoclaste s'explique ici comme une dispute sotériologique où la vision du monde représentée par l'idéologie religio-politique traditionnelle byzantine s'oppose à celle que représentaient les partisans de la doctrine des images.

La contribution principale de notre thèse à la connaissance contemporaine de la controverse Iconoclaste Byzantine est de reconstruire le débat à la lumière des paradigmes théologiques contradictoires des deux parties qui ont façonné, non seulement leurs attitudes à l'égard des images, mais aussi leur position politique par rapport à l'implication de l'Empire byzantin dans la politique ecclésiastique. Cette nouvelle lecture de synthèse explique le débat en référence à deux piliers théologiques essentiels de la tradition Byzantine—la «Théologie Impériale» Eusébienne et la définition Christologique du Conseil de Chalcédoine—tous deux pris comme points de référence, contre lesquelles les positions politiques et doctrinales des deux parties se sont construites et interprétées.

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Abbreviations

GCS   Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte, Berlin, etc.

LC   *De Laudibus Constantini.* H. A. Drake, *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius's Tricennial Orations* Berkeley, CA, 1976.

LCL   Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass.

PG   J.-P. Migne. *Patrologiae cursus completus ... Series Graeca.* Paris, 1857-1866.

PTS   Patristische Texte und Studien, Berlin, etc.

SC   *De Sepulchro Christi* (chs. 11-18 of the *LC*). H. A. Drake, *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius's Tricennial Orations.* Berkeley, CA, 1976.

CHRONOLOGY

Iconoclastic Controversy (ca. 726-843)

726   Leo III publicly bans making and venerating of images.

730   The emperor convenes a formal meeting (*silention*) to proclaim Iconoclastic teaching. Germanos, the patriarch of Constantinople (715-30), refuses to co-operate and resigns from his post.

730-40   In his *De haeresibus et synodis* (written after 730), Patriarch Germanos narrates a great persecution against Iconodules, as a result of which many priests, laymen and monks were exiled, and some suffered mutilation. Iconoclasts did away with panel icons, mural decorations in churches.

730-750   John of Damascus (651-750) writes three treatises in defence of icons and develops the first theological argument in favour of images on the basis of the theology of the incarnation.

740-75   Constantine V, Leo's son and successor rules and implements systematic iconoclastic policies.

754   A council of 338 bishops convenes under the presidency of Theodosios of Ephesus in the suburban palace of Hiereia (modern Fenerbahçe). The Iconoclastic council pronounced a definition (*horos*) that summarizes the argument against icons. The Iconoclastic *horos* included the "Christological-dilemma," the Iconoclastic Christological argument that was developed by the

emperor himself. According to the *horos,* making and veneration of icons are rejected on Christological grounds.

760 Known cases of persecution of Iconodules begin.

765 The famous anchorite monk Stephen the Younger is put to death.

766 Monks are made to parade in the hippodrome of Constantinople, each holding a woman by the hand.

768 A number of important monasteries in the capital are either secularized or destroyed.

775-80 Leo IV succeeds Constantine and allows the prisoners and exiles to return home.

786 Owing to the influence of the Athenian Eirene, widow of Leo IV and a staunch iconodule, an Iconodule council assembles at Constantinople, but the proceedings are halted by a demonstration of the military garrison.

787 The delayed Iconodule council resumes its work, now in Nicea, under the guidance of the Patriarch Tarasios. The veneration of icons is officially re-introduced into the Church.

813 After ineffectual and disastrous reigns of Iconodule emperors, the Iconoclastic Leo V the Armenian takes power. Leo asks the Patriarch Nicephorus (806-15) to support the iconoclastic policies. The patriarch refuses the compromise.

815 Nicephorus abdicates his post and an iconoclastic patriarch is appointed in his place. An Iconoclastic council assembles at St. Sophia and sanctions the re-introduction of Iconoclasm. Milder measures are taken to implement Iconoclasm.

820   Leo V is brutally murdered by Michael II who rules for the next nine years

(820-28). The new emperor stops the persecution of the Iconodules;

nevertheless, he does not end the Iconoclastic policies completely.

826   The most influential defender of icons, Theodore the Studite dies.

829-42   Theophilos, the last Iconoclastic emperor takes a more determined stance than

his father in implementing Iconoclastic measures. But the movement loses its

strength.

843   Icons are re-established in the church at the instigation of Theodora, wife of

Theophilos. After the death of her husband, she becomes the regent for her

under-aged son Michael (842-46), and prepares the necessary conditions for a

council in 843, which confirms the canons of the Council of 787.[1]

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[1] The chronology is prepared with the aid of the following: Cyril Mango, "Historical Introduction," in
Iconoclasm: Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin, eds.
(Birmingham: Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1977), 1-6 and Daniel J. Sahas,
*Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-Century Iconoclasm: An annotated translation of the Sixth Session of
the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicea, 787), containing the Definition of the Council of Constantinople
(754) and its refutation and the Definition of the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (Toronto: University of
Toronto Press, 1986), 3-44.

INTRODUCTION

Despite their apparent incompatibility, both iconoclastic and iconodule tendencies and practices existed side by side in the early church prior to the eighth century according to the available evidence.[1] It was in the latter century that matters came to a head in the form of the Iconoclastic controversy. This began with the edict of Leo III against icons in 726, and continued until their final vindication in 843, save for an interval of relative peace between the Second Council of Nicea (787) and the Second Iconoclastic Council of St. Sophia (815).[2]

On the one hand, the controversy was a theological debate over the legitimacy of icon-veneration as a form of Christian devotion to God. Since a significant portion of the primary sources from the Iconoclastic period consist of theological treatises in defence of or against icons, the theological dimension of the debate represents an essential aspect

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[1] The Patristic *florilegia* that were prepared by both the Iconoclastic and the Iconodule parties in support of their convictions reveal that Christian tradition had demonstrated both tendencies in representing divine personalities through images. For the patristic florilegia see, Daniel J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-Century Iconoclasm: An annotated translation of the Sixth Session of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicea, 787), containing the Definition of the Council of Constantinople (754) and its refutation and the Definition of the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 280E-328A. As for iconoclastic and iconodule tendencies before the outbreak of Iconoclasm see Ernst Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954), 85-150.

[2] For a general picture of the Iconoclastic Controversy consult the following: Milton V. Anastos, "Iconoclasm and Imperial Rule 717-842," *The Cambridge Mediaeval History*, vol. 4, *The Byzantine Empire*, ed. J. M. Hussey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 61-104; Charles Joseph Hefele, "The Controversy about Images and the Seventh Ecumenical Synod," in *A History of the Councils of the Church: From the Original Sources* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1896), 5:260-400; E. J. Martin, *A History of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (London: The Church Historical Society, 1930).

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and one that must be accounted for.[3] These works reveal an urgency and enthusiasm on the part of both the Iconoclastic and the Iconodule parties in relation to some cardinal principles of Christian theology, mainly Christology, in support of their respective positions for and against icons. We believe that the witness of the primary sources should be taken as proof of the importance and weight of the theological dimension of the controversy.

On the other hand, unlike many previous doctrinal controversies in early church history, the Iconoclastic Controversy was specifically charged with political implications.[4] It is pointed out first of all that the initiative for Iconoclasm came directly from the Isaurian emperors, who were ardent supporters of the Iconoclastic cause. Secondly, The Isaurian emperors' religious and administrative reforms aimed to overcome the prolonged crises of the seventh century Byzantium; therefore their Iconoclastic reforms were somehow connected to their other administrative reforms.[5] Thirdly, it is important to note that the vindication of icons in 787 and again in 843 came

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[3] It should be pointed out that the Iconoclastic treatises are totally lost, except for the definition of the Iconoclastic Controversy of Hierea (754), which has come down to us in the record of the sixth session of the Second Council of Nicea (787); see Sahas, 204A-364E.

[4] The sources for this period, which are overwhelmingly of Iconodule persuasion, emphasize the political motivations of the Iconoclasts and somehow create a rivalry between the Iconoclasts, who are portrayed as politically ambitious, and the Iconodules, depicted as the sincere and devoted defenders of the Christian faith. We think this situation should be taken as a rhetorical device through which the Iconodules tried to discredit their opponents; however, this observation should not cause us to downplay the importance of politics during the controversy. See S. Gero "Notes on Byzantine Iconoclasm in the Eight Century," *Byzantion* 44 (1974), 41-42: "The ninth-century iconophile biographer of Nicetas of Medicium, in a sober mood, emphasizes that iconoclasm, unlike other heresies which grew out of ecclesiastical disputes, was indeed a uniquely imperial heresy. Theosterictus says: "The other heresies had their origin from bishops and lower clergy, but this one from the rulers themselves..., the other heresies were strengthened little by little, but this one [gained strength at once] from the imperial power"." Gero uses this quotation to support his thesis that Iconoclasm was an imperial heresy, started and ended in the purple; however, it is plausible to consider these remarks as rhetorical devices to discredit the theological impact and importance of the Iconoclastic movement.

[5] For an excellent recent treatment of Byzantine history in the seventh century see J. F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

not as a result of the genius of the Iconodules' theological arguments but through imperial decrees. Hence, there is much in favour of the assumption that the orbits of theology and politics provide the best place to search for the true nature and implications of the controversy.

The sources of the period suggest that the Iconoclastic emperors did not separate their Iconoclastic policies or their ecclesiastical policies in general from their political and administrative actions; on the contrary, they considered them to be organic parts of a whole.[6] In other words, the prospects of theological propriety and political expediency were somehow correlated in their minds. The object of this thesis is precisely to clarify this internal link between the political and theological discourses, which we argue, was, on balance, more doctrinally oriented; in fact, it was the Iconoclastic reformers' theological principles and beliefs that gave meaning not only to their Iconoclastic policies, but also to the entire range of their political and administrative initiatives.

The Iconoclastic Controversy has received extensive, though often misplaced, scholarly attention and it is beyond our scope here to attempt a general overview of all scholarly interpretations so far.[7] However, in order to orient ourselves to the theological debate, a concise overview of the treatment of the problem of religion and politics in this period would be useful. One group of studies defines Iconoclasm as a political debate in which "Caesaropapist" Iconoclastic emperors, struggling to subdue the church to imperial

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[6] See Leo III, *A Manual of Roman Law: The Ecloga: Published by the Emperors Leo III and Constantine V of Isauria,* translated with an introduction by E. H. Freshfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 67: "We can conceive nothing more acceptable by way of thanksgiving to Him than the righteous and just government of those entrusted to us by Him." This remark of the Emperor Leo III is the perfect example of the unity of discourses between the religion and politics, where the prospect of pleasing God in governing his people is expressed in that righteous and just government is as same as thanksgiving.

[7] More than three decades ago Peter Brown had remarked that "Altogether, the Iconoclast controversy is in the grip of a crisis of over-explanation." "A Dark-Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy," *The English Historical Review* 88 (1973), 3.

control, and Iconodule churchmen, defenders of the freedom of their institution, were set

against each other. These political readings see the theological debates as merely

instrumental to the essentially political aims of the opposing parties; as a result, the

remarkable theological legacy of the controversy is reduced to a pretext, a simple tool

used by both parties to score political gains.[8] Some of these political readings ascribe the

Iconoclastic emperors' ecclesiastical policies to their Caesaropapist tendencies, claiming

that, as both priests and kings, they tried to reassert their imperial authority, which had

been weakened due to the historical developments of the preceding century, over the

church.[9] One cannot deny that this political reading of the crisis won much favour in

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[8] To give some examples of the prominent political readings of the Iconoclastic Controversy, we can
mention the following: Hélenè Arhweiler "The Geography of the Iconoclastic World," in *Iconoclasm:
Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies,* Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (eds.) (Birmingham:
Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1977), 22: "The question of the icons was
deliberately raised by an emperor, who was trying to halt the military disasters and the political decline
which beset the empire, by every possible means. In my opinion this fact proves that Iconoclasm was
provoked by a state of national emergency, which required a vast programme of reform of both the state
apparatus and society of Byzantium, embarked upon by the Isaurian emperors. The controversy over icons
was therefore only a pretext, a convenient touch-stone by which the people could express their agreement
or disagreement with imperial policy;" Cyril Mango believes that the Iconoclastic policies of the Isaurian
Emperors were motivated by their conviction of the relationship between their political success and
religious behaviors of their people, such that icon-veneration was the main cause which incurred God's
punishment that came in military defeat and political instability. "Historical Introduction," in *Iconoclasm:
Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies,* Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (eds.) (Birmingham:
Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1977), 2; see Moshe Barasch, *Icon: Studies in the
History of an Idea* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1992), 186: "The Iconoclastic
Debate, the major event or process in Eastern Christianity of the eighth and ninth centuries, made the icon
explicitly and directly an object of political struggle, a central political symbol."

[9] See Ernest Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images before Iconoclasm," 128: "He [A. Grabar] suggested, in fact,—
and the idea was then elaborated by L. Koch and G. Ladner—that the outbreak of Iconoclasm was in
essence a re-assertion of imperial power and an affirmation of its absolute superiority vis-à-vis the Church.
This explanation of Byzantine Iconoclasm perhaps had a particular appeal for scholars living and working
under the impact of European experiences in the years before the Second World War, just as earlier
interpretations of that highly complex and many-faceted movement were influenced by contemporary
events." Similarly, at the turn of the century, Adolf V. Harnack expressed a less sophisticated form of the
same argument: "But this monkish piety [icon worship], which prevailed from the bishops down, had
become more and more independent in relation to the State. None of his successors had mastered the
Church, like Justinian; and it was the aim of the iconoclastic emperors to reduce it to complete subjection to
the State, to make it a department of the State...They merely wished that the Church should not give
trouble, and that it should be possible in any given case to make whatever use of it the State might require."

accounting for the historical circumstances prior to and during the controversy. However, it proved insufficient when it came to explaining the theological implications of the controversy in relation to the political and social circumstances that they so successfully elaborated. How is it possible that the theological disputes over images, which left behind such an outstanding legacy from the pens of such prominent theologians as John of Damascus, Theodore the Studite and the Patriarch Nicephorus, could have been "mere pretexts?" We believe that the witness of those theological treatises on icons, their scope, sophisticated arguments, and the urgency and enthusiasm that filled them, constitute sufficient evidence of the fact that theological issues were essential to the debate and that they cannot be explained away by such instrumentalist approaches.

From the perspective of historical methodology, to define the Iconoclastic debate as a political power struggle in which theology served as a merely ideological vehicle would be an anachronism; for such an assumption represents the convictions of scholars which have been shaped by the modern experience of church-state conflicts, rather than of observers contemporary to the debate. The available historical evidence does not warrant such a "power-struggle" interpretation. Moreover, since political readings emphasize the political aspects of the debate to the exclusion of its theological and doctrinal implications, this would also mean a reductionist approach on their part. Therefore, in order to avoid these methodological fallacies we should try to elaborate the internal link between the theological and political aspects of the controversy by giving due emphasis to both aspects.

History of Dogma, trans. Neil Buchanan (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company: 1901), 4:319-20. More recently, S. Gero defined Iconoclasm as an imperial heresy. "Notes on Byzantine Iconoclasm," 42.

At the other end of the spectrum, we have a large body of scholarly interpretation that tends to treat the debate almost exclusively as a theological phenomenon; as if the entire controversy took place amongst theologians who created sophisticated arguments for or against icons from their ivory towers in complete isolation from historical and political circumstances.[10] Some of the theological readings contextualize the Iconoclastic debate as a continuum of the Christological controversies, describing the Iconoclasts as crypto-Monophysites and the Iconodules as Chalcedonians.[11] Some acknowledge the importance of the political aspects of the controversy, yet never attempt to account for them. We can include a number of remarkable studies undertaken by art historians under this category.[12] All of these studies dealing specifically with the theological aspect of the controversy, which they have acknowledged as an important phase in the development of Christian theology and thought, have contributed substantially to our understanding of the debate through their meticulous analyses of its theological and philosophical implications. Nevertheless, they never attempt to reconstruct the organic link, the correlation between the theological and political aspects of the controversy. On the whole, by ignoring the political and historical aspects of the latter, they reveal the same

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[10] For example, Georgios Metallidis, "Theodore Studium against the Iconoclasts: the Argument of His Letters," *St Viladimir's Theological Quarterly* 46:2 (2002), 191-208; Theodore Sideris, "The Theological Position of the Iconophiles during the Iconoclastic Controversy," *St. Viladimir's Theological Quarterly* 17 (1973), 210-226; Paul J. Alexander, "The Iconoclastic Council of St. Sophia (815) and Its Definition (*Horos*)," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 7 (1953), 35-66a; Kenneth Parry, *Depicting the Word: Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Ambrosios Giakalis, *Images of the Divine: The Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (Leiden: Brill, 1994); Leonide Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978).

[11] See, John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Washington&Cleveland: Corpus Books, 1969), 132-148; George Florovsky, "Origen, Eusebius, and the Iconoclastic Controversy," *Church History* 19 (1950), 77-96. The Christological dimension of the Iconoclastic debate will be discussed further below.

[12] See for example Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002); Moshe Barash, *Icon: Studies in the History of and Idea.*

anachronistic and reductionist approaches as the political readings but in reverse. The theological readings fail to answer the crucial question of why the Iconoclastic emperors needed to take political action against icons, and why Iconoclasm as an imperial policy occurred at those specific times and in those political circumstances. Therefore, just as with the political reading, the theological reading of the controversy offers only a partial explanation of the phenomenon and fails to account for the full import of the controversy.

This polarization between political and theological approaches and the need for a unifying perspective is acknowledged by A. Kazhdan, a leading Byzantinist of the twentieth century:

> Iconoclasm has been interpreted on the one hand as a purely political and economic movement, of which the rejection of icon worship was an outer sign or hieroglyph, and on the other hand as a purely philosophical and theological doctrine that repeated rather than developed the ideas of the ancient philosophers and early church fathers...None of these views [of the former group of studies], though different and even contradictory, takes seriously the religious content of the controversy....[the latter group of scholars] emphasizes the theological and aesthetic aspects of the controversy and in so doing tend to divorce the views of the opponents and supporters of icon worship from the actual problems of the time....The time has come to assemble, as cautiously as possible, what is known for certain about the Iconoclastic controversy.[13]

The present study, by contrast, takes its inspiration from a third research perspective which acknowledges the equal importance and role of the theological and political components of the controversy, and attempts to link them in order to give an account of the debate as far as possible on its own contemporary terms.[14] Taking the middle path,

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[13] Alexander Kazhdan and Giles Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium: An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Centre for Byzantine Studies, 1982), 86-87.

[14] To give some examples, Milton V. Anastos, "Iconoclasm and Imperial Rule 717-842"; Leslie W. Barnard, "The Emperor Cult and the Origins of the Iconoclastic Controversy," *Byzantion* 43 (1973), 13-29, and *The Graeco-Roman and Oriental Background of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (Leiden: Brill, 1974); although we mentioned S. Gero among the scholars who considered the controversy as a political debate, his following studies treats the political and theological dimensions of the controversy equally, Stephen

studies of this type try to consider equally political and theological implications in explaining the debate. Some of these studies emphasize that the Iconoclastic emperors took action against images not for the sake of political expediency, but for theological propriety.[15] Some refer to the importance of the fourth century for the origin of church-empire relations, and they even consider Constantine I and Eusebius to be the reference points in the Iconoclastic ideology.[16] Our study starts from this synthetic standpoint and explains the theological and political implications of the debate as parts of an organic unity, which seeks to explain their origins in Eusebian "Imperial Theology", on the one hand, and, as well as in the Christological debates in the aftermath of the council of Chalcedon, on the other.

Having reviewed these different critical approaches to the Iconoclastic controversy, we would like to define it as a "politico-theological" debate. By this definition we mean that the true significance and scope of the controversy should be looked for in the theological convictions of the Iconoclasts and their Iconodule rivals, which in turn gave shape to their political and ecclesiastical activities. That through their Iconoclastic measures the Iconoclastic emperors sought divine favour on their side cannot be a

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Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm During the Reign of Leo III: With Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources* (Louvin: Secretariat Du Corpus, 1973) and Stephen Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm During the Reign of Constantine V: With Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources* (Louvin: Secretariat Du Corpus, 1977); Jaroslav Pelikan, *Imago Dei: The Byzantine Apologia for Icons* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); John A. McGuckin, "The Theology of Images and the Legitimation of Power in Eight Century Byzantium," *St. Viladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37 (1993), 39-58; Steven Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

[15] For example, see M. Anastos, "Iconoclasm and Imperial Rule," 61-62.

[16] See Leslie W. Barnard, "The Emperor Cult and the Origins of the Iconoclastic Controversy," 29: "Yet there is the interesting fact that when it came to the crunch neither side in the Byzantine controversy clung to its religious opinions with that pertinacity shown earlier by the Monophysites. It may be that the question of the Imperial cult and images was a more prominent feature in the controversy than the surviving Iconodule sources would suggest. The increase of religious images, at the expense of the Imperial, was reversed by the Iconoclastic Rulers in order to re-establish the traditional view of the uniqueness of the Christian Emperor. On this view the fourth century, no less than the seventh and eight, is decisive for the understanding of the origins of Iconoclasm."

sufficient explanation for their theological convictions.[17] We argue that these theological convictions extended to giving the entire political realm a role in Christian economy of salvation, which was no less important than that of the church; in short, it was the question of the empire's role as the main vessel of Christian salvation that was at stake in the Iconoclastic debate. As we see it, the debate was as much about the role of the empire as a Christian body politic in providing salvation to humanity, as it was about the role of images as such. We seek to demonstrate that the theological reasoning of the Iconoclastic reformers united the religious and political discourses within the concept of the Byzantine Commonwealth, the divinely established polity—regulated by both *imperium* and *sacerdotium*—that provided its subjects with both political and spiritual salvation. Since the main reference for such a unified discourse harks back to the first engagement between the Roman Empire and the church in the fourth century, it will become clear that the Eusebian "Imperial Theology" is crucial to accounting for the Iconoclastic Controversy. The Iconodules, on the other hand, correlated the religious and political aspects of the debate under different principles. Their insistence on the continuing validity of the incarnation as the main principle of their soteriology carried with it an implied denial of any salvific role for the body politic and in particular for the emperor as the head of the political establishment. Instead of salvation through becoming "a good citizen" of a Godly order, Iconodules sought salvation in direct participation in the

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[17] See Cyril Mango, "Historical Introduction, 2-3: "Correct observance of religious doctrine was, to the Byzantine mind, closely related to military and political success…We should also remember that all through the seventh and early eighth centuries icons were widely used as palladia: they were solemnly paraded round city walls, painted in towers and above gates, carried into battle. And yet, in spite of such protection, city after city fell to the Arabs. Clearly, something was amiss, and it was perhaps at Nicaea that the cause of divine displeasure was most clearly identified. Such, I believe, was the main motivation of the religious reform of Leo III."

mysterious unity of the divine and human natures in the person of Christ, a process of '*theosis*' where icons played an essential role.

Our argument thus holds up Eusebian "Imperial Theology" as a paradigm with which to contextualize the politico-theological implications of the Iconoclastic controversy. Within the limitations of the available historical evidence, we try to demonstrate that Eusebius articulated the theological underpinnings of the religio-political establishment of the Byzantine Commonwealth, which consisted of both the church and the empire—the main agents of Christian salvation, whether material or spiritual. We contend further that the Iconoclastic reformers adhered to this traditional salvific role of the Byzantine Commonwealth. They claimed, on theological grounds, that Christians should seek salvation within the traditional paradigm provided by the Byzantine religio-political establishment. They did so in the face of an alternative religiosity—heterodox in their eyes—represented by the veneration of images, which they saw as intrinsically exclusive of and subversive of the role assigned to the Byzantine Commonwealth. Icon-veneration was thus perceived as a substantial challenge to the religious ideology of the Byzantine religio-political establishment. In order to answer this challenge, we argue, it was natural for the Iconoclasts to go back to the origins of their worldview in order to reassert the divine character of the commonwealth.[18] This is why the "Imperial Theology" became a paradigm and reference for the Iconoclasts, and consequently an essential tool for us to contextualize an eighth-century debate in the political theology of the fourth century.

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[18] Barnard, "The Emperor Cult and the Origins of the Iconoclastic Controversy," 28. Our reconstruction of the Iconoclastic debate in reference to the "Imperial Theology" and the fourth century developments of church-empire relations has been partly inspired by that of Leslie W. Barnard.

On the other hand, the Iconodules insisted on the importance of icons on Christological grounds. They argued that denouncing icons would amount to compromising the continuing validity of the incarnation, insisting that denial of the sanctity of images is no different from denying the earthly experience of Christ. We propose a alternative reading of the Iconoclastic debate along these lines and try to demonstrate, within the legitimate boundaries of the available historical evidence, that the one-and-a-quarter-century-long debate (*ca.* 726-843) brought about a distinct refinement of the theological stands of both sides on central theological themes, including salvation, incarnation, salvation history, and Old and New Testament dispensations.

In conclusion, the available historical evidence reveals the equal importance and relevance of political and doctrinal factors in accounting for the dispute over images. The amount and the content of doctrinal treatises on icons and the scope of the political involvement throughout the conflict are witnesses to this fact. The same historical evidence also reveals that the political and religious discourses constituted an organic unity, while the concept of the Byzantine Commonwealth as the main agent of Christian salvation was the concrete realization of this unity of discourses. Therefore, to overemphasize either the political or doctrinal aspects of Iconoclasm would result inevitably in a reductionist explanation of the debate. On the other hand, failure to appreciate the organic unity linking the categories of religion and politics, especially by compartmentalizing and polarizing explanations such as religion versus politics or emperor versus the church, would also be anachronistic. Our study aims to avoid these methodological fallacies through a holistic, synthetic approach that takes both the

political and theological implications of the debate into consideration. By doing so, it also seeks to contribute to our understanding of the era.

The unfolding of our argument over the course of the ensuing chapters bridges two separate time periods, i.e., between the fourth century, when Christianity became the official religion of the empire and Eusebius structured his "Imperial Theology" to Christianize the Roman empire as well as establish the principles of church-empire relations, and the Iconoclastic period of the 8th and 9th centuries. The first two chapters elaborate on the Eusebian "Imperial Theology" and the principles of the church-empire relations within the religious and historical context of the fourth century, at which time the conversion of the Roman Empire posed new challenges to the Christian community.

We assume that the Eusebian soteriological paradigm that gave equally important roles to the *imperium* and the *ecclesia* in Christian salvation had been officially appropriated by the Byzantine religio-political establishment and that this paradigm had been maintained at least until the late sixth century when the Byzantine Empire entered a period of major decline that would continue until the beginning of the Iconoclastic debate in 726. The third chapter thus aims to elaborate on one of the major assumptions underlying our argument: Iconoclasm was, at least in part, the result of a historical background extending from the late sixth century until the Iconoclastic edict of Leo III in 726. As will be seen below, the period witnessed two major developments simultaneously: on the one hand, the Byzantine Empire went through a major military, social, and economic decline; on the other, icons became central objects of popular devotion, in both the private and public spheres of the Byzantine life. We thus consider this period as the immediate context of the debate and maintain that it had a significant

share in the evolution of the theological considerations that shaped the Iconoclastic and the Iconodule movements. Similarly, our analysis presupposes that the different political theologies and perceptions of icons of the opposing parties were also refined and related to each other against this historical backdrop.

The remaining four chapters deal with the doctrinal issues related to the making and using of images in Christian worship, while at the same time seeking to demonstrate the organic link between the theological first principles of the Iconoclastic and Iconodule parties that had been used to refute or support images and their respective political theologies. In the fourth chapter, the first Iconoclastic doctrine will be elaborated. This first phase of Iconoclasm emphasized the charge of idolatry on the basis of the biblical strictures against idols and the question of Christology was not raised at this point. The first Iconoclastic emperor, Leo III claimed his responsibility for the material and spiritual well-being of his subjects, and it was apparent that he took the iconoclastic measures according to this assumed double responsibility.

The fifth chapter is reserved for a leading Iconodule theologian, John of Damascus, who developed a full-fledged doctrinal argument for the defence of icons. Against the Iconoclastic charges of idolatry, John developed his defence on the basis of the incarnation, making it the main justification of making and venerating images. With John of Damascus, the center of the debate became Christology. The sixth chapter focuses on the Iconoclastic council of Hiereia (754 CE) which developed the Iconoclastic Christological arguments. Based on the assumptions of the Iconoclastic emperor Constantine V, this Christological argument successfully claimed the impossibility of defending images on Chalcedonian Christological grounds. Finally, the last chapter

pursues the further developments of Iconodule doctrine through the definition of the second council of Nicea (787 CE), and the theologies of the two prominent Iconodule theologians, the Patriarch Nicephorus (758-828 CE) and Theodore the Studite (759-826 CE). In this phase, the Iconodule theologians developed their arguments to refute the doctrine of the Iconoclastic council of Hiereia. The dissertation ends with a brief conclusion summing up the argument of the whole and highlighting the main discoveries of the inquiry.

General Methodological Assumptions

This inquiry started from one observation in relation to the empire-church relations during the Iconoclastic controversy: there existed a common pattern of relations between the clergy and the imperial office during the debate on images. Both Iconodule and Iconoclastic churchmen appealed to their imperial associates to secure endorsement of their doctrinal position as the official doctrine. This observation led us to a search for the types of theological arguments employed by churchmen to justify their use of political power. Curiously enough neither the sources of the period nor most of the modern scholarship of the debate provide us with a comprehensive treatment of the political theologies of the Iconodule and the Iconoclastic parties; and this is especially the case with the latter.

The Iconodule sources emphasize the political incentives of the Iconoclasts in an attempt to discredit the integrity and importance of the theological claims of their opponents.[19] It is necessary from a critical standpoint that we should take their respective apologetic orientations into consideration in reconstructing the debate. Moreover, the

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[19] See above, footnote 4.

practical pattern of this relationship between churchmen and their imperial associates was more or less the same for both parties. Both sides appealed to the imperial power to endorse their respective theological arguments as true doctrine.

A significant portion of modern scholarship of the debate tends to follow the Iconodule sources in their heavy emphasis upon the primarily political motivations of the Iconoclastic party; and in doing so there is a corresponding devaluing of the theological relevance of the Iconoclastic concerns.[20] Many even adopt *a priori* an essentially Iconodule orientation towards interpretation of the debate.[21] In such accounts of the debate, the purely theological and ecclesiastical concerns of the Iconodules tend to be underlined to the exclusion of their political motivations. Since the endorsement of both the Iconoclastic (in 726 and in 814) and the Iconodule (in 787 and in 843) positions was accompanied by imperial decrees, it is necessary at the outset to acknowledge that both parties should have assigned a similarly important role to political involvement in the debate. That is to say, the prospects of both theology and politics were equally important and relevant to both parties. It is a key consideration to our interpretation that the relevance of method of political theology with respect to both parties be established in order to achieve a well-founded understanding of the dynamics of the Iconoclastic controversy.

Owing perhaps to the above mentioned *a priori* critical assumptions—viz. the tendency to separate political from theological discourse, especially with reference to

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[20] See above, footnote 4 and 8.

[21] For example, Georgios Metallidis, "Theodore Studium against the Iconoclasts: the Argument of His Letters," *St Viladimir's Theological Quarterly* 46:2 (2002), 191-208; Theodore Sideris, "The Theological Position of the Iconophiles during the Iconoclastic Controversy," *St. Viladimir's Theological Quarterly* 17 (1973), 210-226; Ambrosios Giakalis, *Images of the Divine: The Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (Leiden: Brill, 1994); Leonide Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978).

accounts given of the Iconodule position—political theology has been significantly under-utilized in modern approaches to the Iconoclastic debate. The modern scholarly accounts which do deal with the political theology do so only to a degree, and almost exclusively in relation to defining the position of the Iconoclastic party. Very seldom do they touch upon the relevance of political theology in relation to the Iconodules.[22] The present study aims to redress this methodological imbalance, and offers the first comprehensive attempt to undertake a full comparative treatment of the political theologies of both the Iconoclastic and Iconoclastic parties in relation to their theological first principles.

In relation to the above mentioned shortcomings of the assumptions of much of modern scholarship in the study of this controversy, we give special attention to two major questions that have long been generally ignored: first, the importance, integrity, and consistency of the theological stand adopted by the Iconoclasts; and secondly, the intrinsic relevance of imperial politics to the defence of the Iconodule position. Taking no sides in this debate, we believe that a historian's task is to give a fair and impartial voice to the claims of both parties; for the true nature of the debate can only be disclosed by giving a thorough, fair and impartial treatment of the politico-theological stands of both parties. This being the case, our study's emphasis on the theological consistency of the Iconoclastic politico-theological arguments constitutes a significant revision of the received reading of the controversy. In order to redress the current critical imbalance that would seem to favour the theological integrity of the Iconodules' position, we have attempted as far as possible to present a full and impartial account of the Iconoclasts' central theological concerns; and we believe it is our main contribution to the modern

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[22] See above, footnote 14.

critical study of the debate in particular to render this kind of clear voice to the Iconoclastic position. A strong commitment to the principles of historical methodology demand that both the Iconoclastic and Iconodule theologies receive our full attention; and it is our duty as historians to render the voices of both the Iconoclastic and Iconodule theologians equally and evenly audible.

This approach may perhaps best be described as a "hermeneutics of sympathy", i.e. an attempt to penetrate the self-understanding of the contemporaries of the debate through their texts and as much as possible through their own declared categories. Rather than anachronistically reading our modern paradigms and partial assumptions into the debate, we seek to let both sides speak for themselves as much as possible. We mostly do this through extensive analyses of both the Iconoclastic and the Iconodule texts within their historical, social, doctrinal, religious, and polemical contexts. Our aim above all is to seek to understand the true nature of this controversy through a reconstruction of the Iconoclastic and Iconodule theological first principles that manifested themselves in their writings as well as in their actions.

The primary hypothesis underlying our approach is that these theological assumptions of both the Iconoclastic and Iconodule theologians were the main factor that determined the course of the controversy, and as such their reconstruction would give us the best possible historical picture of the controversy. We are therefore not primarily undertaking empirical history or social history, but nonetheless we employ the findings of such works as instruments to contextualize our reconstruction of the political theologies of both parties in relation to their respective theological first principles.

The principal theological texts of the Iconoclastic and Iconodule parties provide the most explicit statements of their respective assumptions and they give us rather secure bases to make reasonable evaluations of the Iconoclastic controversy. Our methodology and approach thus best conforms to the "history of ideas." We demonstrate our arguments through our detailed analyses of the primary theological texts of both parties in relation to their historical, theological, and polemical contexts. We choose our texts from the writings of the prominent representatives of both parties who were personally involved in the debate and also deliberations of the Iconoclastic and Iconodule councils.

The paucity of the Iconoclastic sources is a major factor in the imbalanced portrayal of their position. Almost all the available Iconoclastic sources came down to us through the writings of the Iconodules. The latter wrote the history of the debate from their victors' perspective and therefore there is a tremendous imbalance between the sources of the two sides. Moreover, the same Iconodule perspective is still dominant in many modern accounts of the debate.[23] Therefore, the aim of our thesis is to rectify this imbalance by giving a voice to the Iconoclastic politico-theological position through Eusebius's Imperial Theology.

In this regard, the relevance of Eusebius's theology is essential as his theological position was definitely one of the main references of the Iconoclasts as they referred him as the "acropolis" of their cause.[24] Eusebius's letter to the empress Constantia was one of the main patristic testimonies for the Iconoclastic Christological argument against

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[23] See above, footnote 21.
[24] Nicephorus, *Greater Apology for the Holy Images,* 12 (PG 100:561); *Refutation* 3.30 (PG 100:421); and *Shorter Apology for the Holy Images* 11 (PG 100:848). See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of The Christian Doctrine,* vol. 2. *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 101-102.

images, against which the Patriarch wrote a refutation.[25] There is thus a significant continuity between the theological first principles of Eusebian Imperial Theology and those of the later Iconoclastic political theology. These similarities will be established as we analyze the Iconoclastic theological arguments in detail.

Through an analysis of the Iconoclastic theology, we will argue that the overall soteriological stand of the Iconoclasts in defining the Byzantine Commonwealth as the main instrument of Christian salvation had the Eusebian Imperial Theology as its main politico-theological reference. Similarly, the overall soteriological stand of the Iconodules had the Christological definition of the Council of Chalcedon as their main theological reference. Therefore, the Eusebian Imperial Theology and the Chalcedonian Christological definition provide two key theological references in our attempt to contextualize the debate over images. By means of extended reference to these two authoritative theological foundations we seek to re-evaluate and reconstruct the politico-theological stands of both sides of the controversy. From a historical point of view, Eusebius's Imperial Theology and the historical circumstances of the reign of Constantine constitute foundations of the religio-political ideology of the later Christian Roman Empire. The Iconoclastic controversy represents a major crisis where the theological validity of this structure is debated. On our part, a detailed reconstruction of the Imperial Theology and Eusebian paradigm of church-empire relations provides a necessary prolegomenon to an inquiry into the full politico-theological implications of the Iconoclastic debate.[26] The primary hypothesis underlying our argument is that

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[25] For a detailed analysis of the letter see chapter VI, heading, *Eusebius of Caesarea on Images: Ad Constantiam.*

[26] Leslie W. Barnard had previously pointed out the importance of the fourth century in accounting for the politico-theological implications of the debate. See the footnote 16 above. For a more detailed justification

Eusebian Imperial Theology and the Chalcedonian Christological definition were used by both parties as key reference points in shaping their respective stands in political theology and in the question of images. Thus we utilize these two authoritative theological cornerstones to explicate the full theological implications of the debate over images. It is for this reason that we do not think it necessary to rehearse the whole intervening development of the political theology between Eusebius and 8th century; for similar reasons neither is it necessary to trace the entire post-Chalcedonian Christological developments.

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for the employment of Eusebius's Imperial Theology as a context for the Iconoclastic debate see Chapter 1, heading, *Eusebius of Caesarea and the Iconoclastic Debate.*

CHAPTER ONE

EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA'S "IMPERIAL THEOLOGY" AND THE

ICONOCLASTIC CONTROVERSY

Eusebius of Caesarea and the Iconoclastic Debate

It is well-known that both the Iconoclastic and the Iconodule parties had an intimate

relationship with the imperial authority during the controversy of the 8th and 9th centuries

[1] As one reads the historical narratives of the period, a certain pattern of relationship

between the clergymen of both parties, who strived for the vindication of their respective

doctrinal causes, and the emperors, who were expected to endorse one position as official

doctrine, emerges as a salient feature of the debate.[2] In this relationship, the clerical

schools of both sides of the issue acknowledged a divinely authorized responsibility on

the part of the emperor over theological matters, while the emperor, in turn, endorsed

their respective doctrinal positions by giving them legal, institutional force. The fact that

the emperors' official endorsement was essential in order that the Iconoclastic or the

Iconodule doctrine be recognized as the official orthodox position on the issue of images

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[1] For the most significant scholarly accounts of the Iconoclastic controversy, see Introduction, footnotes 8, 10, 11, and 14.

[2] For a general picture of the Iconoclastic Controversy consult the following: Milton V. Anastos, "Iconoclasm and Imperial Rule, 717-842," *The Cambridge Mediaeval History,* vol. 4, *The Byzantine Empire,* ed. J. M. Hussey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 61-104; Charles Joseph Hefele, "The Controversy about Images and the Seventh Ecumenical Synod," in *A History of the Councils of the Church: From the Original Sources* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1896), 5:260-400; E. J. Martin, , *A History of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (London: The Church Historical Society, 1930).

best reveals the assumed divine role of the emperor in theological matters. It is important to note that it was not only the clergymen who assumed such a role for the emperors in vindication of their doctrinal positions, but also the emperors themselves, who claimed this divine role as being ultimately responsible for both the material and spiritual well-being of their subjects.[3]

Emperors had enjoyed this elevated position in the Eastern Church since the first council of Nicea (325 CE), and, therefore, imperial involvement in doctrinal matters such as the question of images was by no means a new phenomenon.[4] However, due to the factors mentioned in the introduction, the political implications of the Iconoclastic controversy were particularly important. Due to the active involvement of the emperors as promoters of the Iconoclastic cause, the debate proved to be an occasion where the salvific role of the emperors, as well as politics in general, was debated alongside the doctrinal issues in connection with images.

To a modern mind that inclines to compartmentalize religion and politics, it is all the more interesting to observe that the churchmen of the Iconoclastic era utilized political power, on the one hand, to vindicate their respective doctrinal positions, and, on the other, to observe that the emperors made theologically justified claims of divine

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[3] The first Iconoclastic emperor, Leo III, considers himself responsible for the material and spiritual well-being of his people, see Leo III, *A Manual of Roman Law: The Ecloga: Published by the Emperors Leo III and Constantine V of Isauria,* translated with an introduction by E. H. Freshfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 66-70. For an elaboration of the theological connotations of the texts, see Chapter 4, heading "Documents of the First Iconoclastic Doctrines: Iambic Poems and the Ecloga."

[4] For a general picture of the tradition of church councils see Francis Dvornik, *The Ecumenical Councils* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1961), and "Emperors, Popes, and General Councils," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 6 (1951): 1-23.

authority over the issue of images, considering themselves equally responsible for the material and spiritual well-being of their subjects.[5]

We are thus justified in seeking to discover the foundations of the relationship between the clergymen and the emperors, and the theological principles that connected the religious and political discourses during the Iconoclastic controversy. In other words, we aim first to elaborate the main lines of the theological paradigm that connects the realms of politics and religion, and, then, to contextualize the debate over images in relation to this paradigm. In this way, we seek to clarify the types of theological meanings that the Iconoclastic or Iconodule churchmen gave to politics in the context of the debate over images. We contend that their different notions of theological first principles caused the Iconoclasts and the Iconodules to assign different meanings to political notions. The primary object of the thesis is thus to clarify the political theologies of the Iconoclastic and Iconodule parties in connection with their theological first principles, such as Christology, soteriology, and ecclesiology.

We propose that, as the first full-fledged Christian political theology to give the Roman Empire an essential and direct role in Christian salvation, Eusebius of Caesarea's "Imperial Theology" can be used as a key reference to contextualize the debate over images. The Eusebian paradigm is also essential to prove that the political and doctrinal aspects of the Iconoclastic controversy are interconnected within an overall theological outlook.

Despite the four hundred years that separated the Constantinian era from the Iconoclastic controversy, both periods were marked by a substantial evaluation of the role

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[5] For elaboration of such claims see chapters 4 and 6.

of the empire in Christian salvation.[6] In this regard, "Imperial Theology" represented the recognition of the Roman Empire as an essential medium of Christian salvation. In the light of this recognition, it also contributed to the establishment of the principles of church-empire relations as linking two divinely guided, interdependent and cooperative institutions providing Christians with material and spiritual salvation. The Iconoclastic era, on the other hand, represented a substantial re-evaluation of the assumed divine role of the Roman Empire as the vessel of salvation, in the face of grave difficulties that had been facing the Byzantine Empire for more than a century.

The theological first principles that gave shape to Eusebius of Caesarea's political theology, especially his views on Christology, and those that shaped the theologies of the Iconoclasts, have some significant similarities.[7] Most importantly, both Eusebius and the Iconoclasts laid emphasis on a logos-Christology where Christ is primarily defined as the principle of a universal order. The "Imperial Theology" defined the Christian commonwealth, composed of both the empire and the church, as the main vessel of salvation. This soteriological paradigm implied a Christology that stressed the divinity of Christ, and seemed to overlook the role and importance of his humanity in Christian salvation. The Christological developments that culminated in the council of Chalcedon (451 CE), however, laid emphasis on the 'suffering Christ.' By emphasizing the unity of the divine and human natures in the incarnation as a key to Christian salvation, the orthodox dyophysite Christology pointed to the unbalanced position of the logos-Christology.

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[6] For the comparison of the historical conditions of the two periods see chapters 1 and 3 respectively.

[7] See chapter 6.

We may contend, then, that the Chalcedonian Christological formula posed a challenge to the "Imperial Theology," which had been appropriated by the religio-political establishment as the theoretical foundation of church-empire relations. That the Christology espoused by Eusebius's "Imperial Theology" and the Iconoclasts led to an imbalance by stressing the transcendent divinity as *theologia* and downplaying the dispensation as *oikonomia,* was the main argument of the Iconodules, who believed that the incarnation was the only key to Christian salvation. Iconodules thus based their arguments on their interpretation of the Chalcedonian Christology. In the following chapters, then, we will elaborate the relationship between the different Christologies of the two parties and their political theologies associated with these Christological views.

Interestingly, Eusebius's Christological views came to the fore during the controversy in relation to one of his letters, which he wrote to the empress Constantia on the issue of images. The letter, which gave direct support to the Iconoclastic Christological argument, was included in the Iconoclastic *florilegium* of the council of Hiereia (754 CE).[8] Eusebius's argument was so important that the Iconodule patriarch Nicephorus had to write a special treatise to refute it.[9] According to the patriarch, the continuity between Eusebius's Christological views and those of the Iconoclasts was so immediate that he marked Eusebius as the main reference and the forefather of the

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[8] For the text of the letter see Daniel J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-Century Iconoclasm: An Annotated translation of the Sixth Session of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicea, 787), containing the Definition of the Council of Constantinople (754) and its refutation and the Definition of the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 313A, B, C, D.

[9] For a discussion and summary of the Patriarch Nicephorus's *Contra Eusebium,* see Paul J. Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople: Ecclesiastical Policy and Image Worship in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 173-78; and also Patrick O'Connell, *The Ecclesiology of St. Nicephorus I (758-828): Patriarch of Constantine* (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalum, 1972), 60-1.

'Iconoclastic heresy.' Nicephorus argued that the root cause of the flawed doctrine of Iconoclasm was Eusebius's Arianism.[10]

The Arianism of Eusebius is a much debated issue in modern scholarship, and whether he can be truly labelled an Arian does not directly interest us here.[11] However, Eusebius was definitely a leading figure among the Eastern bishops of the fourth century whose Trinitarian doctrine was influenced by Origen.[12] In explaining the relation between the Father and the Son, Eusebius's prevailing concern is cosmological rather than soteriological. He understands the Word as God's intermediary for creating and governing the universe. According to Eusebius, the existence of such a mediatory principle is essential, for the contingent order cannot stand direct contact with the transcendent Father, the invisible Monad who begot the Word as a distinct hypostasis from Himself before all ages.[13] Eusebius thus subordinates the Son to the Father. Even though Eusebius accepted and signed the Nicene creed (325 CE), his position always remained closer to the Arian party. Perhaps Eusebius was not Arian in the sense of his denial of Christ's full divinity alongside the Father, but the overriding cosmological concern in his Christology and his subordinationist doctrine of the Trinity clearly account for his "Imperial Theology" as well as his Iconoclastic interpretation of the Chalcedonian Christology.

Basing themselves on the Chalcedonian dyophysite Christology, the Iconodules underlined the humanity of Christ, making the incarnation the backbone of their

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[10] O'Connell, *The Ecclesiology of St. Nicephorus,* 60.

[11] For an evaluation of Eusebius's Arianism consult, Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition,* 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2001), 171-74.

[12] J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines,* 2nd ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1960), 223-4.

[13] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines,* 225.

soteriology. The Iconoclasts, on the other hand, developing their own interpretation of the Chalcedonian definition, argued that making and venerating images contradict the orthodox principles of Christology. Therefore, the council of Chalcedon became the main reference of the Christological dimension of the conflict.

In conclusion, we argue that Eusebius's "Imperial Theology" and the council of Chalcedon constituted the two main backdrops against which the Iconoclastic and the Iconodule parties shaped their respective doctrinal stands. In other words, the opposing parties' political theologies and principles of church-empire relations can be seen as two different stands against the Eusebian project of a Christian commonwealth. On the other hand, the theological first principles that shaped their respective stands on images and their corresponding political theologies can be contextualized as two different interpretations of Chalcedonian orthodoxy. In the first two chapters, therefore, we will undertake a reconstruction of Eusebius's "Imperial Theology" and its relationship to church-empire relations on the basis of his principal writings and with reference to historical developments of the early fourth century, when the emperor Constantine I (272-337 CE) initiated the process of "Christianization" of the empire.

The Challenge of the Constantinian Era and Eusebius of Caesarea's Tricennial Orations

As one of the greatest emperors in the entire history of the Roman Empire, Constantine the Great left an outstanding legacy that has lasted up to the present.[14] By far the most important aspect of his legacy was his positive approach to the Christian Church. Beginning with the edict of Milan (313 CE), where, for the first time, Christianity was

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[14] Charles M. Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire: Roman Imperial Biographies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 280-1.

officially recognized as a *religio licita*, Constantine deliberately promoted Christianity

until his death in 337. His reign thus marked the inauguration of a process through which

Christianity gradually became the official religion of the empire.

After three centuries of being a marginalized and often persecuted minority,

Christians were to become the members of a privileged cult, for Constantine not only

recognized Christianity as a legitimate religion, but also, and more importantly, actively

promoted the church in many ways. During his reign, Constantine frequently intervened

in the church's internal conflicts, such as the Donatist and Arian controversies with a

view of securing the doctrinal unity of the church. He built many cathedrals in almost

every urban center of his empire. He also drew up some important legislation in favour of

the Church. For instance, he granted Christian clergymen service exemptions and

monetary subventions, and furthermore exempted them from all taxation. Constantine

aimed to give a high-ranking social status to bishops; he even granted them some

judiciary functions.[15] As a result of these regulations, churches all around the Roman

Empire became highly privileged institutions with multiple functions and wealthy

budgets.

These were some prominent features of Constantine's policy to promote

Christianity. His personal motivation in supporting the church and his general religious

policy are much debated issues among the historians of the period.[16] For the purpose of

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[15] Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire,* 167-9.

[16] For a concise overview of modern interpretations of Constantine see Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire,* 282-4. Some prominent examples of modern scholarly work on Constantine: Jacob Burkhardt, *Die Zeit Constantins des Grossen,* (Basel, 1853; repr. Bern: Hallwag, [1950]); transl. M. Hadas as *The Age of Constantine the Great* (New York: Pantheon Books), 1949; André Piganiol, *L'empereur Constantin,* (Paris, 1932); Norman H. Baynes, *Constantine the Great and the Christian Church* (London: H. Milford, 1929); A. H. M. Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* (London: English Universities Press, 1949); Ramsey MacMullen, *Constantine* (London and New York: Croom Helm, 1987).

our argument, we are interested in theological perspectives on the part of the clerics on the issue of imperial support rather than Constantine's own commitments. However, it seems certain that his public support for the church reveals that he had deliberately chosen Christianity as the new official religion of the Roman Empire.

The impact of such a dramatic change of status in the church might be better understood when we realize that it came right after the 'great persecution' (303-13 CE), which was the most wide-spread and comprehensive persecution Christians had faced so far.[17] Such a rapid, comprehensive, and dramatic change in her social, legal, and financial status in a couple of decades, however, posed some crucial challenges to the church. In the face of the Christianization of the world's largest empire, Christians had to define the realm of politics in relation to the church and to their theological first principles. The reality of an intimate engagement with the Roman Empire required a new ecclesiology on the part of the church, which had been so far recruiting her members on the basis of their commitments of faith. Such an ecclesiology would necessarily depend on a theological re-evaluation of the Roman Empire and its relation to the church. In short, the developments of the Constantinian era obliged Christians to create a political theology that would accommodate the Roman Empire and the political realm within the Christian discourse. Such a political theology was also necessary to establish the principles of church-empire relations.

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[17] Persecution and martyrdom are among the most prominent features of the early church history. Some prominent scholarly accounts of the issue are the following: G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, "Persecution and Martyrdom," in Michael Whitby and Joseph Streeter (eds.), *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 35-251; G. W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Graeme Clarke, "Third-century Christianity," *Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd edition, vol. 12, *The Crisis of the Empire A. D. 193-337* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 616-71; W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of Conflict From the Maccabees to Donatus* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1967); N. H. Baynes, "The Great Persecution," *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 12, *The Imperial Crisis and Recovery, A.D. 193-324* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), 646-677, 789-795.

As the most articulate ecclesiastical witness of the Constantinian era, Eusebius took a highly positive stand on all of these developments as he welcomed the Christianization of the empire in his writings. In fact, as the chronicler of the Constantinian era, Eusebius recorded this drastic transition, especially in books 8 through 10 of his *Church History*, in the *Life of Constantine*, and in the *Tricennial Orations*.[18] So passionate was his support for the first Christian emperor that Eusebius was compared to Vergil, who had loudly praised the Emperor Augustus' achievements: "But if Constantine lacked a Vergil to proclaim his virtues, he had at least had his Eusebius."[19] One of the most prolific writers of his era, Eusebius's literary output covered a vast range: history, interpretation of Scripture, geography, philosophy, biography, and apology, as well as panegyric.[20] In the first two chapters, we will examine the convictions of a leading churchman that led him to regard the emperor as a *theologically* justified authority over both civil and ecclesiastical matters. This theological justification also established the Roman Empire as a primary agent of salvation next to the church, and thus prepared the necessary groundwork for subsequent church-empire relations. Eusebius's main concern was thus to establish a Christian political theology that gave a theological justification for the Christian Roman Empire. Since the Roman polity was one of the main aspects of the

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[18] Eusebius, "Church History, VIII-X," "The Life of Constantine," and "Oration in Praise of Constantine," trans. E. C. Richardson, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1997, repr. of 1890 ed.): 323-341, 357-386, 481-560, 581-610.

[19] Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 183.

[20] For a general overview of Eusebius's works see A. Louth, "Eusebius and the Birth of Church History," *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature,* F. Young, L. Ayres, and A. Louth (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 266-74; and also Hubertus R. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction,* trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 223-35; in addition, for a broad and sweeping appraisal of Eusebius's literary output see Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 106-207.

Greco-Roman milieu that surrounded early Christians, the problem addressed by the "Imperial Theology" was part and parcel of the perennial issue of Christianity's encounter with Greco-Roman culture. In this regard, it would be appropriate to see the encounter between Roman politics and Christianity as another step towards the Christianization of the Greco-Roman world.

From the very beginning, Christianity preached its message of universal salvation all around the Mediterranean littoral, including Asia Minor and Syria, an area ruled mostly by the Roman Empire. Prior to the Constantinian era, Christians formed a separate society based on commitments of faith. A community of believers, the church was herself a political organization surrounded by the pagan Greco-Roman culture.[21] The church faced the challenges of Greco-Roman paganism and culture in the process of her expansion throughout the empire, and her struggle for accommodation into the larger society. In this context, the church had to survive among many religious cults and their various beliefs and practices. She had to defend the veracity and superiority of her doctrines and practices against those other cults. Similarly, the church had to reckon with Greek philosophy and literature to establish the veracity and superiority of her claims. In order to justify the truthfulness of her message and lifestyle, the church developed several philosophical and rhetorical arguments. In this sense, prior to the fourth century, the church had already had a considerable experience in accounting for the religious, philosophical, and political problems of the Greco-Roman world.[22]

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[21] Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture,* 219.

[22] For the Church's confrontation with the Greco-Roman thought in the second and third centuries see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrines,* vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1971), 27-41.

Seen in this context, Eusebius's attempt to account for the Roman political discourse was not completely novel since he developed his political theology following in the footsteps of the previous church fathers. As a matter of fact, the keynote of Eusebius's attempt to give a Christian principle to Roman political discourse was the *Logos* of Christ. This was a concept developed by earlier prominent church fathers such as Justin Martyr (d. ca. 165), Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215), and Origen (ca. 185-254), whose theologies incorporated the best features of the Greco-Roman culture as Christian, on the basis of the Christian *Logos*, which was equated with Christ.[23]

Among his vast literary output, the *Tricennial Orations*—comprised by the *Laudibus Constantini (LC)* and *De Sepulchro Christi (SC)*—constitute an exposition of Eusebius's "Imperial Theology" and his argument for positive church-empire relations. Eusebius's conviction concerning the indispensable role of the Roman Empire for the universal salvation of humanity is the backbone of his entire argument.[24] A reading of the

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[23] A detailed comparison between the three church fathers' use of the *Logos* of Christ to account for the Greek philosophy and literature and Eusebius's use of the concept to account for Roman political discourse will be made below. For a brilliant interpretation of the three church fathers' role in the earliest encounter between the classical tradition and Christian thought see Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition: Studies in Justin, Clement and Origen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966).

[24] In his *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius's Tricennial Orations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 30-2, H.A. Drake discusses the question of unity of the *LC*. Some facts, such as that the present *LC* is too long to be delivered as an oration and that many of the manuscripts either contain only a part of the *LC* or assign a second title to its second half, along with critical differences in subject, locale, terms of address, and style, led some scholars, including T. D. Barnes (see his article: "Two Speeches by Eusebius" in his *Early Christianity and the Roman Empire* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984): 341-345), to distinguish two separate orations: Chapters 1 to 10 were delivered in Constantine's palace, in his presence, on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of his rule and named as *Laudibis Constantini (LC)*; chapters 11 to 18 constitute an another oration which Eusebius delivered during the jubilee year at the dedication of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in September 335 and named *De Sepulchro Christi (SC)*. Having reviewed the argument which is elaborated in detail in a whole chapter (pp. 30-45), we consider the evidence to be overwhelming and agree with the conclusion that they are two separate orations on and for two different occasions, addressed to two different audiences. According to Drake's analysis, The *LC* is addressed to Constantine and his entourage and naturally avoids specifically Christian terminology; it reads like an encomium, while the *SC* seems to be addressed to a Christian audience, probably clergy, and includes many issues of Christian theology, using Christian terminology; it reads like a sermon in the form of a diatribe; most probably the *SC* was delivered in the absence of the

Laudibus Constantini and the *Sepulcro Christi* reveals that they are two separate orations with two separate occasions and audiences. Chapters 1 to 10 constitute the oration in praise of Constantine (*LC*), which was read by Eusebius on the occasion of the celebrations of the thirtieth anniversary of the emperor's rule in his palace in Constantinople. In the prologue, the orator outlines the address as follows:

> Let the oracles of learned men…teach us in these ceremonies about sovereignty itself, about the Highest Sovereign and the holy escort around the Ruler of All, of the model sovereign before us and the counterfeit variety, and of the consequences that follow upon each (*LC*, Pr., 5).

This plan is fulfilled in the first ten chapters. Eusebius defines God the Supreme Sovereign in kingly terms and his eternal *Logos* as the co-ruler of the universe and the medium between the Supreme Sovereign and the cosmos (chapter 1); the *Logos* and the emperor Constantine are portrayed as sharing comparable concerns and qualities in relation to their kingdoms (chapters 2 and 4); monarchy is defined as the best form of human government because it imitates the celestial kingdom and constitutes the political counterpart, as it were, of monotheism (chapter 3); in the rest of the oration Constantine's struggles against the enemies of monotheism are praised in many different ways with an ongoing emphasis on the divine support he receives from the Supreme Ruler through the *Logos*. The first ten chapters form an organized and detailed exposition of the orator's political philosophy, the 'Imperial Theology.' Following this exposition, in chapter 11, he outlines another:

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emperor himself, which is significant. However, as the argument proceeds, most likely Eusebius himself or a later editor seems to have considered these two separate orations to be thematically related and thus combined them into a unity, probably with an addition of a prologue and conclusion. Therefore, Drake refers to chapters 1-10 as *LC,* and to chapters 11-18 as *SC,* and we will follow him in this manner. We will also use his translation throughout.

Fully persuaded, O greatest of sovereigns, that these things are dearest and pleasing to you, my present account wishes to make known to all the reasons and the motives for your devout deeds. I pray that I may be a kind of interpreter of your intentions and become the reporter of your devout soul, in order to teach all that it is necessary and proper that everyone be taught in whom a desire exists to learn the principles of the power of our Savior God, for which He who long ago pre-existed and had charge of the universe at length came down to us from heaven, assumed a human nature, and underwent death. Of His subsequent immortal life and Resurrection from the dead, I shall provide not only the causes, but also a logical exposition and the enlightening lessons that are necessary for those who even now have need of them (*SC*, XI, 7).

As a sequel to the oration, *De Sepulchro Christi* thus carries out the elaboration of this plan in the form of a sermon, using specifically Christian terminology. It is quite clear that Eusebius delivered the *Sepulchro Christi* to a Christian audience, probably largely composed of clergymen, for the content of the oracle is an exposition of the principles of Christian doctrine such as God, the *Logos*, incarnation, and resurrection, in such a way as to culminate in the unity of this doctrine with the empire of Constantine.[25]

In the first two chapters of our thesis, we will propose a reading of the orations as two distinct expositions of the same argument, i.e., that the time has come for the unity of the church and the empire to provide humanity with a permanent peace, prosperity, and salvation.[26] A salvation-historical perspective shapes both orations: as for the *Laudibus Constantini*, Eusebius argues that the progress in the political history of mankind culminated in a type of monarchy that was grounded on a principle of monotheism as the best solution to the political problems of mankind;[27] as for the *Sepulchro Christi*, on the other hand, prophetic history culminated in cooperation between the Roman Empire and

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[25] Drake, *In Praise of Constantine*, 33-34, 38-40.

[26] Chapter XVI of the *Sepulchro Christi* provides the most explicit statement of this argument. In his *Christian Attitudes Towards the Emperor in the Fourth Century: Especially Shown in Addresses to the Emperor* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 42, K. M. Setton proposes a similar reading for *Vita Constantini: "The Life of Constantine* is clearly an effort to convince the Roman world that the time had come for rule by a Christian emperor."

[27] Eusebius, *Laudibus Constantini*, III.

the church.[28] From the addressees' point of view, the *Laudibus Constantini* seems to attempt to persuade the Emperor and his entourage as well as the educated Roman elite that the permanent peace and well-being of humanity, which had been longed for throughout the political history of mankind is dependent on a cooperation between the empire and the church and such cooperating is therefore historically necessary. The *Sepulchro Christi*'s goal, on the other hand, is to persuade the bishops that the unity of church and empire is the natural corollary of prophetical history and, therefore, is a soteriological necessity. Common to both orations is a dominant theological perspective: the economy of divine providence led the historical progress of humanity into this ripeness for unity between the Christian Church and the Roman Empire so that the two cooperative institutions procure peace and salvation for humanity on a universal scale.

To summarize, Eusebius argues that, under the control of divine providence, prophetic and political experiences of mankind had ripened to a point where, the cooperation and symbiosis of the two—the church and the Roman Empire—became necessary in order to produce the benefits of peace, prosperity, and salvation for humankind.[29] Through the same salvation-historical perspective, Eusebius claims that prophetic and political experiences of human civilization had always been parallel, for they shared the same beginning point and source as well as the same destination.

...At the same time, one empire also flowered everywhere, the Roman, and the eternally implacable and irreconcilable enmity of nations was completely resolved. And as the knowledge of One God was imparted to all men and one manner of piety, the salutary teaching of Christ, in the same way at one and the same time a single sovereign arose for the entire Roman Empire and a deep peace took hold of the totality. Together, at the same critical moment, as if from a single divine will, two beneficial shoots were produced for mankind: the empire of the Romans and the teachings of true worship (*SC*, XVI, 4).

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[28] Eusebius, *Sepulchro Christi*, XVI.

[29] *Sepulchro Christi*, XVI.

Chapter XVI of the *Sepulchro Christi* can be seen as a junction point of the two orations where the orator joins the prophetic and political discourses to the same effect. In this way, Eusebius's argument develops along a double-line. Although one trajectory addresses the concerns of the emperor and his entourage, and the other the church, both lead to the same conclusion, namely, the engagement and symbiosis of the church and the empire are pre-destined by divine will as the culmination of salvation history, and, at the same time, constitute a natural corollary of the development of human civilization.

Eusebius of Caesarea's Imperial Theology

The first chapters of the *Laudibus Constantini* make some essential definitions of "sovereignty itself, the highest sovereign and the holy escort around the ruler of all, of the model sovereign before us and the counterfeit variety, and of the consequences that follow upon each" (*LC*, Prologue, 5). The first ten chapters of the oration are a detailed and organized unfolding of this plan. It is a political philosophy from the perspective of a Christian and, at the same time, a theology of history from the perspective of a Roman citizen. N. H. Baynes characterizes it thus: "Here for the first time is clearly stated the political philosophy of the Christian empire, that philosophy of the State which was consistently maintained throughout the millennium of Byzantine absolutism".[30] Eric Peterson describes the same model as a type of 'political theology'[31] while Claudia Rapp

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[30] N. H. Baynes, "Eusebius and the Christian Empire," in *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London: Athlone Press, 1955), 168.

[31] Edward F. Cranz, "Kingdom and Polity in Eusebius of Caesarea," *Harvard Theological Review* 45 (1952): 47.

prefers to call it 'imperial theology.'[32] We prefer to use the last term, for the basic

principle of this political philosophy is the Eusebian definition of Godhead as an

'imperium' (*basileia*) where God is a sovereign and all other spiritual beings are subjects

who constantly offer praise to Him as an expression of their obedience:

...And I mean by "Supreme Sovereign" the One who is truly supreme; this one...is the One who is Above the Universe, the Highest of All, the Greatest, the Supreme Being, whose kingdom's throne is the vault of the heavens above, while the earth is footstool for His feet [Isa. 66:1; cf. Acts 7:49]...Him celestial armies encircle and supernatural powers attend, acknowledging Him their master, lord, and sovereign. The infinite number of angels, the company of archangels and choruses of holy spirits gaze upon His gleaming presence as if drawing nourishment from ever-flowing springs of light. All light, even the divine and intellectual category of incorporeal lights allotted the region above heaven, celebrate the Supreme Sovereign with the highest and most God-befitting hymns. But the great heaven that lies between has been drawn as a dark curtain, shutting off those outside from those within the royal halls. And about this like torchbearers at the palace doors circle the sun and moon and heavenly lamps, glorifying the Sovereign who is Above the Universe and by His will and word hanging out for those allotted the darkness beyond the land of heaven inextinguishable lamps of light...Does not even the entire order of the world admit Him its master, having revealed in the vegetable and animal life that issues from it that it is subject to the will of the Higher Power?...Him, the Supreme Sovereign, the entire cosmos itself rhapsodizes (*LC,* I, 1-2, 4-5).

From the perspective of political philosophy, the above description of the divine monarch

as the supreme ruler of the cosmos is an application of Hellenistic royal theories to the

Christian God. Scholars have shown that the political theorists of the Hellenistic period

developed the concept of the monarch as the imitator of a supreme God who maintains

harmony amongst the elements of the universe.[33] We do not intend to undertake a full

examination of these Hellenistic influences on the text. The orator seems to have

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[32] Claudia Rapp. "Imperial Theology in the Making: Eusebius of Caesarea on Constantine as 'bishop'," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 49.2 (1998): 685-95.

[33] For the Hellenistic ideology of kingship see John Ma, "Kings," *A Companion to the Hellenistic World,* ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003): 177-195; Angelos Chaniotis, "The Divinity of Hellenistic Rulers," *A Companion to the Hellenistic World,* ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003): 431-445. Erwin R. Goodenough wrote an important article about the Hellenistic theories of kingship in 1928: "The Political Philosophy of Hellenistic Kingship," *Yale Classical Studies,* ed. Austin M. Harmon (New Haven: Yale University Press: 1928), 55-102. This study inspired N. H. Baynes to write his article on Eusebius's political theory in relation to its resemblance to the Hellenistic Theories of kingship which was published in 1933: "Eusebius and the Christian Empire" in his *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays,* 168-172.

compiled the common-stock notions of Hellenistic political philosophy into a coherent unit, and, as such, this is an undertaking that does not deserve notice for its originality.[34] What is however remarkable in this effort is Eusebius's radical approach in ascribing a theological principle to the problem of politics. This principle defined the Christian God as a sovereign, a cosmic king whose relation with the rest of the universe was then explained in terms of a ruler-subject relationship. Having done so, Eusebius actually incorporates the realm of politics into Christian discourse. In other words, imperial politics is vested with a divine characteristic through its identification with the divine *imperium*. Eusebius thus initiated the process of Christianization of the political discourse in the same way as Justin Martyr had initiated the Christianization of philosophical discourse in the second century. As a matter of fact, Justin had similarly ascribed a theological principle (Logos/Christ) to the philosophical discourse.[35] The absolute power of the Supreme Sovereign over the entire cosmos—both celestial and terrestrial—is, at the same time, the cause of their harmony and peace. For since "all creatures acknowledge Him as their sole and great Lord and Master", they all offer due praises without any dissension against this absolute sovereign. Even the emperor is no exception:

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[34] Scholars have paid enough attention to the indebtedness of Eusebius to Hellenistic theories which were in his day common stock among the political thinkers. We can quote here D. M. Nicol as an expression of a scholarly consensus: "The theorists of the day, like Eusebius and Themistius were able to see the fact that there was a common ground in the Hellenistic theories of kingship where Christians and pagans could meet. Themistius regarded earthly monarchy as a copy of the kingship of Zeus, the supreme emperor *(Basileus)*. The kingdom of this world would be a reflection, a replica of that higher model. The king must possess and display a whole catalogue of virtues. Such notions were elaborated most fully by the apologists of the monarchs of the Hellenistic kingdoms in the third and second centuries BC who were pleased to be reassured of their divinity as gods among men. These theories were part of the stock in trade of Greek political thinkers by the time of Constantine. Eusebius neatly accommodated them to the new phenomenon of a Christian Roman Empire with a Christian monarch..." from "Byzantine Political Thought" in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought (c.350-1450)*, ed. J.H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 51.

[35] See Justin Martyr, *Second Apology,* 10, 13.

This one, the Supreme Sovereign, our triumphant sovereign himself praises to us, having fully perceived in Him the cause of his empire; Him the God-loving Caesars, heirs to their father's learning, admit to be the source of all benefits; Him the hosts of the army, the multitudinous peoples in cities and countrysides, the rulers of the lands in council worship, instructed by the great savior teacher; yes, even the entire species of mankind in general, people of every race, shape, and tongue, all in common alike individually, though divided in their opinions on other matters, agree on this alone, calling on the One and Only God with an inbred logic, a self-taught and self-learned knowledge (*LC*, I, 3).

The divine imperium is described as the principle of cohesion of the entire cosmos—both celestial and terrestrial. Constantine's recognition of God as the cause of his empire and his sons' admission of God as the sole source of all benefits were meant to establish the Christian God as the sole divine principle of the empire. The divine *imperium* was thus rendered the ultimate reference of the earthly Roman Empire as well as its cause, model, and origin. As such, the divine *imperium* is recognized as the Christian theological principle of the political realm.

This principle is, at the same time, the source of a universal cohesion and solidarity among the entire species of mankind. The Stoic natural theology of *logos* is identified with the Christian God and presented as the common ground on which all humankind can be of the same mind, "agree on this alone, calling on the One and Only God with an inbred logic, a self-taught and self-learned knowledge."[36] In other words, Christian monotheism is the new force of solidarity behind the universal empire of Rome. Eusebius makes a considerable claim here by saying that Christianity is the exact principle of universal solidarity, which political philosophers had been looking for since Alexander the Great established his multi-cultural world empire.[37] Eusebius thus argues that faith in universal Christian monotheism is the only principle of cultural solidarity that could provide the necessary integrity for an empire, which so far had only pretended to be a

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[36] *Laudibus Constantini,* I, 3.

[37] Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture,* 185.

universal political system. Polytheist Roman religion, argues the orator, proved to be inadequate as a principle of solidarity among the multi-ethnic peoples of the universal Roman Empire.[38]

In short, Eusebius of Caesarea's political philosophy is an "Imperial Theology" for the following reasons: 1) it establishes the Christian God as the absolute monarch of the entire cosmos—terrestrial and celestial; 2) the relationship between this absolute monarch and the cosmos is considered as a ruler-subject relation; 3) God's celestial kingdom is the main reference and model of the Christian Roman Empire.

That the Christian Roman Empire takes the heavenly kingdom as its model and, in this way, becomes a replica, a *mimesis* of the Godly polity, is perhaps the most crucial principle of Eusebian political theory. Eusebius presupposes a Platonic ontology as he links the transcendent heavenly realm with the immediate earthly Roman Empire through the notion of *mimesis*. To build a coherent philosophical construction, Eusebius had to address the perennial problem of the relation between the transcendent divine and the immediate worldly empire. Therefore, the orator establishes the Christian *Logos* as the mediating principle between the two realms:

Him He who is above all, before all, and after all, His Pre-Existing and Only-Begotten Logos, yes, the great high priest of the great God, older than all time and all ages, dedicated first and foremost to the glory of His Father, petitions for the salvation of everyone, distinguished with first rank of the universe, but second to rule in the paternal kingdom. For He was the very light beyond the universe, which plays around the Father, which mediates and separates the eternal and ungenerated Form from created existence, the light which gushes forth from the ceaseless and eternal divinity above and proceeds out over super-celestial land, shining over everything within heaven with rays of wisdom brighter than the sun. And this selfsame One would be the Governor of this entire cosmos, the One who is over all, through all, and in all, visible and invisible, the all-pervasive Logos of God, from whom and through whom bearing the image of the higher kingdom, the sovereign dear to God, in imitation of the Higher Power, directs the helm and sets straight all things on earth (*LC*, I, 6).

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[38] Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture,* 185.

The Supreme Sovereign, the *Logos* and the emperor are the three essential principles in Eusebius's "Imperial Theology". These three are subordinated vertically and since the Supreme Sovereign is invisible and impassable by definition, the necessary connection between the Supreme Sovereign and the emperor is made by the eternal *Logos* which "mediates and separates the eternal and ungenerated Form from created existence." According to Eusebius, the Christian emperor's due relationship with the *Logos* gives immediate access to the knowledge of the heavenly kingdom and, in this way, it becomes possible for the emperor to turn his earthly empire to a true replica of the heavenly polity. We may contend that Eusebius's positive attitude towards politics in general and the Roman Empire in particular as instruments of salvation derives from this accessibility of the heavenly kingdom through the *Logos*. As a matter of fact, the relationship of the emperor with the *Logos* provides the empire with the possibility of realizing the heavenly kingdom here on earth. Therefore, Eusebius expends great effort to describe the emperor and the *Logos* in similar terms, making the former one of the key elements of his theory.

There are two important roles of the *Logos* beside his mediatorial position. Both imply *Logos'* subordination to the Supreme Sovereign and thus suggest clear Arian overtones in their Christology. First, he is "the great high priest of the great God" who "petitions for the salvation of everyone." Eusebius modifies the Old Testament concept of high priest who petitions in the temple for the salvation of Israel in order to expand this service to benefit all of humanity, which then becomes the "new Israel."[39] Secondly, he is "the governor of this entire cosmos" who "distinguished with first rank of the universe, but second to rule in the paternal kingdom." Thus the *Logos* is not the Supreme

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[39] *Laudibus Constantini,* I, 6.

Sovereign, but has a subordinate position as the co-ruler or governor of the entire cosmos. There is a clear implication of the Old Testament priest-king model in this description, which recalls the example of Moses who held both priestly and kingly offices as the head of Israel.[40] In this context, it might be surmised that the community of Israel becomes synonymous with the whole of humanity, and, through their respective claims to universality, the church and the Roman Empire are united to realize this new and true Israel.

Eusebius appropriates a full-fledged theory of the *Logos*, which is equated with Christ, in order to establish a Christian principle for the realm of Roman politics:

> But how came it to man to perceive these things? Who brought them to human hearing? How can matters that are not of flesh and the body be elucidated by a tongue of flesh? Who has seen the Invisible Sovereign and beheld these powers in Him? By physical senses we comprehend kindred elements and compounds made of these, but no one ever has prided himself on having seen the invisible, transcendent kingdom with mortal eyes, nor has human nature comprehended Wisdom in its own beauty....So there had to be a medium for these things, the one, all-pervading Logos of God, the Father of the rational and intellectual faculty in men, alone endowed with the Father's divinity, who channels the paternal emanations into His own progeny. Hence the natural instinctive reasoning powers in all men, alike Greek and barbarian; hence the concepts of Reason and Wisdom; hence the seeds of Prudence and Justice; hence apprehension of skills; hence knowledge of Virtue and the sweet name of Wisdom, and noble passion for the training of philosophy; hence knowledge of all goodness and beauty; hence the ability to conceive of God Himself, and a life worthy of God's service; hence men's regal force and irresistible sway over everything on earth (*LC,* IV, 1-2).

Christian use of the theory of the *Logos* has a long history prior to Eusebius. We first encounter the concept in the Gospel of John. In the prologue to John's gospel (John 1:1-18), the word (*Logos*) is described as God's self-revelation, His creating principle. He is

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[40] See Claudia Rapp, "Imperial Theology in the Making", 689: "Eusebius clearly pursued a deliberate literary strategy of evoking Moses as the Old Testament *examplum* which Constantine imitates in every turning-point of his imperial career: his flight to Britain where he was proclaimed emperor, his victory over Maxentius, his defeat of Licinius, and the last campaign of his life, against Persia. In fact, Eusebius's overall portrayal of Constantine is strongly reminiscent of Moses even when concrete allusions are lacking. Constantine is king and legislator, a high priest inasmuch as he stands in direct communication with the deity, and a prophet insofar as he has foreknowledge and intercedes with God on behalf of his people."

the source of life and the true light who enlightens everyone. As such, John's *Logos* is the

principle of rationality and order in the cosmos and in human beings.[41]

In the second century, Justin Martyr (d. ca. 165) developed the concept of the

Logos of Christ, the source of all wisdom—prophetical or philosophical—, as a device, as

it were, to lend a Christian principle to Greek philosophical tradition. By using the

concept of *Logos,* Justin claimed as "Christian" anything that was good and noble in

pagan literature and philosophy.[42] In order to substantiate his argument, Justin developed

the term *logos spermatikos* for the universal activity of the *Logos*. According to Justin,

the *Logos* inspires all thinkers through germs (*sperma*) of the truth. This accounts for the

fragmentary truths found in Greek philosophy and literature. The *Logos,* who had been

revealing himself partially throughout the history, revealed himself in full in the person of

Jesus Christ during the incarnation. Hence the superiority of Christianity over Greek

philosophical tradition and the Old Testament prophetical tradition.[43] In Justin's thought,

the *Logos* of Christ also proves to be a principle and criterion of selection as he relates

the origins of the best and noble features of Greek philosophy and literature to the *Logos*

of Christ. He uses this device to judge the truthfulness of various branches of Greek

philosophy and literature. For example, in his estimation, Platonists are the nearest

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[41] Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition,* 3.

[42] For Justin Martyr's *Logos* theology see J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines (Second Edition),* London: Adam and Charles Black, 1960), 96-98. Similarly, Jaroslav Pelikan in his *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of the Christian Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 32-34, elaborates this understanding in relation to Justin and Origen as an essential tool used for the Christian dispute with Classical thought.

[43] Leslie W. Barnard, "Introduction," *St. Justin Martyr: The First and Second Apologies,* translated with introduction and notes by Leslie W. Barnard, *Ancient Christian Writers,* W. Burghardt, J. J. Dillon and D.D. McManus (eds.), vol. 56 (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1997), 14-16.

among the philosophers to Christianity. Depending on the criterion of the *Logos,* Justin rejects the Stoics' paganism while favouring their ethics.[44]

Developing further the concept of Christian *Logos,* Clement of Alexandria argues that all wisdom is summed up in Christ. According to Clement, both the Old Testament prophetical tradition and Greek philosophical tradition were tutors, preparatory exercises to the true philosophy in Jesus Christ:

God is responsible for all good things: of some, like the blessings of the Old and New Covenants, directly; of others, like the riches of philosophy, indirectly. Perhaps philosophy too was a direct gift of God to the Greeks before the Lord extended his appeal to the Greeks. For philosophy was to the Greek world what the Law was to the Hebrews, a tutor escorting them to Christ. So philosophy is a preparatory process; it opens the road for the person whom Christ brings to his final goal.[45]

In the first book of his *Strometeis,* Clement develops Justin's argument for the *Logos* of Christ as the supreme principle of all wisdom. The essence of the concept remains the same as Justin's: the *Logos* of Christ is the principle and origin of all wisdom. It was he who inspired humankind before the incarnation, including the Greek philosophers and the Old Testament prophets, and then was incarnated in Jesus Christ.

Following in the footsteps of Justin and Clement, Origen also defines the *Logos* of Christ as the universal principle of wisdom. "Every wise man, to the extent that he is wise, participates in Christ who is wisdom."[46] With a unique combination of the Genesis story of man's creation and the concept of the *Logos,* Origen argued that man is made in

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[44] Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition,* 11-12.

[45] Clement of Alexandria, *Strometeis, Books One to Three,* transl. John Ferguson, *The Fathers of the Church,* ed. Thomas P. Halton, Vol. 85 (Washington, D.C.; The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), I, 5.

[46] Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition,* 103.

the image of the *Logos,* and, as such, man has freedom, rationality and capacity to recognize good and to desire for God.[47]

In short, Justin, Clement, and Origen all used the concept of the *Logos* of Christ as a supreme principle, allowing them to appropriate the best features of the Greco-Roman philosophical tradition and claim them as 'Christian.' The three theologians employed the concept as a principle and criterion of selection through which they favoured some parts of Greek philosophy and literature while rejecting others. For example, they all agree on favouring Platonic metaphysics and Stoic ethics, insisting that these were inspired by the *Logos,* while rejecting Stoic paganism and pantheism as being inspired by demons. Once they had chosen the best and noblest parts of Greek philosophy, they could claim them as 'Christian,' justifying, at the same time, their use in Christian theology. In this sense, we may contend that the Christian *Logos* was used as a device to Christianize the Greek philosophical discourse, through a comprehensive evaluation of the entire philosophical tradition.

The Christian use of *Logos* had always had an implicit claim of superiority on the part of Christian truth over Greek philosophical discourse. The truth, the true *gnosis* that the philosophers always strived for, is represented by the *Logos* of Christ, who was fully incarnated in Jesus Christ during his earthly life and was given by Him to the church, the repository of the truth in post-resurrection history. Christians of the first three centuries, it may be argued, claimed the superiority of their tradition over Greco-Roman tradition through the *Logos* of Christ, whose wisdom and truth were older than the Old Testament prophetical tradition or Greek wisdom, fuller than any human wisdom:

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[47] Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition,* 104.

And what they [Christians] demanded was a radical revision of first principles as the presupposition to an adequate cosmology and anthropology. The basis for such a revision they held to lie in the *logos* of Christ, conceived as a revelation, not of 'new' truth, but of truth which was as old as the hills and as everlasting. This they accepted as an answer to the promise of illumination and power extended to mankind and, thus, the basis for a new physics, a new ethic and, above all, a new logic, the logic of human progress. In Christ, therefore, they claimed to possess a principle of understanding superior to anything existing in the classical world. By this claim they were prepared to stand or fall.[48]

In this context, we may argue that, in his use of the Christian *Logos*, Eusebius pursued a similar strategy. He argued that as the *Logos* of Christ is the source of all wisdom and rationality, he is also the source of all political discourse.[49] Establishing the political history of mankind as one of the main trajectories of salvation history,[50] Eusebius argued that the *Logos* of Christ had directed the political history of mankind from all kinds of polyarchy to a universal monarchy represented by the Roman Empire. In this process, argued Eusebius, the *Logos* of Christ taught humanity, through their own experiences, that universal monarchy is the best solution for the perennial problems of political theory, that is, the search for the form of government that can best able to procure for humanity peace and salvation on a universal scale.

To conclude, we can argue that what Justin, Clement, and Origen had previously accomplished, through their use of the Christian *Logos* in relation to Greek philosophy was accomplished by Eusebius in relation to Roman political discourse. First of all, Eusebius managed to give a Christian principle to the Roman political realm by his use of the *Logos* of Christ. In a sense, this was Christianization of Roman politics. Secondly, Eusebius's Imperial Theology was able to unite the discourse of Christian theology with

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[48] Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture,* vi.

[49] *Laudibus Constantini,* IV, 1-2.

[50] *Sepulchro Christi,* XVI.

that of Roman politics under the principle of Christian *Logos*. Thirdly, as a supreme principle and criterion of selection, Eusebius argued that, with the support of Christian monotheism as the new principle of political solidarity, universal monarchy constitutes the best form of government.[51] Lastly, by applying the principle of Christian *Logos,* Eusebius also claimed the superiority of Christian truth over the Roman political realm.

Eusebius's linking of "man's regal force and irresistible sway over everything on earth" to the *Logos* of Christ was aimed to extend a theological principle into the political realm and thereby to include the Roman Empire into Christian discourse. Eusebius establishes his claim on the natural disposition of the human being as a political animal— a concept of Aristotle[52]—and amalgamates this concept with the Genesis story of human creation, where God had created man in his image and gave him a dominion over all other creatures on earth. Since God is a sovereign, so man's creation in his image would imply his natural political disposition. Therefore, the *Logos* "had perfected in him a sovereign species, to which He showed along of those on earth how to rule and be ruled and to anticipate and foreknow here the promised hope of the heavenly kingdom" (*LC,* IV, 2). It is this human disposition as well as the anticipation of the heavenly kingdom here on earth as the consequences of the actions of the *Logos* of Christ that makes the realm of politics an essential part of the divine providence.

Perhaps union of the Scripture with Aristotle's concept of the natural political disposition of humans needs to be underlined as a hermeneutic distinctive of Eusebius, as his reference amalgamates scriptural authority with philosophical argument within the paradigm of natural theology. As a matter of fact, this reference can be seen as key to

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[51] *Sepulchro Christi,* XVI.

[52] See Aristotle, *Aristotle's Politics,* transl. Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 1253a.

Eusebius's approach. In the rest of the passage, Eusebius refers to Aristotle's definition

of a citizen when he relates the knowledge of "how to rule and be ruled" to the *Logos*.

This definition is taken from Aristotle, who explains it in the context of his discussion of

the righteous citizen, the question of the nature of political rule and the virtue of the

citizen in politics:

And a citizen is one who shares in governing and being governed. He differs under different forms of government, but in the best state he is one who is able and willing to be governed and to govern with a view of the life of virtue.[53]

As an example of his use of Aristotle, Eusebius's synthesis is quite interesting and

original. Aristotle states that the virtuous or excellent ruler:

...must learn by obeying, as he would learn the duties of a general of cavalry by being under the orders of a general of cavalry...It has been well said that 'he who has never learned to obey cannot be a good commander.'[54]

According to Aristotle, governing and being governed apply to the righteous citizen,

while the prospect of political life is defined as "a view of the life of virtue." For

Eusebius, on the other hand, the emperor is ruled by the divine *Logos*, and, in turn,

exercises his rule upon his subjects. In the Eusebian political paradigm, ruling and being

ruled refer to the middle position occupied by the emperor between divine and human

governance. The Eusebian approach is quite different from Aristotle's aristocratic

republic of free citizens ruling and being ruled by one another in turn. Aristotle's notion

of "a view of the life of virtue," on the other hand, as the highest prospect of his republic,

is alternated by Eusebius with "anticipation and foreknowledge here the promised hope

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[53] Aristotle, *Politics,* 1284a.

[54] Aristotle, *Politics,* 1277b.

of the heavenly kingdom."[55] Eusebius thus presupposed that the knowledge of ruling and being ruled and the knowledge of the highest prospect of political life are mediated through the emperor. In fact, the Eusebian notion of the divine emperor assumes his role in teaching his subjects about these matters and guiding them to the life of eternal bliss.[56]

To conclude our discussion of Eusebius's "Imperial Theology" and its justification of the Christian claim over the political realm, we have two points to make. First, Eusebius was the first political theologian in the Christian tradition to define the *Logos* of Christ as the source of mankind's political nature. His purpose in doing so seems to incorporate Roman politics into Christianity and he might thus be designated as the first imperial theologian in Christian history, who gave an essential role to the Roman Empire in Christian salvation. Secondly, Eusebius's undertaking followed the previous Christian tradition, which formerly interpreted the *Logos* theology to extend Christian claims into various domains of human civilization as practiced by Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen in relation to the other domains of Greco-Roman culture. The latter point is important to counter the Eusebian scholarship, which underestimates his position as a political theologian by presenting him as merely a shrewd rhetorician and a sycophantic eulogist of Constantine motivated by political pragmatism.[57] We argue that

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[55] *Laudibus Constantini,* IV, 2.

[56] See *Laudibus Constantini,* V, 8.

[57] To give but two examples, Jacob Burckhardt in his *The Age of Constantine the Great* (trans. Moses Hadas; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), 292, presented Eusebius as one of the most disgusting of all panegyrists, who falsified the portrait of Constantine in order to accommodate his stand to Constantine's program who is defined as "a genius driven without surcease by ambition and lust for power". On the other hand, Johannes A. Straub in his "Constantine as *Koinos Episkopos*: Tradition and Innovation in the Representation of the First Christian Emperor's Majesty" in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers,* Vol. 21 (1967): 50, represents him as a shrewd interpreter of Constantine's actions and even an inspirer of the emperor's own political intentions and of the concept of his special mission. For Strauss, Eusebius's hasty attitude was caused by the fact that neither the church nor the empire was prepared for such engagement in the age of Constantine. Both of these approaches clearly define Eusebius's stand as an accommodation to that of

Eusebius accomplished a deliberate reformulation of the principles of Christian politics as a whole on the basis of the first principles of Christian theology. In short, the second principle of Eusebius's theory is Christ the *Logos,* who mediates between the heavenly and earthly realms, and provides humanity with the knowledge of the heavenly kingdom through his special mediatorial relationship with the emperor.

The third principle of Eusebius's "Imperial Theology" is the emperor himself, whose virtues and due relationship with the *Logos* provide assurance of the unity and strength to the empire. In Roman political tradition, the emperors' rightful relationship with the divinities was generally considered to be a necessary requirement of the political stability of the empire:

As the Roman polity developed into a worldwide empire increasing emphasis was placed on the state religion. It was an article of faith that Rome's success was due to the support of the gods. Roman emperors were seen as controlling all religious activity in their territories, and were regarded as custodians of a pact with the gods, the *pax deorum.* This central feature of the ideology of Roman rule was projected in all the available media of imperial propaganda: panegyric speeches, the designs of buildings and sculptures, commemorative inscriptions, the legends and designs used on Roman coinage...During late antiquity, when the Roman world, and especially the Roman state, became Christian, the substance and form of this ideology inevitably changed, but the significance of religion in maintaining the Roman Empire increased.[58]

In this context, Eusebius's concept of Constantine's close relationship with the *Logos* of Christ as the basis of his success—a central theme of his *Vita Constantini*—is by no means novel or original. Nevertheless, Eusebius's importance derives from the fact that,

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Constantine and therefore deny his self-referentiality. However, as we have shown above, his strong connections with the previous Christian tradition as a continuum of his predecessors secures his own place as to a substantial point of view.

[58] Stephen Mithcell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire, AD 284-641* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 3-4.

by replacing the pagan deities with the *Logos* of Christ, he established Christian monotheism as the new principle of solidarity for the empire.[59]

The classical virtues that had been attributed to the kings in Hellenistic tradition—such as wisdom, philanthropy, goodness, prudence and courage[60]—are bestowed by the *Logos* of Christ upon emperor who was "God's friend":

And in this God's friend henceforth shall participate, having been furnished by God with natural virtues and having received in his soul the emanations from that place. His ability to reason has come from the Universal Logos, his wisdom from communion with Wisdom, goodness from contact with the Good, and justice from his association with Justice. He is prudent in the ideal of Prudence, and from sharing in the Highest Power has he courage. For he who would bear the title of sovereign with true reason has patterned regal virtues in his soul after the model of that distant kingdom (*LC*, V, 1-2)

The above passage suggests that the emperor's due relationship with the *Logos* as the source of all goodness makes an ideal ruler, and such a ruler can replicate the model of the "distant" heavenly kingdom in his earthly rule. The regal virtues in Constantine's soul are derived from emanations of the heavenly kingdom through the mediation of the *Logos*. The personal relationship of the emperor with the divine *Logos* was thus essential in order that the emperor could structure his earthly empire according to the model of the heavenly one. Once this was accomplished, the Roman Empire was to become one of the primary instruments of the divine economy, providing all of humanity with order, peace, and salvation. For Eusebius, the emperor and his empire were almost identical, such that

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[59] For elaboration of this theme, see *Laudibus Constantini*, X and *Sepulchro Christi*, XVI.

[60] See D. M. Nicol, "Byzantine Political Thought," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought, c. 350-c. 1450*, ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 51: "The king must possess and display a whole catalogue of virtues. Such notions can be traced back to the political theorists of Greek antiquity. But they were elaborated most fully by the apologists of the monarchs of the Hellenistic kingdoms in the third and second centuries BC who were pleased to be reassured of their divinity as gods among men. These theories were part of the stock in trade of Greek political thinkers by the time of Constantine. Eusebius neatly accommodated them to the new phenomenon of a Christian Roman Empire with a Christian monarch."

the emperor's close relationship with the *Logos* of Christ simultaneously transformed the empire into a Christian institution. This principle held true as well in the opposite direction, in which case any alienation of the emperor from the *Logos* of Christ would render the institution pagan:

But one who has alienated himself from these virtues and who has denied the Universal Sovereign, who has neither acknowledged the Heavenly Father of souls nor adopted a decorum proper to a sovereign, but who has instead taken into his soul the chaotic and shameful and traded for regal kindness the spirit of a wild beast; one in whom exists the deadly poison of sin instead of a liberal temper, folly instead of prudence, and in place of reason and wisdom the ugliest of all things, irrationality, on which as from bitter drink destructive consequences attend—an abandoned life, selfishness, bloodthirstiness, enmity to God, impiety (*LC*, V, 2).

Eusebius claims that the best form of government, true universal monarchy, is only possible with an emperor who believes in monotheism, and who, at the same time, has a close relationship with the *Logos* of Christ:

For how could one bear the likeness of monarchical authority who has formed in his soul the myriad falsely depicted images of demons? How can he be ruler and lord of all who has bound himself to countless malignant masters, who is a slave of shameful pleasures, a slave of unbridled lust, a slave of ill-gotten gain...? (*LC*, V, 3).

Based upon the intimacy of his relationship with the *Logos* of Christ, the emperor is vested with high esteem and authority in both religious and civic matters. In fact, the "Imperial Theology" deliberately unites the religious and political realms into a harmonious unity on the common ground of the cosmic rule of the *Logos*. The primary aim of such cosmic rule is to prepare the entire creation for the heavenly kingdom by eliminating all the obstacles and difficulties that prevent humankind from entering the realm of eternal bliss. Since all human activity is to be directed by such a prospect of salvation, it might be argued that there is no room for a separation between the spiritual

and material aspects of life. Similarly, the Christian emperor, who imitates and resembles

the *Logos* of Christ, struggles to achieve an earthly *mimesis* of the *Logos*'s action in his

earthly realm. In actual fact, Eusebius pursues a deliberate strategy of comparing

Constantine's actions to that of *Logos* to emphasize that there is no distinction in the

Christian empire between civic and religious issues, since both are directed towards the

realization of the same theological prospect, that is, the salvation of humanity:

As the Universal Savior renders the entire heaven and earth and highest kingdom fit for His Father, so His friend, leading his subjects on earth to the Only-Begotten and Savior Logos, makes them suitable for His kingdom. Again, our common Universal Savior, by invisible and divine power, keeps the rebellious powers—all those who used to fly through the earth's air and infect men's souls—at a distance, just as a good shepherd keeps wild beasts from his flock. And his friend, armed against his enemies with standards from Him above, subdues and chastises the visible opponents of truth by the law of combat...(*LC,* II, 2-3).

The above simile illustrates that the Eusebian "Imperial Theology" aims at a harmony

between religion and politics by subsuming the realm of politics under the categories of

Christian theology. Since Christian salvation is defined in terms of the prospect of a

heavenly kingdom, the entire functioning body of the empire—which is the anticipation

and *mimesis* of the heavenly kingdom—, including her laws and wars, turns into an

instrument of salvation. The key in all of this is the Christian emperor who is described as

follows:

Because of all these things, the high-minded sovereign, learned in divine matters, pursues things higher than his present life, calling on the Father who is in heaven and longing for His kingdom, doing all things with piety and holding out to his subjects, just as if they were students of a good teacher, the holy knowledge of the Supreme Sovereign (*LC,* V, 8).

The divine monarch and his place in relation to the heavenly kingdom is thus the decisive

element of the Eusebian project. The monarch's ultimate frame of reference and his

spiritual nourishment is the heavenly kingdom itself, and the divine *Logos* whom he

imitates. His bodily desires are to be controlled by his spiritual virtues; his knowledge of divine matters is to be the dominant principle in his personal actions and desires; and his ultimate desire is to transcend this world and all worldly concerns. His political and religious aims converge in this highest goal, namely, to be able to teach his subjects the saving knowledge of the Supreme Sovereign. For such a personality, the mundane matters of the empire can only be meaningful in relation to his higher concerns. Even its wars are waged for noble causes, such as protecting the true piety and believers. For Eusebius, there is no final dichotomy between the mundane and the spiritual, the terrestrial and the celestial. Once the principle and the reference of the political body is established as holy and divine, all of her workings become Christianized. Finally, it is the intentions and religious persuasion of an emperor that make him either a tyrant or a divine monarch, just as the emperor's success or failure in imitating the *Logos* makes his empire holy or pagan.

Summary

The present study aims to shed light on the underlying theological principles of church-empire relations during the Iconoclastic controversy. We contend that the doctrinal and political aspects of the controversy were, in fact, interrelated within a larger theological paradigm. That is to say, clarification of the political theologies of the Iconoclastic and the Iconodule parties in connection with their theological first principles (such as Christology, soteriology, and ecclesiology) is the primary object here. We argue that Eusebius of Caesarea's "Imperial Theology" provided the Iconoclastic controversy with the paradigm of church-empire relations and, therefore, is crucial in any attempt at

contextualizing the debate. As the first full-fledged Christian political theology that gave the Roman Empire an essential role in Christian salvation, "Imperial Theology" assumed a soteriology that presupposed the Christian commonwealth as the main vessel of salvation. On the other hand, Chalcedonian Christology pointed to the incarnation as the main saving event of post-resurrection history, and, indirectly, posed a challenge to the official ideology of the religio-political establishment. Therefore, the doctrinal developments that grew out of the council of Chalcedon constitute the second essential context of the Iconoclastic debate.

The primary goal of the "Imperial Theology" was to Christianize Roman political discourse. In his attempt to accomplish this through *Logos* theology, Eusebius followed the church fathers of the Alexandrian tradition. His theory is called "Imperial Theology" on account of its founding principle and primary reference to the definition of God as "the Supreme Sovereign" and His celestial realm as an imperium (*basileia*). This reference is meant to make the entire political model primarily a construction of Christian theology.

According to the theory, the Supreme Sovereign is the first and foremost principle of the cosmic order. He is the absolute monarch; all the celestial beings are His subjects who pay their tributes through their due praises. He is the principle of cosmic harmony and order. The second principle, the *Logos* of God, is the principle of mediation and knowledge through which humanity can grasp the principles of the celestial realm. Mediation of the *Logos* makes the celestial realm accessible to the terrestrial so that the latter can be said to be a *mimesis* of the former. The *Logos* is the principle through which Eusebius gives the political discourse a Christian principle, uniting religious and political

discourses under the paradigm of Christian theology. The *Logos* of Christ is the source of the regal knowledge of humanity as he is the supreme source of all knowledge and wisdom. The emperor is the third of the three hierarchically ordered principles. The emperor's virtues and due relationship with the *Logos* provides the assurance of unity and strength of the empire. By imitating the *Logos*, the emperor can shape his empire into a *mimesis* of the heavenly kingdom. As a necessary feature of this idea of *mimesis,* the character and goals of the emperor and those of the *Logos* are closely intertwined, indeed almost identical.[61]

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[61] *Laudibus Constantini,* V.

CHAPTER TWO

EUSEBIAN PARADIGM FOR CHURCH-EMPIRE RELATIONS

The Politico-Theological Problem of Church-Empire Relations

In the previous chapter, we elaborated on Eusebius's "Imperial Theology" as a positive

solution to the theological problems posed by the reality of the Christian Roman Empire.

"Imperial Theology" was primarily proposed to give a positive basis for church-empire

relations. The *Tricennial Orations* address to the concerns of both the churchmen and the

imperial intellectual elite and develop, on the ground of natural theology, the idea that the

Constantinian era marked the beginning of a providentially designed era of the Christian

commonwealth, which was to be realized through the symbiosis and cooperation of the

church and the Roman Empire. In the 16th chapter of the *Sepulchro Christi,* Eusebius

explains the necessity of this unity, addressing both the political problem of the Roman

political theory, that is, how can humanity establish a universal political system that

could provide humanity with peace and prosperity,[1] and the theological problem of the

Church's attitude towards the Christianized Roman Empire and the new shape of church-

empire relations. In a way, Eusebius attempted to satisfy the concerns of both sides (the

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[1] For the Roman political ideal see C.N. Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 74: "In reality it [Roman Empire] was that of an order which professed to satisfy the permanent and essential requirements of human nature, thereby fulfilling the secular hope of mankind."

church and the empire), which had been interacting for the last three centuries, arguing that their cooperation and symbiosis is a historical necessity.

The previous church-empire relations and the theoretical principles that shaped them are crucial to contextualize the Eusebian paradigm for church-empire relations. Political historians generally agree that the earliest church taught and practiced an overall civil obedience towards secular authorities.[2] A classic statement of this civic loyalty is attributed to Jesus:

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' They answered, 'The emperor's.' Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.[3]

Jesus's statement assumes a division of secular and religious realms in a Christian's life, according to which civic issues of government—such as taxation—are reserved for the 'secular' empire, whereas the "things that are God's" were to be reserved for a realm over which emperors had no jurisdiction. In his epistle to the Romans, St. Paul presents a somewhat similar but more sophisticated expression of Christian civil obedience, which was arguably the first Christian political theology:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what

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[2] George Holland Sabine and Thomas Landon Thorson, *A History of Political Theory*, 4th ed. (Hinsdale, Ill.: Dryden Press, 1973), 176-8; Janet Coleman, *A History of Political Thought: From Ancient Greece to Early Christianity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 298.

[3] Matt., 22:21; cf. Mark, 12:17; Luke, 20:25. (All biblical quotations are taken from *NRSV*: Catholic Edition).

God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due to them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due.[4]

First of all, in addition to Jesus's dictum for civil obedience, Paul's political philosophy ascribes all authority to God, and, therefore, equates a Christian's obedience to political authority with his or her obedience to God and, similarly, a Christian's disobedience to secular authorities means disobedience to God. Secondly, Paul explains the necessity for political rule with man's sinful nature.[5] That is to say, it was mankind's natural disposition to do evil to others that required the existence of a political rule to protect its subjects from such evils. Political rule, as established by God, is defined in terms of its preventive function, which the rulers fulfill by creating a fear among the wrongdoers and, if necessary, the magistrates are expected "to execute wrath on the wrongdoer." Thirdly, similar to Jesus's dictum, Paul also assumes that political authority relates to the secular dimension of Christians' lives, leaving room for a spiritual authority, the church, to rule over the spiritual matters of Christians' lives. From the perspective of political theory, the latter idea caused early Christians to have double loyalties according to this injunction: one being their spiritual loyalty to the church and the other their civic loyalty to the Roman Empire.[6]

The establishment of the church as an institution in charge of Christians' spiritual concerns had important political implications. As long as she exercised authority upon

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[4] Romans, 13:1-7.

[5] See Sabine, *History of Political Theory,* 177-178.

[6] Sabine, *History of Political Theory,* 176-182.

Christians' spiritual matters, the church held power and this made her a political organization. In fact, the establishment of an authority alternative to the empire, the church, constituted a unique and revolutionary development in the history of political theory.[7] For as much as she exercised authority upon Christians, the church required a loyalty from Christians, which was largely similar to their normal civic loyalties to secular authorities. In a way, Christians practically defined themselves as being "citizens of two cities," according to the later famous formulation of Augustine of Hippo in *De civitate Dei*.[8] On the one hand, Christians were citizens of the Roman Empire, and as such they offered their civic loyalty to the emperor; on the other hand, they claimed to be citizens of another city, a spiritual realm, represented on earth by the church and thus they offered their spiritual loyalties to church authorities.

The Christian position of double loyalties, as implied by Jesus's and Paul's above quoted expressions, corresponded to the Christian definition of human kind's dual nature—soul and body.[9] Since God made mankind of a body and a soul, he also established secular and spiritual authorities for the care of human's respective material and spiritual concerns. Christians thus presupposed two authorities—secular and spiritual—for the care of the respective material and spiritual needs of the faithful, acknowledging, at the same time, the divine origin of both.

As posed by Jesus's and Paul's dicta, the possibility of a conflict between the two authorities seems to be precluded, for the secular and spiritual authorities were theoretically responsible for different and somewhat territorial aspects of Christian life,

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[7] Sabine, *History of Political Theory,* 176.

[8] See Bk. XIV.28

[9] Sabine, *History of Political Theory,* 180-181.

that is, material and spiritual. However, the possibility of a conflict between these two loyalties always existed. In actual fact, as long as the church exercised authority upon Christians' lives, the latter had to have divided loyalties.[10] When such a conflict occurred, Christians were expected to side with the spiritual authority, in accordance with the Christian notion that the spiritual aspect of human beings has ontologically a higher position. In this context, the emperor Marcus Aurelius (d. 180) was right in his belief that "Christianity contained an idea incompatible with the Roman virtue of unlimited obligation to the state."[11] As a matter of fact, during the second and third centuries, the Christian Church increasingly appropriated the features of a political organization so much so that she has been described as "an invisible empire."[12]

Christians, on the other hand, assumed that the church and empire should always be in contact with each other. This principle of cooperative coexistence also corresponded to their notion of the dual nature of human beings.[13] Since the secular authorities were established by God—as expressed in Romans 13—civic obedience was considered an unquestionable Christian virtue. However, Christian obedience was not absolute and had its potential limits set by the church.

According to the Roman religio-political ideology, offering honour of worship to the emperor was as much a civic duty as it was religious; however, Christians were not ready to fulfill this requirement for they refuse to offer any loyalty to the emperor that

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[10] Sabine, *History of Political Theory*, 178-182; Coleman, *History of Political Thought*, 296-297.

[11] Sabine, *History of Political Theory*, 179.

[12] Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 219-220.

[13] Sabine, *History of Political Theory*, 181.

was incompatible with their loyalty to Christ.[14] The Roman authorities thus charged them with treason. Worshipping the emperor in public ceremonies was thus the main issue of contention between Christians and the Roman authorities. Christians proved to be ready to be martyred in order not to compromise their loyalty to Christ.[15] In the earliest authentic account of martyrdom, Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna (*ca.* 69-155), refused to "swear by the fortune of Caesar" and to revile Christ with the following remarks:

For six and eighty years I have been serving Him, and He has done no wrong to me; how, then, dare I blaspheme my King who has saved me...for we have been trained to render honor, in so far as it does not harm [compromise] us, to magistrates and authorities appointed by God. (*Martyrdom of Polycarp,* 9-10).[16]

In short, as Polycarp's statement reveals, the church's claim to govern Christians' spiritual concerns posed a direct challenge to the Roman political establishment, which so far had claimed authority over both religious and spiritual lives of its subjects. To the Roman authorities, therefore, Christians were always potential subversives, though the latter themselves never acknowledged the description.[17]

Christian apologists of the second and third centuries tried to persuade their pagan neighbours that their political stance did not pose a challenge to the political solidarity of the empire, and that, on the contrary, through their civil obedience and prayers, they actually supported the well-being of the empire.[18] However, as mentioned earlier,[19]

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[14] Frances Young, "Christianity," *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought,* Christopher Rowe, Malcolm Schofield (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 643.

[15] For persecution and martyrdom in early church see chapter 1, footnote 17.

[16] *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of Fathers in Translation,* vol. 6, translated and annotated by J.A. Kleist, J. Quasten and J.C. Plumpe (eds.) (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1961).

[17] Young, "Christianity," 637.

[18] Young, "Christianity," 644.

[19] See chapter I.

Christians initially did not seem to entertain the idea of a Christian empire. For them, political authority was established by God to govern people's secular concerns. As such, Christian fathers could ascribe to the empire only an indirect share in the work of salvation: that the Roman Empire provided the church with a safe environment where the apostles could spread the gospel easily.[20]

This was the general picture of how the church and the Roman Empire saw each other prior to the Constantinian era. The conviction of the Roman authorities that, due to their divided loyalty, Christians were potential subversives had its result in the persecution policies pursued against Christians; whereas the Christian attempts to refuse the truthfulness of those charges constituted one of the main themes of apologies written by the church fathers.[21] It is important to note that Eusebius himself was one of the most prominent apologists among the early church fathers.[22] Eusebius thus probably took this picture into consideration in shaping his argument for the historical and providential necessity of the cooperation between the church and the empire.

Prior to the fourth century, Christians always defined the Christian society, the representatives of the kingdom of God on earth, to be the church and never seem to have entertained the possibility of a Christian *empire* under the rule of a Christian *emperor*. The era of Constantine, then, posed a new challenge to the church to redefine herself in association with a Christianized emperor, who openly favoured Christians and proved himself ready to accommodate Christianity as the official religion of the empire. The

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[20] The argument for the providential coincidence of the incarnation and the *Pax Romana* will be discussed below.

[21] See Hubertus R. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction,* trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2007), 71-73.

[22] For Eusebius's apologetic works see Drobner, *Fathers of the Church,* 233-235.

problem of redefining Christian society required a new ecclesiology on the part of the

churchmen who were facing the new reality. The importance of Eusebius of Caesarea lies

in the fact that he responded to this new challenge with a sophisticated theological

argument to prove to both his fellow churchmen and to the emperor and the Roman

intellectual elite that the time had come for the Roman Empire and the church to unite

and cooperate in providing humanity with universal salvation and peace, which were the

ultimate goals of human civilization. Therefore, the main issue that the orations addressed

was to define a universal Christian society that embraced both the empire as the body

politic and the church, as well as outlining the principles of church-empire relations

within this Christian society.

The Divine Roles of the Church and the Roman Empire in the Eusebian Salvation History

The 16th chapter of the *Sepulchro Christi* illustrates the common roots and goals of the

political and religious histories of humanity within a salvation-historical perspective.

Eusebius gives an overview of salvation history, in which he joins the political and

religious history as two separate lines, which had been together in the beginning of time

and, after a long period of separation, were again joined together in the age of

Constantine. The main argument of the orations is that the progress in the political history

from all forms of polyarchy to monarchy (or from the principle of ethnicity to the

principle of universality), and the progress in the religious history from polytheism to

monotheism were not accidental, but the results of the same divine providence.

According to Eusebius, these parallel developments were the decisive proofs that the

political and religious histories of humanity had always been under the guidance of the divine providence. Eusebius begins his exposition as follows:

Now formerly all the peoples of the earth were divided, and the whole human race cut up into provinces and tribal and local governments, states ruled by despots or by mobs. Because of this, continuous battles and wars, with their attendant devastations and enslavements, gave them no respite in countryside or city. Hence the topics of countless histories—adultery and rape of the womenfolk—in particular the evils of Ilium and tragedies of the ancients, so well remembered among all men If you ascribe the reason for these evils to polytheistic error, you would not miss the mark. (*SC,* XVI, 2-3).[23]

Eusebius begins his salvation-historical construction with a description of the political situation of the ancient period. He alludes to the times of Trojan war and the foundation of Rome as narrated by Homer, Thucydides, Heredotus, and Livy. As Eusebius portrays it, the period was marked by severe political instability and insecurity caused by rivalries between the contending political powers. Political division and strife resulted in long-term wars, political chaos, and insecurity. Eusebius refers to the period to support his monarchical view, pointing out that division in political power was the cause of political strife and the ensuing evils. However, his next sentence gives this phenomenon a new dimension: "If you ascribe the reason for these evils to polytheistic error, you would not miss the mark." The evils that are previously ascribed to political division are similarly ascribed to a different cause: polytheism. The orator seems to attempt to equate these two causes—polyarchy and polytheism—as similar twins. For him polytheism and polyarchy—division in divinity and division in politics—corresponded to each other; in fact, Eusebius presents the two sometimes in a relation of cause and effect, and sometimes in a relation of mutual representation; in this way he creates an inseparable

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[23] For Eusebius's orations we use the following translation: H.A. Drake, *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius's Tricennial Orations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

pair from polytheism and polyarchy, with a view to emphasize their unbroken co-existence, in such a way that one's existence brings the other's unavoidable company.

Eusebius's combination between polyarchy and polytheism as inseparable twins implies that the Roman consolidation of power under the control of one emperor in the form of absolute monarchianism, and its ensuing benefits for humanity, will not reach to its perfection as long as paganism remains as the religion of the empire. Eusebius seems to address to the Roman intellectual elite, reminding them the *Pax Romana* and its positive results in securing a universal peace, and creating a common hope that a universal monarchy could provide humanity with the benefits of an ideal political establishment.[24] Eusebius seems to share, with his audience, the conviction of the official ideology of the Roman Empire, that the political well-being of the empire and the religious life of the Roman society and that of the emperor himself affected each other.[25] On this common ground, Eusebius claims that the monarchical argument and polytheism are naturally contradictory and incompatible. For this reason, argues Eusebius, a universal monarchy cannot fully yield its benefits for humanity as long as it supports a polytheistic belief. Eusebius acknowledges that polyarchy was the cause of all political strife, wars, and all kinds of evils that befell upon humanity throughout history. However, he also argues that the root cause of polyarchy itself was polytheism. As a Roman citizen, Eusebius alludes to the fundamental concept of the Roman religion that the earthly empire was sustained by an overall structure of cosmic order, and that the stability of the

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[24] Vergil was the most articulate witness of the *Pax Augusta* who, with great enthusiasm and optimism, promoted the principles of the Augustan project. For a detailed exposition of Vergil's views on the *Pax Romana* see Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture,* 27 ff.

[25] Stephen Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire, AD 284-641* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 3-4.

empire was provided by the gods.[26] Eusebius argues that a multiplicity of gods

("demons," according to his Christian perspective) cannot sustain a universal monarchy,

simply because they always conflict with each other. As a matter of fact, it is impossible

for many gods to agree upon a universal monarchy's rule on earth.

The Eusebian argument brings the *Pax Romana* and the incarnation together in the

following manner:

> If you should ascribe the reason for these evils to polytheistic error, you would not miss the mark. For once the salutary instrument—that is, specifically, the All-Holy Body of Christ—had been seen to be stronger than all demonic error and the adversary of evil-doing, whether by deed or word; once it had been raised as a victory trophy over the demons and a safeguard against ancient evils, then at once all the acts of the demons also were undone. No longer were there localized governments and states ruled by many, tyrannies and democracies and devastations and sieges that resulted from these, but One God was proclaimed to all (*SC*, XVI, 3).

The orator presents the political and social consequences of *Pax Augusti* as the immediate

effects of Christ's resurrection, and the resultant political stability and general security as

the working of the divine *Logos*, in order to pave the way for the proclamation of

Christianity to all. According to Eusebius's presentation, Christ's victory over demons in

the celestial realm was corresponded with the *Pax Romana* on earth. Therefore, argues

Eusebius, Christians and pagans should realize that the historical coincidence of the *Pax*

Romana and the incarnation was in no way a coincidence, but a deliberate plan of divine

providence. Therefore, the argument addresses two groups of audience: on the one hand,

Christians should be aware of the fact that their mission and progress had only been

possible with the political stability of the Roman Empire, and thus an appreciation of the

empire as an essential building block of divine providence was a theological necessity on

their part. On the other hand, Romans should notice the fact that the *Pax Romana* was

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[26] Mitchell, *History of the Later Roman Empire,* 3-4.

only a result of the advent of Christ and his victory against the works of demons in the celestial realm, so the maintenance of political stability had only been possible through the monotheism proclaimed by Christianity. This being the case, the Roman Empire and the church had been predestined for mutual existence in cooperation and symbiosis. Just as an inseparable co-existence is created between polytheism and polyarchy, Eusebius forms another pair between monarchy and monotheism, as a strategy of amalgamating the religious and political discourses by means of a comprehensive theological principle, the *Logos* of Christ. In the same vein, we also notice that he uses the political or military jargon to describe theological principles of Christianity, as in the above case when he illustrates the resurrection of Christ "as a victory trophy over the demons and a safeguard against ancient evils... (*SC*, XVI, 3)"

The argument for providential coincidence between the *Pax Romana* and the advent of Christ is by no means original. Formerly, in his effort to refute the notorious anti-Christian polemic that Christians were responsible for all the evils inflicting the Roman society, such as earthquakes, famines, and the like, Melito of Sardis (d. *ca.* 190) remarked as follows:

And a most convincing proof that our doctrine flourished for the good of an empire happily begun, is this— that there has no evil happened since Augustus' reign, but that, on the contrary, all things have been splendid and glorius, in accordance with the prayers of all.[27]

Though Melito of Sardis was not directly concerned with the argument for the providential coincidence between the *Pax Romana* and the advent of Christ, this remark is still important as a first step to the argument. Similarly, Origen (*ca.* 185-254), in

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[27] Eusebius, "Church History," in *Eusebius, Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers,* Second Series, vol. 1, trans. A. C. McGiffert (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), IV, 26.

dealing with the eschatological concerns, comments on Psalm 72:7-8 that reads: "In his days may righteousness flourish, and peace abound, until the moon is no more. May he have dominion from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth!"[28] Origen underlines that this peace had begun with the birth of Jesus and that God had prepared the nations for His doctrine by uniting them under the reign of one emperor so that the apostles could accomplish the mission given them by Christ in Matthew 28:19: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."[29] Origen's contribution to the argument is highly significant for, in this coincidence, he points to the divine interference in history to the effect that the political stability and peace are explained as a preparation for the mission of the Christian religion. Origen and many of his contemporaries considered Rome as a divine instrument to provide an environment of stability, in which Christians could easily travel and preach their gospel, although the political realm for them was essentially secular and as such had nothing to do with the church.[30]

This being the case, prior to Constantine's era, Christians offered their civic loyalty to the Roman Empire, which was essentially a secular institution. Therefore, Eusebius's presentation of the Roman body politic as an essential instrument of Christian salvation can be considered a radical move. Indeed, Eusebius shapes this contention into

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[28] For his argument see *Origen: Contra Celsum,* translated with and introduction and notes by Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), II, 30.

[29] Jean Sirinelli, *Les Vues Historiques D'Eusèbe de Césarée Durant La Période Prénicéene* (Dakar: Université de Dakar, 1961), 388-400.

[30] See Kurt Aland, "The Relation Between Church and State in Early Times: A Reinterpretation," *Journal of Theological Studies* 19:1(1968), 124: "For the Christians of the early period, the Roman State is *their* state; that which damages the State, also damages them; that which is beneficial to the State, is beneficial to them also. Out of this there emerges, beside the theological concept of the State as God's instituted system and instrument, a second more utilitarian view of the State, which was mentioned earlier. The Christian desire to be loyal towards the State arises from both these concepts, though the first carries the most weight."

a complete argument for the providential unity and concord between the Roman Empire and the Christian Church. He does so by creating a new pair, the inseparable twins of the church, as the provider of the teaching of one God, and the empire, as that of universal monarchy. Eusebius points to their simultaneous onset on the stage of history and similarity of their historical progress to prove their common origin and goals:

At the same time [ἐν ταὐτῶ δέ], one empire [βασίλεία μία] also flowered everywhere, the Roman, and the eternally implacable and irreconcilable enmity of nations was completely resolved. And as the knowledge of One God [Ἑνός Θεοῦ γνῶσις] was imparted to all men and one manner of piety (τρόπος εἰς εὐσεβίας), the salutary teaching of Christ, in the same way at one and the same time a single sovereign arose for the entire Roman Empire and a deep peace took hold of the totality. Together, at the same critical moment, as if from a single divine will, two beneficial shoots [ἀγαθῶν δύο βλαστοί] were produced for mankind: the empire of the Romans [Ρωμαίων ἀρχή] and the teachings of true worship [εὐσεβής διδασκαλία] (*SC*, XVI, 4).

Eusebius emphasizes the similarity of the Roman Empire and the church on the basis of their simultaneous onset on the stage of history. "A single divine will" is the common source of the two. They are "two beneficial shoots" of the same seed. The metaphor of shoots is deployed to describe the empire and the church as two parallel entities, originated from the same "root" and "seed," and directed to the same goal—to bear the same "fruit" of peace and salvation. The two were predestined to have a symbiotic existence in relation to each other, and, for this reason, they were inseparable. Detachment of one shoot from the other would only be possible by taking it apart from its root, in which case the separated shoot would die. By the same logic, Christian monotheism, as represented by the church, and the universal monarchy, as represented by the Roman Empire, are described as being complementary to each other. The Roman Empire and the church thus were twin institutions that shared the same goal and destination in relation to humanity, i.e., producing the good fruit of peace and salvation.

The twins of monarchy and monotheism have their stark contrast in the pair of polyarchy and polytheism. At this point, many examples of polyarchy are given in order to prove that polyarchy always brings chaos and inflictions upon humanity:

Before this, at least, independently, one dynasty ruled Syria, while another held sway over Asia Minor, and others yet over Macedonia. Still another dynasty cut off and possessed Egypt, and likewise others the Arab lands. Indeed, even the Jewish race ruled over Palestine. And in city and country and everyplace, just as if possessed by some truly demonic madness, they kept murdering each other and spent their time in wars and battles (*SC*, XVI, 5).

Eusebius refers here to the political situation before the *Pax Augusti* when the Hellenistic kingdoms were constantly fighting against each other for power, a situation that had brought dreadful consequences upon humanity. One important feature of the Hellenistic kingdoms was their ethnic prejudices: the former generals of Alexander, who divided his empire, had abandoned Alexander's attempts to produce a fusion of Greek and barbarian, and established military tyrannies on the premise of the superiority of Greeks over other ethnic groups.[31] Since the rulers based their sovereignty on a principle of ethnic superiority of Greeks over barbarians, they lacked the social support which was the essential component of solidarity in any political establishment. In other words, the political ideology of the Hellenistic kingdoms did not correspond to the political reality of their subject societies, which consisted of various ethnic and cultural elements; hence the political power struggles, wars, and the resulting difficulties that inflicted humanity throughout the period.[32]

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[31] Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy and Its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1961), 232.

[32] For the political situation of the period see Sabine, *History of Political Theory*, 125-140; Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, 252-275.

The example of a Jewish state is a striking one to be mentioned amongst the polyarchies. During the same period, the Palestinian Jews believed monotheism and yet, according to Eusebius, in structuring of their state, they could not avoid ethnicity. Eusebius once more points out the substantial political problem of the conflict between the ethnic prejudices of the rulers and their multi-ethnic and multi-cultural subjects. The Palestinian Jews defined the concept of Israel so as to be limited to the Jews by blood; thus their monotheistic belief could only serve political division. For Eusebius, all kinds of particularism—ethnic, political, or theological—are evil and should be avoided. He claims that the remedy for particularism came as political universalism through the *Pax Romana*, on the one hand, and as universal monotheism through Christ, on the other:

But two great powers—the Roman Empire, which became a monarchy at that time, and the teaching of Christ—proceeding as if from a single starting point [νύσσης μίας], at once tamed and reconciled all to friendship [Φιλίαν]. Thus each blossomed at the same time and place as the other. For while the power of Our Savior destroyed the polyarchy and polytheism of the demons and heralded the one kingdom of God to Greeks and barbarians and all men to the farthest extent of the earth, the Roman Empire, now that the causes of manifold governments had been abolished, subdued the visible governments, in order to merge the entire race into one unity and concord (*SC,* XVI, 5-6).

The Greek word νύσσης means a pole which marks the starting point in a hippodrome, and is chosen here deliberately as a similar metaphor to the two 'shoots.' This time the illustration compares the Roman Empire and Christianity to two race horses, each running in the same direction towards a common goal. The shoot metaphor alternates to emphasize the simultaneous development of the empire and the church: "thus each blossomed at the same time and place as the other." That polyarchy and polytheism were abolished by the cooperation of Christ and the Roman Empire and that "all are tamed and reconciled to friendship" are compared to the blossoming of the two shoots.

Eusebius refers to Stoic concepts of unity, concord, and friendship as the outcome of collaboration between Christianity and the Roman Empire:

> Moreover, as One God and one knowledge of this God was heralded to all, one empire waxed strong among men, and the entire race of mankind was redirected into peace and friendship as all acknowledged each other brothers and discovered their related nature. All at once, as if sons of one father, the One God, and children of one mother, true religion, they greeted and received each other peaceably, so that from that time the whole inhabited world differed in no way from a single well-ordered and related household (*SC*, XVI, 7).

According to Eusebius's interpretation, monotheism and monarchy together united all humanity into one unit, a family, wiping out all the causes of division and strife. This universal harmony and concord was not a new reality but a returning to the pristine state of pre-lapsarian humanity as "...the entire race of mankind was redirected into peace and friendship." The divine providence acts in history in such a way as to diffuse the principle of unity everywhere. It was the result of such action, argues Eusebius, that the knowledge of one God was proclaimed to all, and simultaneously political unity and human concord were realized through the Roman Empire. In the meantime, the entire human race acknowledges each other as friends and kin because of the recognition of their common nature. As a result of the simultaneous rise of the universal monarchy and monotheism, humanity became as one household. Therefore, the unity of humanity in recognizing one God, and in coming under one universal political body, resulted in the establishment of the principles of love, friendship, and peace on earth.

In the above passage, there are noticeable references to some important Stoic principles. The passage alludes to the diffusion of the principles of the Middle-Stoic ethics among the Roman intellectuals such as Cicero and Seneca, prior to and during the

Pax Romana.[33] Stoic concepts of natural reason (*logos*), kinship of humanity, and friendship best suited the project of the Roman Empire as the political gospel of universality, which found its expression in the concept of *Romanitas,* which meant to the Romans that:

...while local and racial differences continued to exist, citizens of the empire discovered a bond of community with one another on the plane of natural reason. It was on this account that the Roman order claimed universality and a finality to which alternative systems of life could not pretend.[34]

As explained above, the main basis on which the *Romanitas* built its political universality was the Stoic concept of *logos*. The concepts of "kinship of humanity," "friendship," and "humanity as one single household" all receive their justification from the notion that the reason of every individual is considered a part of this universal mind or *logos*.[35] The emperor Marcus Aurelius describes this concept as a basis for a universal law and universal state as follows:

If we have intelligence in common, so we have reason which makes us reasoning beings, and that practical reason which orders what we must or must not do; then the law too is common to us and, if so, we are citizens; if so, we share a common government; if so, the universe is, as it were, a city—for what other common government could one say is shared by all mankind?[36]

Eusebius's argument refers to that this concept of natural theology, which was commonly used in the Roman political ideology and the Christian soteriology, as the basis of their respective claims of universality. In other words, the Stoic concept of universal *logos* was

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[33] For the political views of Cicero and Seneca see Sabine, *History of Political Theory,* 157-164 and 171-176.

[34] C. N. Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 73.

[35] Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture,* 165-166.

[36] Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, *The Meditations,* IV. 4, translated with an introduction by G. M. A. Grube (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1963), 26-7.

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a junction point and a common ground, on which the Roman Empire justified its ideology of a universal rule over the entire humanity and the church, based its gospel of universal salvation. The striking similarities between the thoughts of the Middle-Stoic philosopher Seneca (ca. 3 B.C.—65 A.D.) and that of the early church fathers, especially that of St. Paul, reveals that the Stoic natural theology was the most fertile soil, on which the church and the Roman Empire could grow their respective claims of universality. Many concepts used by Seneca such as the 'city of God', the 'fatherhood of God', 'brotherhood of man', and 'law of charity or benevolence' were similarly used by Christian fathers.[37] Several of the fathers claimed Seneca as a Christian, and a purported correspondence between him and St. Paul was assumed to be genuine by prominent figures of the Christian tradition such as St. Jerome.[38] In his discussion about the similar views of Seneca and the church fathers, G. Sabine remarks as follows:

In general, it may be said that the Fathers of the church, in respect to natural law, human equality, and the necessity of justice in the state, were substantially in agreement with Cicero and Seneca. It is true that the pagan writers knew nothing of a revealed law, such as Christians believed was contained in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, but the belief in revelation was in no way incompatible with the view that the law of nature also is God's law.[39]

Eusebius reminds both the churchmen and the emperor that the gospel of political universalism of the *Pax Romana*, and the church's gospel of universal salvation both depended upon the same principle of natural theology, and that this situation could not be a pure coincidence. On the contrary, this common principle was an actualization of the divine will, which had predestined the co-existence and cooperation of the church and the

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[37] Sabine, *History of Political Theory,* 171-176.

[38] Russell, *History of Western Philosophy,* 267.

[39] Sabine, *History of Political Theory,* 177.

empire to bring universal salvation and peace upon humanity. They were the two shoots of one root, as it were, which blossomed at the same time; two race horses that run towards the same destination with a similar will and enthusiasm. The metaphors imply that, as a natural unfolding of the divine economy of salvation in history, the fruits of these two shoots were garnered in Constantine's conversion and in Christianity's becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire. The bottom-line of the argument is that the co-existence and cooperation of the church and the Roman Empire was a historical necessity, as it represented a natural unfolding of the economy of the divine *Logos* in history.

Given the historical circumstances of his day, when the great persecution was still fresh in the church's collective memory, and the dominantly pagan character of the Roman Empire still remained, Eusebius's claim about the place and role of the Roman Empire in divine history sounds rather revolutionary and radical particularly when he even designates the Roman Empire as the fulfillment of the Scripture:

Thus the predictions of the ancient oracles and utterances of the prophets were fulfilled—countless of them not time now to quote, but including those which said of the saving Logos that "He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the rivers unto the ends of the earth." And again 'In his days shall the righteous flourish and abundance of peace." "And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (*SC,* XVI, 7).

According to the above passage, the new *imperium* of the Christian empire is presented as the fulfillment of the Scripture: it is Isaiah's 'peaceable kingdom'. Eusebius is arguably the first church father to claim that the Old Testament prophecy had been fulfilled in Constantine's Christian empire and such a claim implied the inclusion of the empire within the limits of Christian salvation history. By assigning the Roman Empire

the role of promoting the true piety and leading people to their true lord,[40] a mission

which had previously been considered to be an exclusive function of the church, Eusebius

actually assigned the body politic a position in Christian salvation virtually as important

as that of the church. In point of fact, the involvement of Constantine in the Donatist and

Arian conflicts marked the beginning of a new era of church-empire relations, where the

empire had been given a religious mission, and the Roman politics and Christian religion

had become interrelated. This engagement of the church and empire was destined to

continue for the next millennium of Byzantine theocracy,[41] and Eusebius was the one

who established the theological ground for this unity. For him, such cooperation and

symbiosis of the church and empire were the culmination of salvation history.

The overall consent of the bishops for the imperial involvement in the council of

Nicea might be taken as a proof of a general positive attitude towards the emperor.[42] Such

a consensus on the part of the majority of the bishops might provide us with a reasonable

ground to speculate that, through his positive evaluation of the empire and the emperor's

involvement in church's internal matters, Eusebius's position actually represented that of

the majority of his fellow churchmen. Consequently he became their spokesperson, to

openly express the bishops' tacit acknowledgement of a Christian Emperor's involvement

in doctrinal matters of the church. However, Eusebius's contribution should not be

limited to his being the spokesperson for his fellow-churchmen's tacit approval of

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[40] *Laudibus Constantini,* II.

[41] Steven Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1-2.

[42] According to the available sources, almost all the bishops responded positively to Constantine's invitation to the council of Nicea, and participated in the proceedings that were undertaken under the personal supervision of the emperor. We contend that the bishops' positive attitude points to their tacit approval of Constantine's involvement in the process of this doctrinal conflict. For a brief survey of the proceedings and theology of Nicea see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines,* 2nd edition (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1960), 231-237.

Constantine's active involvement in church matters. On the contrary, his importance

primarily derives from the fact that, in his two orations, Eusebius developed a complete

political theology to justify the Christian Roman Empire, where he assigned the empire

an essential soteriological position within a larger theological paradigm. The radical

approach of Eusebius's attempt might be better appreciated when we compare it to the

previous church fathers'—such as Origen—positive evaluations of the Roman Empire.[43]

For instance, Origen defined the Roman Empire in terms of expediency: it was a divinely

established secular institution to prepare the necessary conditions of order and security

for the church where she could easily promote and preach Christianity.[44] As for Eusebius,

on the other hand, expediency cannot be an adequate characteristic to define the empire.

He defined the body politic on a theological principle as a mimesis of the divine

imperium, and he thus rendered the empire an explicitly Christian institution, vested with

both secular and religious functions.[45] In Eusebius's new construction, the empire was a

fellow institution of the church, assuming an important portion of the church's primary

functions. From the church's point of view, Eusebius's positive evaluation of the empire

required radical modifications in the traditional notions of ecclesiology. In fact,

Eusebius's new paradigm demanded an entirely new ecclesiology. Eusebius presented

this new ecclesiology not as a model of compromise but a necessary corollary of

salvation history: the church and the empire were meant to be and had been prepared to

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[43] For an insightful and detailed exposition of the previous church father's evaluations of the Roman Empire see Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture,* 219 ff.

[44] See above pages, 48-49.

[45] In the second chapter of the *Laudibus Constantini,* Eusebius argues that Constantine's qualities were similar to those of the *Logos* and thus the emperor made his realm a copy of the heavenly kingdom.

evolve into this unity and symbiosis ever since their simultaneous appearances on the stage of history.

On the basis of the findings of modern scholarship, we have mentioned that Eusebius's "Imperial Theology" was not an original model of sovereignty, and that he undertook a new synthesis of the previous constructions of political theory, especially that of the Hellenistic models of kingship.[46] However, Eusebius defined the empire on a specifically Christian principle, that is, the divine kingdom of God, and vested this sovereignty with exclusively Christian missions of promoting and protecting this religion. The orator thus hails the Constantinian era as the realization of the ideal of a universal and permanent order:

It thus appears that what Eusebius looked for in the age of Constantine was nothing less than a realization of the secular hope of men, the dream of universal and perpetual peace which classical Rome had made her own, but of which the *Pax Romana* was merely a faint and imperfect anticipation; and it is important to note the grounds of this convictions. These lie in the fact that Christianity provides a basis, hitherto lacking, for human solidarity.[47]

On the grounds of his conviction that Christian monotheism provides a new basis for human solidarity, Eusebius considers the age of Constantine as the realization of the ideal of universal and perpetual peace. In other words, the Constantinian era realized the fulfillment of the dreams of classical political philosophy, thanks to the new principle of universal solidarity: Christian monotheism. One should notice that this is only one part of the Eusebian double-claim, the part which was specifically addressed to the Roman world. In addition to the fulfillment of the secular hopes of humanity, Eusebius also saw, in the age of Constantine, the fulfillment of the prophetical hopes of Christianity; to

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[46] See chapter 1, footnote 34.

[47] Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture,* 185.

Eusebius, Constantine's Christian empire was at the same time the fulfillment of the Scripture. The orations are full of biblical quotations to this effect. It is this convergence of the fulfillments of political and prophetical expectations, which convinced Eusebius that, in this new era, cooperation and symbiosis of the church and the Roman Empire was a necessity of divine providence.

To summarize, in the 16th chapter of his *Sepulchro Christi*, Eusebius develops a full argument for the providential coincidence of the *Pax Romana* and the incarnation of Christ, or of the proclamation of universal monarchy and of universal monotheism. Structuring his argument within a paradigm of salvation history, Eusebius begins with a description of the Hellenic and Hellenistic ages, when the dire consequences of polyarchy—political instability, incessant wars, murders, rapes, etc.—afflicted humanity. Moreover, the oration presents polyarchy as a direct result of polytheism.

According to Eusebius, the providential simultaneity of the establishment of a monarchy through the *Pax Romana* and the establishment of the universal monotheism through the resurrection of Christ, have defeated the two most formidable enemies of humanity: polyarchy and polytheism. Eusebius develops a full-fledged argument for this providential coincidence in a salvation-historical perspective. According to the argument, the root cause of all division is locality, which translates into local deities in terms of belief, and into ethnicity in terms of political disposition. Christianity and the *Pax Romana* brought the self-same solution against these problems, which was universality. By abolishing the root causes of all evils, the two actually realized the secular and religious hopes of humanity.

Eusebius argued that both the Roman Empire and the church claimed their respective ideals of universality on the same principle, that is, the Stoic notion of the friendship and equality of all humanity, which transcends all kinds of ethnic and class divisions. Eusebius claims that his arguments were based on historical realities rather than intellectual speculations. He concludes that all these proofs lead to one fact: the divine providence has predestined the Roman Empire and the church to cooperate and live together in mutual support to procure the twin benefits of material well-being and salvation for humanity.

From the audience's point of view, Eusebius's argument was addressed to both the representatives of the Roman Empire and the church, who, in the Constantinian era, were facing the reality of an intimate engagement between the church and empire. We can thus read the argument as addressed to two groups of audiences: to his imperial audience, Eusebius stated that unless the Roman Empire accepted the principle of universal monotheism, it would have never be able to realize the secular hopes of humanity; to his ecclesiastical audience, on the other hand, he observed that the prospect of universal salvation could only be realized through a cooperation between the Roman Empire and the church. Eusebius's proposal to his fellow churchmen also implied that they had to revise and reshape their ecclesiology in accordance with the new circumstances.

The bottom-line of the Eusebian arguments was a salvation-historical observation: after having experienced a long term of taming and adjustment, divine providence had ripened the historical circumstances for both entities—Roman Empire and the Christian Church—to realize this engagement, as a culmination of salvation history. The entire progress of human civilization in the political and religious realms had been

providentially brought to this point of convergence. Therefore, it was a historical necessity that the Roman Empire and the church come together and cooperate in concord and friendship for the sake of humankind.

The Problem of Eusebius's Ecclesiology and Modern Interpretations

The overall content of the Constantinian literature (*The Life of Constantine, the Tricennial Orations, the Treatise on the Holy Sepulchre,* and book 10 of the *Church History*) are dominantly preoccupied with the place of the Roman Empire in salvation history, to the effect that ecclesiastical concerns are generally ignored or dealt with only indirectly. The chapter XVI of the *Sepulchro Christi* makes the point that the empire and the church were predestined to cooperate and live together to provide humanity with the twin benefits of material well-being and salvation. However, apart from that, the orations do not provide a detailed exposition of a theory of the church and its relation to the empire, designed for the new situation of a Christianized Roman Empire. Therefore, Eusebius's seemingly intense preoccupation with the role and place of the emperor and the empire in the divine economy of salvation gives the impression that he somewhat downplayed the role of the church in his soteriology.

We have suggested that, by establishing the Roman Empire as an agent of salvation next to the church, Eusebius actually requested that his fellow churchmen revise their ecclesiology. In other words, Eusebius's argument highlighted the need for a new ecclesiology, in keeping with the circumstances of the new Christian empire. However, Eusebius seems to be quite reticent to detail this new ecclesiology himself. This reticence stands out even more when we consider the ramifications of his portrayal of the empire as

the worldly *mimesis* of the kingdom of heaven.[48] The Christian emperor is portrayed in a close relationship with the *Logos* of Christ, through whom the emperor receives the knowledge of the higher kingdom, and shapes and rules his kingdom accordingly.[49] In this context, Claudia Rapp observes that Eusebius vests Constantine with priestly functions and deliberately evokes Moses as the *exemplum* which the emperor imitates in every turning-point of his imperial career.[50] The implication of such a comparison seems to be establishing the notion that the emperor, in his ruling, received a similar inspiration from the *Logos* of Christ. All of these give the impression that the place and function of the church are downplayed by Eusebius. As such, the issue requires to be accounted for on behalf of the overall coherence of Eusebius's theological system. In this subsection, therefore, we will discuss some prominent modern scholarly interpretations of church-empire relations in the Constantinian era and Eusebius's role in defining these relations, in order to clarify what distinctive roles the orator gave to the church and the empire in his theology.

First of all, according to a significant group of modern scholars, Constantinian model of church-empire relations and their Eusebian portrayal can be best described as "Caesaropapism." This term is used to define religio-political systems "where the temporal sovereignty more or less annexes the religious sphere."[51] As the earliest proponent of this view, J. Burckhardt depicted Constantine as a shrewd villain motivated by ambition and lust for power, who saw in Christianity the chance to be a world power

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[48] See *Laudibus Constantini,* II, III.

[49] See *Laudibus Constantini,* V.

[50] Claudia Rapp, "Imperial Theology in the Making: Eusebius of Caesarea on Constantine as 'bishop'." *Jounal of Theological Studies* 49:2 (1998): 689.

[51] Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor and the Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium* (transl. Jean Birrell; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 283.

and took advantage accordingly. Burckhardt blamed Eusebius for having travestied the truth about Constantine for the advantage of political power.[52] G. Dagron explains Burckhardt's position as follows: "By choice a western humanist, by instinct typically Protestant, Burckhardt could imagine only a perpetual tension between religion and power; he rejected all forms of state Christianity and analyzed with obvious antipathy the system he called 'Byzantinismus', which would soon be given the name 'caesaropapism'"[53] Burckhardt designated this cooperation between the church and the empire for the sake of mutual benefits and power as "Byzantinism," which was:

...a separate category of culture...which...at its summit was despotism, infinitely strengthened by the union of churchly and secular dominion; in the place of morality it imposed orthodoxy; in the place of unbridled and demoralized expression of the natural instincts, hypocrisy and pretence.[54]

From the church's point of view it only came with compromise and distortion for the churchmen simply ignored the emperor's paganism and unethical rule.[55] This was a critique based on the assumption that there can be no power relation between politics and religion, for religion is a category, which should only serve the moral betterment of the individual.

Generally speaking, J. Burckhardt's reading that Constantine was primarily motivated by a lust for power, and that Eusebius travestied the real picture to get the benefits of imperial support for the church, and that he thus became an instrument of Constantine's greed is not a popular scholarly interpretation today for many reasons. First

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[52] Jacob Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine the Great,* trans. Moses Hadas (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London, 1949), 292-293.

[53] Dagron, *Emperor and Priest,* 286.

[54] Burchardt, *Age of Constantine*, 345.

[55] Burchardt, *Age of Constantine,* 306.

of all, recent studies on Constantine's conversion and religious policy indicate that he

might well have been sincere in his support for the Christian Church.[56] Secondly,

Eusebius's relation to Constantine assumes that they had a close relationship so that the

orator was in a position of using his talents to secure his support. Timothy Barnes's

studies have shown that their actual acquaintance and personal encounters did not exceed

a few meetings all throughout their lives and that Eusebius spent most of his life residing

in his diocese, serving his community as the head of one of the most important Christian

churches.[57] Thirdly and most importantly, Burckhardt and many Western Byzantinists

had some essential anachronisms in reading their modern concepts into the period of

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[56] In his *Constantine and the Christian Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 282-284, Charles Matson Odahl gives a thorough summary of the modern interpretations of Constantine: "Modern interpretations of Constantine have generally fallen into three schools of thought. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jacob Burckhardt and Henri Grégoire presented Constantine as a political pragmatist. They looked at the religious elements in the Christian sources with the eyes of modern rationalists, and discounted that evidence as unreliable. They maintained that a successful statesman like Constantine must have been a pragmatic realist. According to this school of thought, he simply feigned conversion to gain Christian support for his march to power. Since most of the documents relevant to the religious policies of Constantine are only available in Christian writings, such a view had some merit. Yet, as Christians were only a small proportion of the population in 312, and had not shown much interest in military or governmental service, the idea that Constantine only pretended conversion so that he might "use the altars of the Church as a convenient footstool to the throne of empire" left much to be desired as an explanation for his changed religious policies. The political pragmatist view is the weakest where it discounts the testimony of the most important sources, ignores the religious climate of the era, and interprets Constantine by modern political standards. In the early twentieth century, André Piganiol and Jacques Moreau interpreted Constantine as a religious syncretist. They took the philosophical quest for a "Highest Deity" in the third and fourth centuries seriously, and viewed Constantine as a man of his times who simply added the Christian Deity to this pantheon of heavenly patrons when he deemed it useful to do so …The religious syncretist view is weakest in overemphasizing Constantine's limited toleration for paganism while ignoring his private religious beliefs and his massive public benefactions for the Catholic Church. In the mid-twentieth century, Norman Baynes, Andreas Alföldi, A.H.M. Jones, Herman Dörries, and Ramsay MacMullen gradually turned back the rational skepticism and hypercriticism of the earlier schools of thought, and presented Constantine as genuine convert to Christianity…The genuine conversion viewpoint gained dominance among scholars in the late twentieth century…"

[57] See Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: HUP, 1981), 265-6: "Eusebius [in his *Life of Constantine*] suggests that he was close to the emperor; hence he becomes, in many modern accounts, a constant adviser of Constantine, a close confidant, his principal counsellor on ecclesiastical matters. Basic facts of geography and chronology contradict this conventional portrait. Eusebius of Caesarea did not, like his namesake of Nicomedia, reside near the imperial capital, come to court when he chose, or have ready access to the emperor's presence. He was no courtier, still less a trusted counsellor from whom Constantine sought constant advice on ecclesiastical policy. Under Constantine, as under the pagan emperors who ruled the East before 324, Eusebius lived in Palestine, active as a scholar and a bishop. He probably met and conversed with the emperor on no more than four occasions."

Constantine. G. Dagron contends that as a humanist and instinctively a typical Protestant, Burckhardt *a priori* denied all forms of state Christianity, for "he could only imagine a perpetual tension between religion and power."[58] This alien mentality, argues Dagron, led Burckhardt to structure his historical analysis "...upon all sorts of moral opposites: sincerity and opportunism, religion and politics, Church and state, and already, in the background, West and East."[59] As we shall discuss below in detail, this picture of a perpetual tension between the church and the empire can be applied to neither Constantine's nor Eusebius's points of view. We have already seen that Eusebius painstakingly establishes the interdependence of the two institutions both in salvation-historical and progress-of-civilization perspectives. Unless his sincerity is questioned, his writings do not support the existence of such a tension.

A similar approach is developed by Erik Peterson.[60] His critique is directed to the political use of monotheism, according to which:

The notion of divine monarchy, which the Arians and Eusebios developed and which the Trinitarian dogma combated, should not be understood as a theological response to the problem of divinity, but as a political response to the risks of a break up of the Roman Empire.[61]

According to this reading, Eusebius is an ideologue who reshaped his subordinationist Trinitarian doctrine in order to make it useful for the political expediencies of the Roman Empire. Because of this contention, the scholar rejected all political theology.[62]

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[58] Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 286.

[59] Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 286.

[60] Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 286-287.

[61] Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 287.

[62] Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 287.

As for Peterson's critique of political theology, or the use of theological speculation for the benefit of political gains, we can make similar observations. First of all, that the notion of the divine monarchy was rather a theological response to a political problem—that is, the risk of a break-up of the Roman Empire—is not historically valid. For when Eusebius delivered this oration in circa 336, there was not such a political risk. By the year 324, Constantine had already established his monarchical rule by defeating all his political rivals; he had already consolidated the administrative and military establishment of the empire through his reforms.[63] However, we should mention that part of the Eusebian argument concerning church-empire relations was that the unity and cooperation of the two were necessary for the political well-being of the empire. Secondly, Peterson's analysis depends on a categorical separation between spiritual and political realms. Such a separation, however, does not apply to Eusebius's own conceptions, the primary aim of which was to unite the two realms under the concept of the *Logos* of Christ.[64] We have mentioned that Eusebius's project was to define Christian society in a Christianized political establishment, and his argument was primarily meant to unite those two areas and not to separate them. In his attempt to establish one supreme Christian principle as the foundation of all elements of human civilization, Eusebius was working within the conventions of the previous Christian tradition. This was realized mainly through the *Logos* theology. For Eusebius and for many of his contemporaries,

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[63] See Averil Cameron, "The Reign of Constantine, A.D. 306-337," *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd edition, vol. XII, *The Crisis of Empire A.D. 193-337,* Alan K. Bowden, P. Garnsey, and Averil Cameron (eds.) (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 108-109: "Once he [Constantine] had secured sole power he benefited from the many useful institutional changes which had been begun during the reign of Diocletian, and was able to continue and consolidate them into a system which remained essentially stable until at least the reign of Justinian. It is entirely fair to regard this system with T. D. Barnes as a 'new empire.'"

[64] See *Laudibus Constantini,* IV, 1-2.

the engagement of the church and the empire only enlarged the Christian society in a

positive way. As it will be explained below, the Christian social concept of *Ecclesia*

could well comprise both the church and the empire on a basic principle of faith.

George Hunston Williams approaches the problem of church-state relations in the

fourth century from the perspective of the contending Christologies of the Arians and the

Nicenes:

The present inquiry concerns, rather, the influence if the contending Christologies themselves upon the political behavior and the ecclesio-political thought of their protagonists; in brief, the possible connection (1) between the Catholic insistence upon the consubstantiality of the Son and the championship of the independence of the Church of which he is the Head and (2) between the Arian preference for Christological subordination and the Arian disposition to subordinate the Church to the State.[65]

According to Williams, Eusebius's subordinationist tendencies led him to understand—as

all other Arians—incarnation on cosmological rather than soteriological grounds:

In establishing order and harmony, the emperor was performing on earth what Eusebius regarded as the principal function of the Logos in and over the cosmos. Christ and the Christian emperor are in the thought of Eusebius almost coordinate in honor, each under the Supreme God, each in his special way leading men to the knowledge and worship of God, each complementing the other in bringing order and peace to mankind...Eusebius instinctively felt that the Christian *basileus* on the throne was a fuller image of the *Pambasileus* than the apostolic *hiereus* at the Christian altar. There was no place in the thought of Eusebius (or the Arian Reviser) for two related but distinct societies, the Church and the Christianized State, each with its special task under Christ as *Basileus kai Hiereus*, but rather one God, one emperor, one religion, and a single-minded dutiful episcopate. For such was the religio-political conviction and program of Eusebius, earning for him the title of herald of Byzantinism in proclaiming the Empire as the primary image and reflection of the heavenly Kingdom, the Kingdom of God in time. The connection between a subordinationist Christology and a weak ecclesiology in Eusebius (and the Arian Reviser of the *Vita*) is fairly clear.[66]

Williams's analysis of the possible connections between the Christologies of the Arians

(among whom was Eusebius) and that of the Catholic party in the Arian dispute, and their

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[65] George Hunston Williams, "Christology and Church-State Relations in the Fourth Century," *Church History* 20.3 (Sep. 1951): 10.

[66] Williams, "Christology and Church-State Relations," 18-19.

respective political thoughts during the fourth century, ignores some important historical facts. In simple terms, Williams claims that the Arian Christological subordination translated into subordination of the church to the Empire—thus a "weak ecclesiology"—whereas the Catholic trinitarianism was translated into a claim of equality of the church and the empire, and later on the claim of independence of the church—thus, by default, a "strong ecclesiology"—on their part. Williams's designation of the concept of ecclesiology as "weak" or "strong" reveals his assumption that the church is defined as a political power structure, which, obviously, negotiated her power with the empire. The argument thus seems to assume the ideal of the two powers from the very beginning. As far as the church-empire relations in the Western Christendom are concerned, such 'power-sharing' would be plausible. The Eastern model of church-empire relations, however, did not put so much emphasis on the separateness of the two powers, but on their interdependence and cooperation in forming its own model of Christian society. Similarly, the primary concern of Eusebius's argument was the engagement of the church and the empire to establish a universal Christian society. In this regard, subordination of the church to the empire did not seem to be a major concern. Eusebius established—with the consent of the majority of the churchmen whether Arian or Catholic—the principle of non-separation between the empire and the church.[67] Therefore, Williams's argument could only be justified in the context of the Latin Church where the principle of the two powers was to be established due to various political, geographical, and social causes, to which Christological argument could only be instrumental. If we assume the Byzantine paradigm as a politically submissive and subordinationist model of church-empire

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[67] See above footnote 42.

relations, we should then acknowledge that Byzantine Orthodoxy has maintained a subordinationist Christology throughout.

The modern scholarly interpretations reviewed so far often misjudged the church-empire relations of the Constantinian period and Eusebius's role as a contemporary interpreter of those relations, primarily due to the anachronistic approaches derived from their *a priori* categories of modern-day church-state relations. Regarding the question of Eusebius's ecclesiology, they suggest that Eusebius gave the pride of place to the empire and thus favoured caesaropapism. A few prominent modern scholars, however, in their attempt to avoid such modern anachronisms, developed more reasonable approaches in explaining Eusebius's position in the establishment of church-empire relations.

Edward Cranz contends that Eusebius's main concern was to explain and justify a Christian society in a newly Christianized empire.[68] Drawing on a wide range of Eusebius's works, Cranz reconstructs two essential Eusebian concepts of Christian society, namely, kingdom (*basileia*) and polity (*politeia*). According to his analysis, Eusebius's concept of kingdom refers to man's nature and his ultimate destination: "...man is by his nature a kingly animal and his destination is the kingdom of heaven."[69] As a concept to designate Christian society, argues Cranz, Eusebian kingdom derives its meaning from its heavenly archetype, the divine kingdom:

All kingdom ultimately derives its meaning from God. The divine kingdom is in some way the original, the archetype, the reality; all other kingdoms must be related to it as image or symbol or shadow.[70]

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[68] F. Edward Cranz, "Kingdom and Polity in Eusebius of Caesarea," *Harvard Theological Review* 45 (1952): 47.

[69] Cranz, "Kingdom and Polity in Eusebius of Caesarea," 51.

[70] Cranz, "Kingdom and Polity in Eusebius of Caesarea," 52.

According to Cranz, the existence of the church and empire as two separate institutions within the "Christian kingdom" did not lead Eusebius to acknowledge exclusivist claims of either to represent the heavenly kingdom. Quite the opposite, the church and the Roman Empire are both true images of the heavenly kingdom on earth:

It is now clear from Eusebius's discussion of kingdom that the ecclesia and the empire must be closely related. Both are images of the kingdom of heaven, and they may appear as one in the assembly of Constantine and the bishops, or they may be described as the two aspects, rule and teaching, of Christ's kingdom on earth.[71]

Cranz states that, in order to avoid too limited a sense of Christian society, Eusebius avoided the word "ecclesia" and used "politeuma-politea" instead to refer to the whole Christian society in all its aspects.[72] The conclusion of his argument is as follows:

Eusebius's discussion of kingdom and polity makes plain his two most general assumptions about the Christian society. In the first place he assumes that the Christian society on earth is to be an image of the kingdom and polity of heaven. In the second place he assumes that the Christian society on earth is a unity embracing all aspects of civilization and that in this unity the function of the emperor, for example, is as Christian as that of the bishop. The whole of human society should be Christian and holy, and it becomes Christian and holy when it is an image of heaven.[73]

Our textual analysis of the chapter XVI of the *Sepulchro Christi* revealed similar conclusions to the analysis of Cranz: that the church and the empire are considered as twin societies, which shared a common origin, as well as common destination and aims. Eusebius's paradigm assumes their co-existence and cooperation to be essential for the spiritual and material well-being of the Christian society. Eusebius's project does not turn

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[71] Cranz, "Kingdom and Polity in Eusebius of Caesarea," 59.

[72] Cranz, "Kingdom and Polity in Eusebius of Caesarea," 62.

[73] Cranz, "Kingdom and Polity in Eusebius of Caesarea," 64.

the church and empire into identical institutions, but maintains their separate identities on the basis of their respective functions. In addition, we have shown that, in giving a theological principle—the *Logos* of Christ—to the Roman Empire, Eusebius followed the foot prints of the previous church fathers, who had similarly Christianized some prominent aspects of the Greco-Roman culture through the application of the same principle of the *Logos* of Christ.

We mentioned in the beginning of this sub-section that Eusebius's Constantinian literature gives the impression that the role of the church is toned down as compared to the role of the Roman Empire. Despite the fact that Eusebius never acknowledges such a superior position for the empire, the Constantinian literature led some scholars to read Eusebius's project as "Caesaropapism." We have so far given enough explanation to suggest that this was not the case. In his study of Eusebius's commentary on Isaiah, Michael J. Hollerich attempts to balance Eusebius's seemingly weak ecclesiology, where he concludes with the following remark:

The cumulative result of this research is to portray Eusebius in a more conventional capacity as a bishop-scholar-apologist devoted to advancing an adequate self-understanding for the church in the face of the new situation created by Constantine's unification of the empire and his Christian affiliation.[74]

Hollerich claims that Eusebius's political motives and his political views are overemphasized and that his importance as a churchman and biblical scholar are correspondingly downplayed. Hollerich's main contribution to the Eusebian scholarship is to illustrate the fact that in his commentary of Isaiah, Eusebius gave the pride of place to the church and treated the Christian empire as a secondary theme, which clearly

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[74] Michael J. Hollerich, *Eusebius of Caesarea's Commentary on Isaiah: Christian Exegesis in the Age of Constantine* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1999), 201-202.

reveals a sharp contrast to the picture in the Constantinian literature.[75] Hollerich explains

the overemphasis on the importance of the empire in the Constantinian literature on the

basis of the conventions of the genre of panegyric, suggesting the students of those

literatures a retouching of the portrait drawn from such sources.[76] Hollerich states that his

interpretation of Eusebius has its parallel in the work of Gerhard Ruhbach, who remarks

on Eusebius as follows:

> He never became a political theologian in the sense of one who shaped his ideas to justify political policies or was interested in political events for their own sake, but always saw them from a theological and ecclesiastical perspective. Ruhbach reminds us of the genre limitations of official panegyric and points out, as have others, how Eusebius created a distinctively Christian version of rulership that emphasizes the humanity and moral responsibility of the ruler.[77]

We have also expressed a similar reading of Eusebius's *Laudibus Constantini* and

Sepulchro Christi when we contended that the overall emphasis of his argument is

theological. In fact, Eusebius attempted to establish a unity between the realm of politics

and religion, or, in other words, sought to unite the political and religious discourses

under the supreme principle of the *Logos* of Christ.

To conclude our discussion of Eusebius's ecclesiology, the Western categories of

ecclesiology which seek an independent and authoritative church as an alternative power

structure to the state should not be anachronistically applied to Eusebius's understanding

of church-empire relations in his own time. It would be more appropriate to consider that

Eusebius's main concern was to define a larger Christian society, a universal structure

based on a monotheistic faith, which comprises both political and religious realms.

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[75] Hollerich, *Eusebius of Caesarea's Commentary on Isaiah*, 196.

[76] Hollerich, *Eusebius of Caesarea's Commentary on Isaiah*, 202

[77] Hollerich, *Eusebius of Caesarea's Commentary on Isaiah,* 202.

Cranz's reconstruction of the Eusebian concept of the *politeia* (the Christian Polity) as an all-inclusive definition of the Christian society reveals this fact. Under this larger category, a differentiation between the institutions of the church and the empire on the basis of their respective functions is maintained. On the whole, the new ecclesiology or the new concept of the Christian polity depends on the principle of non-separation between the church and the empire. The two, argued Eusebius, were destined to a symbiosis, in constant cooperation and interdependence. By giving the Roman body politic a Christian principle, Eusebius's "Imperial Theology" was actually instrumental to the establishment of a Christian society, a Christian commonwealth. It can be argued that the later controversies between the church and the Byzantine Empire in relation to the doctrinal matters were about the determination of the limits of the functional differences between the church and the empire, rather than being struggles of independence on the part of the clergymen or power-struggles between the two institutions. Thus the principle established by Eusebius remained unchallenged: that the emperors have a duty to concern themselves with the ecclesiastical and doctrinal matters as part of their imperial duties, on the one hand, and the church is to be equally concerned with the material and spiritual well-being of the empire, on the other. This will be the working principle for the relationship between the church and the empire during the Iconoclastic controversy.

Summary

The era of Constantine posed a new challenge to the church to redefine herself in association with a Christianized emperor, who openly favoured Christians and proved himself ready to accommodate Christianity as the official religion of the empire. The

importance of Eusebius derives from the fact that he responded to the new challenge with a sophisticated theological argument for positive church-empire relations. "Imperial Theology" was primarily proposed to give a positive basis for church-empire relations. The *Tricennial Orations* address to the concerns of both churchmen and imperial intellectual elite and develop, on the shared ground of natural theology, the idea that the Constantinian era marked the beginning of a providentially designed era of the Christian commonwealth, which was to be realized through the symbiosis and cooperation of the church and the Roman Empire.

The Eusebian paradigm for church-empire relations was designed to define the Christian society in the new situation of a Christianized body politic. The paradigm can be better contextualized in view of the previous church-empire relations. During the first three centuries, Christians did not entertain the idea of a Christian empire. For them, political authority was established by God to govern people's secular concerns. As expressed by Paul in Romans 13, all authority—secular or spiritual—are established by God, and civic authority was defined as an essential Christian virtue. However, Christians had also loyalty to the church. As in the case of emperor worship, when their two loyalties conflicted Christians were expected to side with their spiritual loyalty. That is why they were potential political subversives in the eyes of Roman authorities. Therefore, the conviction of the Roman authorities that, owing to their divided loyalty, Christians were potential subversives had its result in the persecution policies pursued against Christians; whereas the Christian attempts to refuse the truthfulness of those charges constituted one of the main themes of apologies written by the church fathers.

Having taken this picture in mind, in the 16th chapter of his *Sepulchro Christi,* Eusebius develops a full argument for positive church-empire relations, addressed to both the representatives of the Roman Empire and the church, who, in the Constantinian era, were facing the reality of an intimate engagement between the church and the empire. According to the argument, after having experienced a long term of taming and adjustment, divine providence had ripened the historical circumstances for both parts— Roman Empire and the Christian Church—to realize this engagement as a culmination of salvation history. The entire progress of human civilization in the political and religious realms had been providentially brought to this point. Therefore, it was a historical necessity that the Roman Empire and the church come together and cooperate in concord and friendship for the sake of humankind.

Lastly, through an overall evaluation of modern Eusebian scholarship, we have addressed the issue of the "underrepresented" ecclesiology of Eusebius. The overall content of the Constantinian literature (*The Life of Constantine, the Tricennial Oration, the Treatise on the Holy Sepulchre,* and book 10 of the *Church History*) are largely preoccupied with the place of the Roman Empire in salvation history, to the effect that ecclesiastical concerns are generally ignored or dealt with only indirectly. Eusebius's seemingly intense preoccupation with the role and place of the emperor and the empire in the divine economy of salvation gives the impression that he somewhat downplayed the role of the church in his soteriology.

Through an overall evaluation of the modern Eusebian scholarship, we have suggested that Eusebius held as much to a traditional ecclesiology as any of the contemporary church fathers. As revealed in M. Hollerich's studies, his ecclesiastical

concerns can be derived from his other works beside the Constantinian literature in which he gave the pride of place to the role of the Roman Empire in salvation history. As for his ecclesiology, we suggested that it would be more appropriate to consider that Eusebius's main concern was to define a larger Christian society, a universal structure based on a monotheistic faith, which comprised both political and religious realms. E. Cranz's reconstruction of the Eusebian concept of the *politeia* (the Christian Polity), as an all-inclusive definition of the Christian society reveals this fact. Under this larger category, a differentiation between the institutions of the church and the empire on the basis of their respective functions is maintained. On the whole, the new ecclesiology or the new concept of the Christian polity depends on the principle of non-separation between the church and the empire. The two, argued Eusebius, were destined to a symbiosis, in constant cooperation and interdependence.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND
OF THE ICONOCLASTIC CONTROVERSY

Decline and Transformation in the Seventh-Century Byzantium

The Iconoclastic and the Iconodule perceptions of images should be elaborated within a

wider perspective, and not limited to their respective doctrinal considerations. In this

regard, we assume that both parties considered the social, political, and religious

developments of the seventh century as integral to their theological reasoning that

eventually shaped their respective stands on the issue of images. The specifically

doctrinal issues are naturally a central aspect of their considerations and will be dealt with

in subsequent chapters; however, we should note that they appeared only after it was

apparent that the dispute required theological justification for the positions already

taken.[1] We will demonstrate that these theological analyses entailed a self-critique of the

Byzantine religio-political ideology on the part of the establishment of the empire and the

church, in the face of grave difficulties that afflicted the Byzantine Commonwealth

during the seventh century, and that this reasoning was made within the parameters of a

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[1] It is interesting to note that the most important area of doctrinal conflict, Christology, only came to the fore nearly three decades after the beginning of the controversy, when the Iconoclastic Council of Hiereia supported its position on Christological grounds in the year 754.

theological paradigm called "Byzantine theodicy."[2] For a long time icon veneration held a significant place in this paradigm as the main expression of a worldview, and it was against this practice that the Iconoclastic party directed its opposition. On the other hand, we will also demonstrate that the Iconodule party took a positive stand on the issue of images based on different theological considerations.

The developments of the late sixth and the seventh centuries until the imperial edict against images in 726 provide the immediate historical context of the Iconoclastic debate. The most striking fact about this immediate context was the coincidence between the accession of icons to the position of the most prominent common feature of Christian devotion, and the military, social, and economic decline of the Byzantine Empire.[3] The scope of this decline can be most easily illustrated by juxtaposing maps of the Byzantine Empire at the end of the sixth century and at that point in the early eighth century when the first Iconoclastic Emperor, Leo III, rose to power. At the end of the sixth century, the Byzantine Empire controlled most of the Mediterranean basin, including Italy, Sicily, the greater part of the Balkans, Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine and most of North Africa. By the time Leo III came to power, however, the Byzantine state had lost most of its former territories and had shrunk to one third of its former extent; leaving it in control only of central and western Asia Minor, a few Mediterranean islands, a small portion of southern

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[2] For Byzantine theodicy see John A. McGuckin, "The Theology of Images and the Legitimation of Power in Eight Century Byzantium," *St. Viladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37 (1993), 42: "It was universally held in Byzantium that God's election had passed from the Jews to the Christians as the New Israel, and the biblical doctrine of God's providence over his elect people was more or less directly inherited as well. The forces of opposition, therefore, like the unbelieving hordes in the Old Testament, were seen as instruments of God's chastisement on the elect, who were meant to correct and punish, but would never wholly triumph over a people who had been definitively formed by a new covenant in Christ, one that would not be superseded. This form of Byzantine theodicy was theologically reinforced after the first wave of Arab invasions (674-678), but was very much shaken by the second."

[3] For the rise of icons see Ernst Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954), 115; for the general situation of the Empire during the period see J. F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 41-91.

Greece and southern Italy, and some insignificant territories around the Adriatic Sea Basin.[4] This loss of territory had been gradual during the second decade of the sixth century. The Persians captured most of the eastern territories, including Jerusalem, and had reached as far as the Bosphorus, while in the Balkans the Avar threat proved as strong as the Persians'. For a brief period, the Avars occupied most of the Balkan territories and besieged the capital in cooperation with the Persians. The Persian and Avar threat was pushed back and a certain stability secured by the early 630s, thanks to the efforts of Heraclius (610-41).[5] However, this brief period of security was to be disturbed by the newly-born Islamic Empire; in the same decade, Muslims occupied Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Armenia and Egypt, and proved themselves to be a permanent threat by their continuous raids into Byzantine territory. By the time of Leo III's accession to the throne, Muslims had captured most of the Byzantine lands in the Middle-East and North Africa, prevailing on both sea and land; they even besieged Constantinople twice, either of which attacks could have easily ended with the fall of the capital, if it were not for the newly-invented "Greek fire." In the second half of the seventh century, the frontier had retreated to Asia Minor and the border territories changed hands back and forth on a yearly basis. The cost of the wars drained the imperial resources and eventually became a heavy burden on the shoulders of people who had to pay increased taxes. Worse still, the political establishment could no longer provide its subjects with security, and no place within the Byzantine Empire was safe. The need for security thus became the primary concern for the Byzantine people in the seventh

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[4] For the maps see Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century,* 33 and 81.

[5] Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century,* 41-8.

century.[6] All in all, historians agree that the time span from the early-sixth to the late-eighth centuries was a dark age of Byzantine history, defined by military setback, political instability, economic regression, cultural decay, and grave insecurity all around the empire.[7] In short, it was a time of struggle for survival.

The above-mentioned developments brought about a comprehensive transformation of Byzantine society and culture, owing to the struggle to respond to these unpleasant circumstances, which revealed a manifest loss of confidence in the traditional structures of imperial supremacy and church order.[8] For the Empire itself and the church, on the other hand, the period was one of self-evaluation and struggle to maintain the unity and solidarity of society, sometimes by reasserting the ideals of the old political order, but most of the time by sanctifying the new religious inclinations of the people.

The traditional ideology of the Byzantine religio-political establishment had certain major conceptions that defined the Byzantine Commonwealth, most of which referred back to the Eusebian "Imperial Theology." One way of comparing fourth-century Church-Empire relations to those of the Iconoclastic period is to think of the former as leading to the conjunction of the two institutions according to a unifying theological paradigm as elaborated by Eusebius, and to look at the Iconoclastic period as a major crisis over the validity of this construction. For this reason it will be necessary to give a summary of the implications of the Eusebian project for a universal Christian society,

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[6] Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 41-99.

[7] For example, Warren Treadgold, "The Struggle for Survival (641-780)," in *The Oxford History of Byzantium,* ed. Cyril Mango (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 129-152; George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State,* trans. Joan Hussey (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 87-147.

[8] Our analysis of the period follows the main lines of John Haldon's reconstruction. He describes the era according to a paradigm of an incongruity between the traditional symbolic world of the Byzantine society, a narrative identity of the Christian Byzantine Commonwealth, and the dire realities of late sixth and seventh centuries. This incongruity had consequences for the society, the church and the empire. The details of this reconstruction will be given below. See, Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century,* 436-48.

especially in order to understand the critical dialectic between the opposing soteriologies of the Iconoclasts and the Iconodules.

First of all, the Christian Roman Empire was defined as the terrestrial replica of the Kingdom of Heaven. Through the Platonic concept of *mimesis,* Eusebius argued that, with a pious Christian emperor who rules his realm according to the Christian principles of justice, and with a church that teaches and preserves the true principles of Christian doctrine and piety, the earthly supremacy could be a real replica of the Kingdom of Heaven; its citizens could receive both material and spiritual benefits in a realm where they prepare themselves for life in Heaven.[9] The political universality of the monarchical Roman Empire and the religious universality of the orthodox church were the two essential building blocks of the Christian commonwealth. The unity of their origins and destinations, and their close cooperation in providing humanity with material and spiritual blessings, were necessary features of the Eusebian structure. Therefore, the Christian commonwealth comprised both *imperium* and *sacerdotium,* which worked together in the service of "the Christian flock." In our discussion of Eusebius's understanding of the community of believers, we demonstrated that Eusebius intentionally preferred the word "politeuma" to "ecclesia" as a more inclusive concept to define Christian society.[10] Therefore, the concept of Christian commonwealth denoted both political and religious universality, and, as such, potentially embraced all humanity.

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[9] Eusebius of Caesarea, *Laudibus Constantini,* V, 1-5 (We use the following translation for Eusebius's Tricennial Orations: H.A. Drake, *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius's Tricennial Orations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

[10] See chapter two, page 97.

By defining both the body politic and the church as the agents of Christian salvation, the "Imperial Theology" diffused the prospect of salvation into all aspects of life: individual, social, political, and devotional. This meant a broad conception of worship, for a Christian could worship God through his daily social activities, as long as he or she performed them according to Christian principles. In other words, Christians were to seek for their salvation not only in their worship and prayers in the church, but also throughout the entire range of their daily social activities. Thus Eusebian "Imperial Theology" implied a comprehensive concept of worship as comprising the activities of the emperor and his entourage, a realm which had been regarded by Christians prior to the fourth century as profane. Accordingly, by implementing Christian principles in the political realm, and in this way rendering the commonwealth a true representation of its heavenly model, the emperor performed the best form of worship and thanksgiving to God.[11]

We also defined, in the previous chapters, Eusebius's attempt to unite the political and religious discourses under the same principles as Christianization of the political sphere.[12] Eusebius considers the political history of mankind to be the major grounds and trajectory of the divine actions in God's economy of salvation.[13] These are the main lines of the religio-political ideology of the Byzantine Commonwealth; in principle, these ideals were maintained with more or less conviction until at least the mid-

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[11] Leo III expresses this belief at the beginning of his *Ecloga*; see Leo III, *A Manual of Roman Law: The Ecloga: Published by the Emperors Leo III and Constantine V of Isauria,* translated with an introduction by E. H. Freshfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 66-7.

[12] See above, page 44.

[13] See above, pages 44-45.

sixth century. To give an illustration, this ideal establishment was emphasized by the emperor Justinian I (527-65):

The greatest gift that God's heavenly *philantropia* bestowed upon men are the *sacerdotium* and the *basileia*, of which the former serves divine matters, the latter presides and watches over human affairs, and both proceed from one and the same principle and regulate human life....For, if the priesthood is in every way blameless and acceptable to God, and the *basileia* rules justly and properly over the state entrusted to it, good harmony will result, which will bestow whatever is beneficial upon the human race. Our chief concern, therefore, regards the true dogmas about God and the saintliness of the priests; and if they [the priests] will preserve it, we trust that by its means great favors will be conferred upon us by God and that we shall possess securely those which we already enjoy, and those which we do not yet have we shall hereafter require. For all things will be done well and fittingly if the principle of the matter is proper and agreeable to God. This we trust will take place if the observance of the holy canons will be maintained, which the rightly praised and venerable apostles, the eyewitnesses and ministers of God's word, have transmitted and the holy fathers have preserved and explained.[14]

As the above passage reveals, Byzantine religio-political ideology was primarily a theological construction, whereas the well-being of the commonwealth as a whole depended on its maintenance of principles that were proper and agreeable to God: orthodox doctrine and practice at the religious level, and the principle of justice in government, at the political. Byzantine society thus believed in a theodicy where, if one or the other were compromised, then the great favours of God would be withheld from Christian society.[15] It is important to note that the Byzantine Commonwealth called itself "the new Israel," which implies the same kind of direct relationship between Byzantine society and God as had existed for biblical Israel.[16] Therefore, the hardships of the late-

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[14] Francis Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: Origins and Background* (Washington: The Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1966), 2:816.

[15] According to the sources, this kind of theodicy was at work on the outbreak of Iconoclasm: Nicephorus (*Short History*, text, translation, and commentary by Cyril Mango (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1990), 59-60) reports that the Emperor Leo III, upon hearing about the volcanic eruption in the Aegean Sea, considered that event as a sign of divine wrath and came to believe that the adoration of images to be the cause and thus launched his attack against images (*Short History*, trans. Cyril Mango (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1990), 59-60).

[16] Eusebius of Caesarea offers an interesting argument for his definition of the Christian Roman Empire as the "true Israel," according to which there was a discrepancy between Jewish universal monotheism and

sixth and seventh centuries led emperors and churchmen alike to a self-critique of their

institutions in order to find and correct a collective sin that caused the anger of God to

fall upon the Byzantine Commonwealth. Their primary motive was to reform Byzantine

society and religio-political establishment in a way that was "agreeable to God." Since

the Iconoclastic reformers believed that the solution for the revival of the Byzantine

Empire was to restructure it in a way pleasing to God, it is possible to argue that the

entire debate over icons was theological in nature.[17]

As for the society that suffered through all of these dislocations and turmoil, their

need for security naturally increased even as their expectations for the fulfillment of this

need by the religio-political establishment remained unanswered; for the emperors were

engaged in a bitter struggle to overcome urgent military and economic problems. Most of

the time, they were happy to maintain their throne against numerous plots and coups. The

church, on the other hand, had little or no control over the border territories that changed

hands between the Muslim invaders and the Byzantines on a regular basis.[18] The official

religio-political ideology of the Byzantine Empire that depended on the principles of

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their ethnic prejudices. Accordingly, their universal monotheism continued to serve political division. It is the Christian Roman Empire that can be truly called "the New Israel" for it represents both universal monotheism and universal monarchy. *Sepulchre Christi*, XVI, 5.

[17] See Milton V. Anastos, "Iconoclasm and Imperial Rule 717-842," *The Cambridge Mediaeval History*, vol. 4, *The Byzantine Empire*, ed. J. M. Hussey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 61-62: "The Byzantines took theology very seriously, and the Emperors were willing to go to the greatest lengths for the sake of a point of Christian dogma, since they looked upon themselves, and were regarded by their subjects, as divinely appointed guardians responsible to God no less for purity of doctrine and harmony in the Church than for the physical well-being of the state, which, it was felt, could never prosper if the Church were weakened by heresy or disorder. Hence, when the Emperors took action against the use of images (726-75, 815-42), they did not do so in order to assert their authority of the state over the Church, as some have maintained, but for the sake of what they thought to be theological propriety, with which they concerned themselves in the exercise of their normal functions, as understood by Constantine I or Justinian I, and in the Byzantine imperial tradition as a whole. Other objectives might become involved in an Emperor's decision to oppose icons or to favour them, the decisive factor was of theological origin."

[18] For a comprehensive treatment of the political and military circumstances of the era see Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 41-99.

Eusebian "Imperial Theology" and the ideal of a universal Christian commonwealth that provided its Christian subjects with material and spiritual salvation[19] were definitely at odds with the reality of the seventh century.[20] As a result, people in the Byzantine Empire were faced with a deep crisis of confidence in the religio-political establishment. On the spiritual level, it was a natural corollary of this loss of confidence for the people to direct their attention to more individualistic and mystical modes of devotion, to paths of salvation that depended on a one-to-one relation between God and the individual Christian. Some scholars contend that this quest for individualised salvation outside the authority of the established church was one of the main reasons for the spread of images in this era; the growing sense of insecurity probably caused an increasing desire on the part of the people for the palpable presence and intervention of the divine; images could well be believed to fill that gap.[21] Since the salvific role of images was perceived as an alternative to similar traditional functions of the Byzantine religio-political establishment, i.e., material security and the services and mediation of the divine, it is not unreasonable to assume that the new mode of religiosity posed a challenge to the Byzantine Commonwealth as a whole.

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[19] Steven Runciman (*The Byzantine Theocracy* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1-2) defines Byzantine theocracy as follows: "…it was the earthly copy of the Kingdom of Heaven….It saw itself as a universal Empire. Ideally it should embrace all the peoples of the earth, who, ideally, should all be members of the one true Christian Church, its own Orthodox Church. Just as man was made in God's image, so man's kingdom on earth was made in the image of the Kingdom of Heaven. Just as God ruled in Heaven, so an Emperor, made in His image, should rule on earth and carry out His commandments….But if the copy—the Greek word was *mimesis,* 'imitation'—could be achieved, with the Emperor and his ministers and counsellors imitating God with His archangels and angels and saints, then life on earth could become a proper preparation for the truer reality of life in Heaven."

[20] Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century,* 436.

[21] See Kitzinger, "Images before Iconoclasm," 119; similarly, see Peter Brown, "The Crisis of an Image: The Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy," in his *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 388: "The Iconodules had come to believe that icons brought, Christ, his Mother, and the saint down among the Christian people. They were accessible through their portraits."

As for the church and the empire, this period was marked by a struggle over their respective positions in relation to the people, either by reasserting the values of the older order, or by trying to adjust to new religious tendencies. The establishment also went through a substantial self-critique of their positions.[22] Thus Iconoclasm should be seen as a continuum of the reforms that had been made by the church and the empire during the seventh century to overcome the difficulties that had been afflicting the Byzantine Commonwealth for a long time. For example, Heraclius (610-41) and Patriarch Sergius (610-638) proposed the theory of "Monoenergism" in an effort to reconcile the Monophysites and Chalcedonians, and thus secure religious unity.[23] According to this doctrine, Christ had two natures, but these natures shared the same energy. In the face of objections from both sides, Heraclius and Patriarch Sergius proposed "Monotheletism" according to which Christ was seen as having two natures but one will. Similarly, the sixth ecumenical council of 680-81 and the Quinisext council of 692 had as their goal to reaffirm the authority of the Byzantine religio-political establishment by securing the religious unity of the society, as well as accommodating the new religious sentiments and practices of the period.[24] On their part, this was a tacit affirmation of the validity and correctness of the new religiosity surrounding images. Their only concern seems to have been to regulate and unify this new orthopraxy, which the religio-political establishment tried to achieve by unifying the various practices and beliefs under the umbrella of church authority, and regulating them according to certain doctrinal principles.

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[22] Brown, "The Crisis of an Image," 388.

[23] Warren Treadgold, *A Concise History of Byzantium* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 92-3.

[24] See Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 334: "The canons of the Quinisext represent the anxiety of Church and state, and their attitudes both to their own control over the patterns of belief of the populations of the provinces, and to the ways in which their authority was received among the ordinary people of the empire."

Rise of Icons

On the flip side of the coin was the second most important development of the late-sixth

and seventh centuries: the rise of icons as the center of popular devotion in Byzantine

society. In his masterly study on the use of icons before Iconoclasm, Ernst Kitzinger

observes:

In any case, however, there can be no doubt that in the second half of the sixth century the cult of images
was vastly increased and intensified, primarily in the East, and that it maintained this new strength
throughout the seventh century and, indeed, until the outbreak of Iconoclasm. [25]

For a clear grasp of the Iconoclastic perception of images it is necessary to understand the

historical development of the phenomenon; for there is no doubt that the Iconoclastic

reformers took into consideration the practice of icon-veneration as well as the previous

attitudes of the Byzantine religio-political establishment towards the matter. As some

scholars have pointed out, Iconoclasm was in large part the result of such self-critique on

the part of the religio-political establishment regarding the propriety of icon-worshipping

according to Christian standards.[26] The sources indicate that this self-critique was made

within the paradigm of Byzantine theodicy, which linked the beliefs and behaviours of

society to the general well-being of the Christian commonwealth.[27]

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[25] Kitzinger, "Images before Iconoclasm," 95.

[26] For instance, see John A. McGuckin, "The Theology of Images and the Legitimation of Power in Eight
Century Byzantium," *St. Viladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37 (1993), 42: "If the Arabs were again making
ground at the beginning of the eighth century, was not the reason that something was radically wrong with
the Christian *oecumene* at large, and in particular with life in Constantinople, under whose walls the
invaders had camped? The iconodule writers tell us that two iconoclast Anatolian bishops, known to Leo III
from his pre-imperial career, supplied a theological answer to the Emperor: it was the implicit idolatry of
the churches of the capital, replete with icons that was scandalizing Jew and Muslim alike and calling down
God's anger on his Church."

[27] Cyril Mango ("Historical Introduction," in *Iconoclasm: Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies,*
Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin, eds. (Birmingham: Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of

In searching for the Iconoclastic perception of icons, one should begin by acknowledging that practice came first: it was mainly the icon-worshippers' manner of devotion and popular behaviour (and not necessarily their theology) that caught the Iconoclastic reformers' attention. Indeed, a fully developed theology of icons was only worked out by John of Damascus (d. 749) in reply to the first Iconoclastic challenge. He was the first theologian, moreover, to set the problem on Christological grounds with his claim that the veneration of icons is justified first and foremost by the event of the incarnation.[28] Nevertheless, it was perhaps due to a certain *odium theologicum* on the part of the iconodule sources, which appears to emphasize the Monophysite tendencies of the Iconoclasts (and in this way, challenging them on Christological grounds) that they somehow bypassed Christian concerns about the practice of icon-worshipping. Therefore, it is important to note that in the Iconoclastic perception of icons, at least at the beginning, practice might have played a more important role than theology. The Iconoclastic reformers were witnesses to a spectacular intensification of the cult of images that had been diffused everywhere in Byzantine religious life with its wide variety of behaviour. To put it differently, they did not direct their first onslaught against the theological arguments of the Iconodules, but rather against their practices. Kitzinger identifies a certain pattern in the development of icon-veneration before Iconoclasm in that practice created opposition and opposition was answered by defence:

Birmingham, 1977), 1), describes the beginning of Iconoclasm as follows: "In the summer of 726 a submarine eruption of tremendous violence occurred in the Aegean Sea between the islands of Thera and Therasia. Leo III, who may have had previous contact with Constantine of Nakoleia and Thomas of Claudiopolis (though this is not attested), interpreted this catastrophe as a manifest sign of divine displeasure and came to the conclusion that the sin of which the Christians were guilty was that of idolatry. Accordingly, he made it known that icons, i.e. portraits of Christ and of the saints, should be removed and denied veneration."

[28] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* transl. Andrew Louth (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), I, 4.

Practice once more took a decisive lead during the period that followed the reign of the great Justinian. At that time the Christian image began to assume a role more central, a function more vital in everyday life in the Greek East than it ever had held in previous centuries. But again reaction was delayed...It is the Iconoclastic movement itself which constitutes the full reaction to the development of the post-Justinianic era. Indeed, the violence of that movement becomes understandable only in the light of the spectacular intensification of the cult of images during the five preceding generations. The Iconoclasts' onslaught, in turn, led to the elaboration of a theoretical defence of Christian images, far more systematic and profound than any that had been attempted previously. Thus, for a broad over-all view, the period from the sixth to the ninth century offers a pattern similar to that encountered in the third and fourth, i.e. a regular sequence of practice, opposition and defence.[29]

The patristic *florilegia* in support of the Iconoclastic case,[30] as confirmed by some modern studies, provides evidence that anti-iconic sentiments existed in early Christian tradition alongside the pro-iconic tendencies throughout the preceding centuries.[31] Christians of the third century debated with pagan intellectuals over the veneration of pagan images. In particular, Origen developed arguments against pagan practices of idol-worship in his criticism of the Neo-Platonist Celsus, who blamed Christians for being so simplistic and naïve as to assume that they venerated stones and wooden objects.[32] It is somewhat ironic that during the Iconoclastic debate the very same arguments about the relation of icons to their prototypes were used by both sides. When images began to emerge as a means of popular devotion in the second half of the sixth century, some Christians opposed the new religiosity on the very grounds of idolatry that Christians of

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[29] Kitzinger, "Images before Iconoclasm," 87.

[30] These quotations from early Patristic tradition are preserved in the minutes of the Second Council of Nicea (787); see Daniel J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-Century Iconoclasm: An annotated translation of the Sixth Session of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicea, 787), containing the Definition of the Council of Constantinople (754) and its refutation and the Definition of the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 204A-364E.

[31] See Kitzinger, "Images before Iconoclasm," 85.

[32] A remarkable, sweeping exposition of the early Christian attitude towards images is undertaken by Moshe Barasch (*Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1992), where he elaborates the Christian attitudes to the matter in great detail. His chapter on Origen and Eusebius (pp. 127-157) is especially important in terms of the philosophical and theological arguments developed on the principles of Platonic philosophy.

the third century had alleged against the pagans.[33] Therefore, it is more appropriate to

consider the debate over icons as an internal conflict between two opposing tendencies

within the Christian tradition.[34]

Kitzinger points out that, during the late sixth and seventh centuries, "devotional

practices in front of images became elaborate, common and intense."[35] Relying on the

testimony of pilgrims, historians and legend writers, Kitzinger undertakes a full

description of the phenomenon of icon-veneration under four headings: 1. devotional

practices; 2. belief in and exploitation of magic properties of images; 3. official use of

images as *apotropaia* (to avert evil or bad luck) and *palladia* (safeguards); 4. belief in

images of miraculous origin.[36] As for devotional practices, Kitzinger distinguishes

between the veneration of images in the private and the public spheres.[37] First, images

began to be used during the second half of the sixth century in the domestic sphere,

where ordinary Christians venerated them for personal devotion. It is obvious that the

church authorities could have exercised no control over this development, and thus

domestic use was vulnerable to abuse.[38] People prayed to images to receive specific

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[33] For example Norman H. Baynes ("The Icons before Iconoclasm," in *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London: Althon Press, 1955), 226-239) reports an interesting dialog between Hypatius of Ephesus, a prominent champion of Chalcedonian Orthodoxy during the reign of Justinian I (527-65), and Julian of Atramution who was troubled by the scriptural prohibition on making of images. The article's importance derives from the fact that it reveals a historical evidence for the existence of both tendencies within the Christian tradition in the sixth century.

[34] Kitzinger ("Icons before Iconoclasm," 85) states that "An undercurrent of at least potential iconoclasm does in fact run through the entire history of the Church in the intervening centuries. Instead of assuming a simple alternation of anti-iconic and pro-iconic periods, it is necessary to think more in terms of a continuing conflict, which finally erupted in an explosion of well-nigh world-historical import."

[35] Kitzinger, "Images before Iconoclasm," 99.

[36] Kitzinger, "Images before Iconoclasm," 96.

[37] Kitzinger, "Images before Iconoclasm," 96-100.

[38] Kitzinger, "Images before Iconoclasm," 98.

favours; and these prayers, accompanied by genuflection, *proskynesis* and similar gestures, are recorded in the sixth- and seventh-century sources:[39]

A story in which some devout workmen, in addition to saluting an image of the Virgin, "embraced it and kissed its hands and feet and continued to salute it a long time pressing it to their bosoms in great faith" unfortunately cannot be dated with any precision.[40]

Kitzinger points out that the use of images was not limited to private sphere but extended to the public sphere as well. He mentions that images were used by clerics "in solemn procession through various cities in Asia Minor in order to collect funds for a church and a village destroyed by barbarian raids."[41] In all these instances, the author observes that the inclination to blur the borderline between prototype and image was an essential characteristic of the cult of images, and that the miracle stories attributed to images reveal that they acted or behaved as their prototypes were supposed to act or behave:

It [the image] makes known its wishes, as in the well known story told by Gregory of Tours of a painted picture of the crucified Christ at Narbonne, which demands to be covered. It enacts evangelical teachings, as in the dream in which an image of Christ at Antioch appears clothed with garments previously given to a beggar. When attacked it bleeds…In some cases it defends itself against infidels with physical force…In others it demonstrates its immunity to attack through various miraculous deeds. It makes promises…By far the most common type of miracle, however, is that in which the image bestows some kind of material benefit upon its votaries.[42]

The above-mentioned material benefits were apparent in the use of images as *apotropaia* (protections against misfortune), as *palladia* (safeguards), and to cure illnesses. Images helped Christians during times of wars. For example the *Ecclesiastical History* of

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[39] Kitzinger, "Images before Iconoclasm," 98-9.

[40] Kitzinger, "Images before Iconoclasm," 99.

[41] Kitzinger, "Images before Iconoclasm," 99.

[42] Kitzinger, "Images before Iconoclasm,"100-2.

Euagrius reports that the image of Christ in Edessa played an important role in the defence of the city during the Persian siege in 544.[43] Kitzinger reports many stories of healing effected by icons as well as stories in which the images function as *apotropaia*. Similarly, images of Virgin and the Child painted on all the walls of the west side of Constantinople are reported to have played an important role during the siege of the Avars in 726; and when the city was threatened by fire, the patriarch carried the image of Christ around the walls pleading for the Lord's help.[44] Similar uses are reported during the defences of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. A particularly interesting occurrence is reported in relation to a Persian attack according to which the bishop carried the sacred image around the city walls and, as a result, a wind came and blew the flames back onto the enemy.[45] In all these reports, the images provided their votaries with the palpable presence of the divine in time of need, whether as healing, protection, or support. Icons thus served as intermediary agents between the Christian—individual or community—and the divine. On the practical level, none of these instances differed from previous pagan practices of idol worship, save for the sophisticated Iconodule theories given in justification.

To summarize, by the time the Iconoclastic reformers took measures against images, the worship of images as the central object of private and public devotion had become a fully developed religious phenomenon. Icons were implored for their help whenever someone felt a material or spiritual need. As representatives of the divine, images served as mediators and intercessors between God and the faithful. As such, they

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[43] Kitzinger, "Images before Iconoclasm," 103.

[44] Kitzinger, "Images before Iconoclasm," 112.

[45] Kitzinger, "Images before Iconoclasm," 109-10.

began to perform a role that had been traditionally fulfilled in the public sphere by the

Byzantine Commonwealth itself. The aforementioned ideal unity of the church and the

empire, as elaborated by Eusebius, aimed at providing Christians with material and

spiritual sustenance. Constituting an alternative soteriology to that of the Byzantine

Commonwealth, the cult of images began to pose a substantial challenge to the latter's

continued existence.

Origins of Icons

Scholars have developed several theories for the origins of the veneration of images.

André Grabar claimed that images represented an extension of the cult of relics in Greek

Christianity.[46] He detects in the Greek Orthodox Church and later in the Slavic Orthodox

Churches the first signs of the decline of the cult of relics and the spread of icons in their

stead as occurring in the late sixth and seventh centuries. He supports his argument by

various ancient testimonies wherein the images are "by-products" of relics, or where they

are considered *acheiropoietai,* i.e. believed to owe their existence to direct contact with a

divine person. Kitzinger partly agrees with this conclusion because of the unmistakable

evidence; yet he claims that icons were not entirely dependent on relics, and that during

the seventh century they become entirely independent objects of devotion without

necessarily having a relation to relics.[47] Kitzinger claims that popular belief in the

presence of divine power in images was deeply rooted in the pagan past, and that this

belief reasserted itself in Christian religious images. Inclination to icon-veneration had

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[46] André Grabar, *Martyrium: Recherches sur le culte de reliques et l'art chrétien antique,* vol. 2, *Iconographie et LXX planches relatives aux volumes I et II* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1972), 357.

[47] Kitzinger, "Images before Iconoclasm," 118-9.

always been present among Christians, but counter-pressure on the part of the church authorities had prevented its spread until the late sixth century; and when such pressure eventually decreased, the use of icons correspondingly increased. This change of attitude towards icons on the part of the church authorities, therefore, proved to be a major factor in the development of their cult.[48] The shift was partly caused by churchmen's realization of the usefulness of icons in defence of Chalcedonian Orthodoxy: the image was a convenient means to make the incarnation of Christ present and palpable. Besides, the adaptation of Neo-platonic philosophy to Christian doctrines through the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius provided a theoretical basis for icon-veneration.[49] Lastly, Kitzinger elaborates on the relationship between the use of imperial portraits, which were carried in solemn processions, and the acclamations and *proskynesis* these received. He observes that some of the features of the imperial cult were taken over by the cult of images, and this development seems mostly to have been promoted by the imperial office itself.[50] For example, the above-mentioned incident of a procession with an image to raise funds for a church and village destroyed by the barbarian raids constitute an example of this transference of images to a position that had previously been enjoyed only by imperial images:

It was in this period that Byzantine rulers and local authorities began to make public and official use in civic and military contexts of the protective and salutary properties of religious images which private devotion had ascribed them for some time. In view of the monopoly previously enjoyed in these contexts by the imperial image the development must be described as a voluntary surrender of a privilege on the part of the monarch....But the most striking evidence of a new spirit was to come towards the end of the

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[48] Kitzinger, "Images before Iconoclasm," 119-20.

[49] Kitzinger, "Images before Iconoclasm," 120-21.

[50] Kitzinger, "Images before Iconoclasm," 121-25.

seventh century, when Justinian II revolutionized Byzantine coinage by placing on his coins an image of Christ....The emperor emphasizes before all the world his subordinate position in relation to Christ.[51]

Scholars interpreted this development as an acknowledgment on the part of the imperial office of its position subordinate to a transcendental power, a surrender of a position of earthly supremacy to a higher, spiritual authority. Accordingly, the Iconoclastic movement has been interpreted as a reassertion of imperial authority which had diminished on account of intervening developments in religious practice.[52]

Another important theory of origins is presented by Peter Brown.[53] He starts with the observation that the imperial image cannot fully explain the psychological aspect of icons:

To the best of my knowledge, no man, on catching the eye of the emperor in his portrait, burst into tears 'like a cloud-burst from a rain-laden sky': and this is what a man of the eighth century was supposed to do when faced with an icon.[54]

Brown argues that icons came into being during the sixth century as an extension of the holy men who had, as living icons, answered the psychological needs of Christians since the fourth century. This was related to the power of holy men in late antiquity as living intermediaries between God and people. Holy men were believed to function as intercessors with God during their lifetimes as well as after death.[55]

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[51] Kitzinger, "Images before Iconoclasm," 125-6.

[52] For example, G. Ladner, "Origin and Significance of the Iconoclastic Controversy," *Medieval Studies,* II (1940), 127-49; Leslie W. Barnard, "The Emperor Cult and the Origins of the Iconoclastic Controversy," *Byzantion* 43 (1973), 13-29.

[53] Peter Brown, "A Dark-Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy," *The English Historical Review* 88 (1973), 1-34.

[54] Brown, "A Dark-Age Crisis," 11-2.

[55] Brown, "A Dark-Age Crisis," 12-3.

All of these theories respecting relics, the imperial cult, and holy men point to the same fact: Christians of late sixth- and seventh-century Byzantium desired a palpable presence of the divine to support them in times of difficulty and hardship, to assuage their pains and answer their prayers. Images were used as intermediaries between their votaries and God, functioning as intercessors. Furthermore, their intermediary nature was often ignored, as they were confused with their prototypes. Indeed there was often little distinction made between the image and its prototype. People expected images to act as providers of material benefits, such as healing, protection, and security, as well as spiritual blessings. They also offered material and spiritual salvation on both the individual and social levels, a function that had been a prerogative since the fourth century of the official religio-political establishment of Byzantium, as elaborated by the Eusebian "Imperial Theology." From this point of view, as central objects of popular devotion, images proved to be agents of Christian salvation, an alternative to the Byzantine Commonwealth as such and a subversive one, at least according to the Iconoclastic interpretation. By assuming the primary function of the religio-political establishment, images actually claimed its position for themselves.

Eusebian "Politeuma" versus "Iconomachy"

As mentioned above, Eusebius defines the universality of belief as an essential principle of Christian salvation and contrasts it with the local nature of pagan beliefs.[56] In the same vein, the unity and collectivity of religious life are essential conditions of salvation, according to the "Imperial Theology." Eusebius's project presupposed a cosmological

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[56] Eusebius, *Sepulchro Christi*, XVI, 3-4.

structure, where every component contributed to the well-being of the entire order by fulfilling its function within the system.[57] This social project aimed at implementing the principles of Christianity in the daily lives of individuals whether an officer, governor, soldier, or peasant. A Christian was expected to seek salvation by living his daily life according to these principles. This being the case, an alternative religiosity centered on images and enabling Christians to seek salvation individually through direct intervention of the divine via these images would have meant narrowing the concept of worship as traditionally defined by the Eusebian project. Such devotion had an implicitly exclusive attitude towards the search for salvation in other aspects of worldly life. We have noted that icon-veneration grew as a result of a crisis of confidence in the traditional institutions enjoying earthly supremacy and, owing in good part to the developments of the seventh century; it intrinsically rejected what was being offered by the Christian commonwealth. That is to say, Christians who focused their attention on images as agents of salvation were doing so at the expense of the Byzantine Commonwealth and the Christian social project it represented as such. Exclusion of the political and social realms from the perspective of Christian salvation would have meant the secularization—or more exactly 'desacralization'—of their political and social lives. Such secularization, in turn, would destroy the ideal of the Christian commonwealth comprised of *imperium* and *sacerdotium.* In other words, for the Iconoclasts, icon-veneration represented a worldview defined by seclusion because it involved a religiosity that withdrew people

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[57] Theoretical bases of Eusebian definition of Christian society is discussed above in chapter one, under the heading, "Eusebius of Caesarea's Imperial Theology," and also in chapter two, under the heading, "The problem of Eusebius's ecclesiology and modern interpretations."

from political and social activities no longer defined as intrinsically sacred.[58] In this context, it might be more useful to define Iconoclasm as a reassertion of the Eusebian project, an attempt to re-Christianize those aspects of social and political life that had been gradually abandoned as the legitimate milieu of Christian devotion.

That the Iconoclastic reformers tried to re-implement the Eusebian model might be illustrated by two separate events. The first was the Emperor Leo III's publication of a civil law-code, the *Ecloga,* considered to be the first such code in Byzantine history structured entirely on Christian principles.[59] We will analyze the document in detail further below. Yet it suffices here to observe that the emperor makes a cogent theological argument in the introduction where he insists that implementing the Christian law of justice in administration, social life and private life is vital to Christian salvation.[60] The document reveals that in order for Christian salvation to be achieved in the context of the Byzantine Commonwealth, it is essential to practice the principles of Christianity in all political, social, individual, and devotional aspects of life; in other words, it is necessary to Christianize the entire life of the Byzantine Commonwealth itself.

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[58] It is interesting to observe that from the beginning to the end of the debate, the available Iconoclastic documents always emphasize the divine character of imperial authority. We will discuss the contents of these Iconoclastic documents below. Such avowed emphasis seems out of place however, given that their opponents do not deny the divine origin of political power, unless the Iconoclastic reformers sensed an increasing challenge on the part of the Iconodules towards the imperial office, a will to desacralize the social and political mechanisms of the Byzantine Commonwealth. John of Damascus describes the divine origin of the earthly supremacy as follows, "For there are few who would utterly neglect the royal constitutions established from above, who know that the king reigns upon earth from above, and as such the laws of kings hold sway," *On the Divine Images,* I, 1. The above-mentioned loss of confidence in the traditional structures of the earthly supremacy must have alienated people from the machinery of the religio-political establishment, for the sake of a new religiosity that sought divine help through images, holy men, and their miraculous powers.

[59] See Leslie W. Barnard, *The Graeco-Roman and Oriental Background of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 4: "This [Ecloga] was a radical measure and the first attempt in Byzantium to apply Christian standards to private morals and family life."

[60] Leo III, *A Manual of Roman Law: The Ecloga,* 67.

The second factor, we contend, was the anti-monastic policies of the Iconoclasts after the council of Hiereia (754), which may have been related to the same effort at Christianizing Byzantine society and politics. According to many sources, after the council of Hiereia, the anti-iconic measures of Constantine V were accompanied by equally intense and severe anti-monastic measures that were clearly meant to eradicate the monasteries: monks were persecuted, publicly humiliated, and forced to abandon their monastic commitments and marry.[61] Scholars have expressed different views on the relation between the Iconoclasts' anti-iconic and anti-monastic policies.[62] Whether the latter were a continuum of the anti-iconic policies or not does not particularly interest us here. However, the implications are clear enough that the Iconoclastic reformers attacked the monasteries for their perspective on salvation, which, because they were renouncing the world around them, posed the same kind of challenge to the religio-political establishment as image-veneration did: both implied deconsecration of the political and social institutions of the Byzantine Commonwealth. In other words, icons and monasteries both represented a lifestyle defined by individualised, mystical salvation and renunciation of the worldly life, which ran counter to the principles of the "Imperial Theology" defining Christian salvation as collective, universal, and achievable only through the mechanism of the Byzantine Commonwealth.

That the decline of the Byzantine Empire and the vogue of icons came about simultaneously probably led the Iconoclasts to posit a causal connection between these

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[61] Anastos, "Iconoclasm and Imperial Rule," 79-81.

[62] For example, Alexander Schmemann ("Byzantium, Iconoclasm and the Monks," *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly,* 3 (1959), 18-35), explains this relation by defining the monks as the defenders of the independence of the church against the Caesaropapist claims of the Iconoclastic emperors. He claims that during the Iconoclastic persecution, only the monks rose to defend icons and therefore the victory of icon-veneration was also a victory of monasticism. One can also cite Peter Brown ("A Dark-Age Crisis," 19-21), who presupposes a close connection between the icons and the monks.

two developments. Popular attraction to icons came as a result of disenchantment with the religio-political establishment during the calamities of the late sixth and seventh centuries. Indeed, in all the above-mentioned official uses of images, there is a tacit acknowledgment on the part of the imperial authorities of their failure to govern effectively, such that they were forced to implore direct divine intervention. In other words, in the face of the various reversals that befell the Byzantine Empire in the form of continuous Muslim raids, economic crises, and other similar ordeals, Byzantine Christians' appeal to icons and monasticism was taken by the Iconoclasts to be both a result and an indicator of defeatism and loss of hope in the survival of the Byzantine Commonwealth and the universal Christian institutional ideals it represented. This being the case, it is reasonable to assume that the Iconoclasts naturally related icon-veneration and monasticism to such feelings of escapism and despair. It was in reaction to this kind of defeatist religiosity, which they considered to be subversive to the ideals of the religio-political establishment that the Iconoclastic reformers tried to re-implement the principles of Christianity in political and social life. They reasserted the religious ideals of the Byzantine Commonwealth—*sacerdotium* and *imperium*—as they also tried to introduce Christian principles into law and administration.[63] In short, the Iconoclastic theology emerged as a result of an evaluation of seventh-century developments on the part of the religio-political establishment; and this assessment was carried out within the paradigm of the Byzantine theodicy, which linked the beliefs and behaviours of the society to the general well-being of the Christian commonwealth. This time period simultaneously witnessed the dramatic decline of the empire and the profound spread of icons as the

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[63] See Leo III, *A Manual of Roman Law: The Ecloga,* 66-70.

most common objects of popular devotion. Iconoclastic thinking must have seen in these two phenomena a causal connection; hence their attack on the icons.

All the above mentioned theories on the origin of icons agree on one essential proposition: they served people as a palpable presence of the divine in their time of need. Seen from this perspective, the Iconoclastic reformers interpreted the previous support of the religio-political establishment for the use of icons as a tacit acknowledgment of their failure to fulfill people's material and spiritual needs.[64] Iconoclasts also observed that their Imperial predecessors had supported icon-veneration and did so even as the decline of the Byzantine Empire accelerated. In short, the Iconoclastic party reacted against icons upon these considerations and concluded that the new religiosity centered on icons was theologically wrong and harmful to the Byzantine Commonwealth, and that the continuous calamities befalling their society were an unmistakable sign of divine displeasure.

To conclude, Kitzinger's article gives a detailed picture of various private and public uses of icons and the miracle stories and beliefs around them. The diversity and intensification of icon-veneration reveals that a new religiosity, even an alternative Christianity, was developed around the veneration of images; it would thus be more appropriate to think of iconodulism as an alternative worldview rather than simply as a devotional practice. Our analysis reveals a dialectical relation between this alternative

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[64] See Leslie W. Barnard, "The Emperor Cult and the Origins of the Iconoclastic Controversy," *Byzantion* 43(1973), 28: "In a period of retrenchment when the Emperors had ceased to be *de facto* Rulers of the Roman World they began to boost an official cult of religious images at the expense of their own previous monopoly. The theme of universal power was at the centre of Byzantine political thought. What was more natural than that this power, in view of the tragic political situation, should be conceived as embodied less obviously in the person of the earthly Emperor and more strongly on the spiritual level where it was independent of the vagaries of military and political fortune?"

worldview and the traditional ideology of the Byzantine religio-political establishment, based as it was on the Eusebian "Imperial Theology." According to this, the former becomes increasingly exclusive of and subversive to the latter. We argue that the Iconoclasts interpreted the phenomenon of icons as a substantial challenge to the traditional ideology of the Byzantine Commonwealth. The ongoing debate would lead both sides to refine their positions as they developed opposing positions not only about icons but also about some major concepts of Christian theology. During this process of refinement Eusebian "Imperial Theology" was implicitly taken by the Iconoclasts as their main reference, whereas the Iconodules referred to Chalcedonian Christology as such. What we suggest here is that icon-veneration and the Byzantine Commonwealth consequently clashed on the grounds of their respective soteriologies. To put it differently, images were believed to offer material and spiritual salvation to their votaries, a privilege that had traditionally been the reserve of the Byzantine Commonwealth. More importantly, the traditional role of the empire in Christian salvation as defined by the "Imperial Theology" was challenged and deconsecrated. Therefore, the Iconoclasts' emphasis on the divine character of imperial authority spoke to an urgent concern that the Byzantine people had lost their faith in the political establishment as such.

The Iconodule position was also shaped within the same historical context. Generally speaking, popular attraction to images and monasteries and holy men appeared as alternative ways of devotion to those of the traditional religio-political establishment of the Byzantine Empire. They both pointed to the fact that Christians could not fulfill their spiritual needs satisfactorily through the forms of worship that the official church offered them. Iconoclasm and Iconodulism represented two opposite reactions of the

religio-political establishment in the face of popular attraction to images as means of direct encounter with the divine. While the former condemned images as re-paganization of Christianity and extended that negative attitude to the monasteries (which they blamed for promoting idolatry), the latter group sanctified icons and monastic ideals in general.

When they faced the Iconoclastic challenge in the eighth century, the Iconodule churchmen became staunch defenders of images because they connected these with the most fundamental tenets of orthodox doctrine, specifically, Christology. Icons were the key features of a soteriology that defined Christian salvation on the basis of the worshipper's participation in the divine mysteries of the incarnation. This individual participation in the continuing validity of the incarnation was facilitated through icons. As against the Iconoclastic "logos Christology," which emphasized the ideal of a universal Christian commonwealth as the main vessel of salvation,[65] Iconodules underlined the suffering humanity of Christ. In other words, Iconodules defined the continuing validity of the incarnation as the principal medium of salvation in which individual Christians participate by the help of images.[66] Both parties shared the same fundamental concern, i.e., Christian salvation in post-resurrection history. However, they differed sharply in defining the means of this salvation. The chief theological cause of this break was their different interpretations of the Chalcedonian Christology. Iconoclasts claimed that the incarnation had been aimed at establishing a universal Christian society, a commonwealth where Christians received material and spiritual care and salvation; Iconodules, alternatively, elevated the incarnation as the single most important salvific

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[65] See the Iconoclastic *Horos* of 754: Sahas, 217A, B; 225D, 229A, E.

[66] See John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* trans. David Anderson (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), I, 4.

factor uniting the divine and human, which will continue until the Second Coming. According to them, Christians received salvation through their participation in this salvific event, a process in which images play a central role. Therefore, the main cause of the Iconodule sanctification of images and the monasteries was their distinctive individualised soteriology. In addition, there were various historical reasons for the Iconodule approach to the matter.

As described above, historians agree that the period from the late sixth century to the early eighth century was a dark age in Byzantine history, marked by military setback, political instability, economic regression, cultural decay, and grave insecurity all around the empire. Our analysis of the period presupposes that several crises in that era instigated a comprehensive transformation of Byzantine society and culture in an effort to adjust to the new circumstances. In relation to this, popular attraction to icons and monasteries during the period may be explained by their loss of confidence in earthly institutions and church order, which had failed to provide people with necessary material and spiritual care in the face of grave difficulties in their daily lives. As an ecclesiastical position, Iconodulism represented a positive reaction on the part of the religio-political establishment against these new popular inclinations, which developed as an alternative to their existence: icons and monasteries fulfilled a spiritual need that was supposed to have been provided by the established church. Indeed, monasteries always vied with the established church as centres of alternative spiritual authority.[67] However, they also better fulfilled the spiritual needs of ordinary people of all social strata in their day-to-day

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[67] See Cyril A. Mango, *Byzantium: the Empire of New Rome* (New York: Scribner, 1980), 108: "Both in its solitary and its coenobitic form monasticism posed a threat to the established Church...He [the monk] held that there was only one morality, one *askêsis,* namely that of the Gospel, and that, ideally speaking, all Christians would become monks. Significantly, however, he sought perfection not through the Church, but outside it...The ministry of the Church, its liturgy, its predication appeared to be almost irrelevant."

problems.[68] This being the case, the Iconodule churchmen's positive reaction to the demands of popular piety constitutes an interesting phenomenon. Why should they have felt the need to defend icons and affiliated monastic ideals that intrinsically challenged church authorities? The Iconodule reading of the rise of icons, as well as the religious and political circumstances prior to the Iconoclastic controversy may be explained as follows.

First of all, the Iconodule support for icon-veneration and monastic ideals implied that they, indirectly, shared in the popular dissatisfaction with the traditional ideology of the religio-political establishment. During the crises of the seventh century, they observed the contradiction between the traditional religio-political ideology of the establishment and its constant inability to fulfil the spiritual or material needs of people. One of the reasons for this failure was the military decline of the empire as compared to its enemies. In the lost Byzantine territories, maintenance of ecclesiastical authority was out of the question. Monasteries and images, on the other hand, were not so much affected by the vagaries of political circumstances. They were almost universally available for Christians to help them in their times of difficulty and hardship. Nor were the icons and the increasing spiritual authority of the monasteries limited to the lost Byzantine territories; on the contrary, these developments occurred everywhere in the empire, including even the capital where the ecclesiastical authorities had full control. What we suggest is that Iconodule churchmen tacitly acknowledged the fact that the church should accommodate people's devotional and spiritual needs as much as possible. By approving the new religiosity centered on images, the Iconodule churchmen tried to accommodate this intrinsically anti-establishment popular religiosity within the authority of the church. This

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[68] Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century,* 295.

accommodation also meant appropriating a new religio-political ideology alternative to the traditional ideology of the establishment. It would thus be quite reasonable to argue that the vindication of images at the end of the controversy in 843 was at the same time a vindication of the monastic lifestyle as the official ideology of the church. For the "Iconomachy" was closely connected with monasteries, as monks actively promoted and defended veneration of images for Christian devotional purposes. It is important to note that the three major Iconodule theologians were all monks and also that the Iconoclastic emperor Constantine V incorporated a campaign against monks into his Iconoclastic policies.[69]

Another related factor that contributed to the shaping of the Iconodule position was the nature of the communal worship administered by the clergy within the church and the various possibilities of individual devotion provided by the images. Icons were very convenient media to meet individual devotional needs, especially for those who desired a palpable presence of the divine in their daily lives. In other words, as against ritualised worship mediated by a priestly hierarchy within the church, images provided to their votaries a sense of immediate access to divine presence. This being the case, Iconodule churchmen seemed to take a more flexible stand on the laity's natural inclination towards a more direct relationship with the divine, compared to the Iconoclasts who considered such attitudes subversive to the church's authority and the principles of Christian doctrine. Iconodule churchmen allowed images on the grounds that they met a basic human need, that is, a personal connection with the divine. This understanding, we may argue, was the basis of the Iconodule position that people's desire

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[69] Mango, "Historical Introduction," 4.

to have an immediate presence of the divine through icons was in perfect congruity with the incarnation, which was an act of divine grace accommodating his transcendent nature to a human body so that humans who had been proved to be incapable of comprehending his transcendent nature, could know God through their own senses.

The Iconodule observation that icons were divinely established media that fulfilled the human needs of immediate presence of the divine extended to their argument that the Iconoclastic position against images pointed to a major flaw in their Christology: that they overlooked the human side of the incarnation. This Christological argument would eventually become the doctrinal backbone of the Iconodule defence of images.[70] Iconodules thus also observed that Iconoclastic theology had an insufficiently orthodox Christology: the perspective of logos theology that emphasized the cosmic dimension of the Incarnation overlooked the humanity of Jesus Christ, the "suffering humanity." It was obvious that Iconoclastic Christology could not accommodate individual spiritual needs. This imbalance between the humanity and divinity of Christ, according to Iconodules, represented a mistaken, 'docetic' interpretation of Chalcedonian Christology. Accordingly, Iconodules blamed their opponents for devaluing the humanity of Christ and the importance of divine incarnation into matter.

For all of these reasons, we may conclude, Iconodules did not agree with the causal connection made by their opponents between images and the decline of the Byzantine Empire and considered the rise of images as an act of divine grace, as nothing other than a natural extension of the incarnation, and as an event through which God presented his transcendent being to human perception. They argued that icons provided

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[70] This point is especially emphasized by John of Damascus; see, for instance, *On the Divine Images,* I, 4.

Christians with the perfect media to modify the inadequacies of the traditional ideology of the religio-political establishment. As opposed to their rivals who tried to reassert the values of former times, Iconodules accomplished a realistic readjustment of the symbolic world of Byzantine Christians to the new political and social realities of the seventh century. As an alternative to a salvation that works through institutions of the Christian commonwealth, the Iconodules emphasized a salvation through one's mystical participation into the continuing reality of the incarnation, a process where images took an indispensable role. This alternative soteriology implied a redefinition of the roles of the church and empire in relation to the economy of Christian salvation. The details of this alternative political theology will be elaborated in the following chapters.

Summary

Our historical analysis has sought to demonstrate that Iconoclasm and Iconodulism as distinctive positions on images within the church evolved over a time-period extending from the late sixth century until the point when Emperor Leo III initiated his Iconoclastic policies in 726. The two most important features of this "immediate context" of Iconoclastic debate were the decline of the Byzantine Empire and the rise of icons as the most common feature of popular devotion.

Relying on Haldon's historical analysis, we have described this context as a time of transformation that came as a result of a conflict between the symbolic world of traditional Byzantine religio-political establishment and the difficult realities of the time. Within this paradigm, the rise of icons is explained in close connection with a desire on the part of the people to feel the palpable and unmediated presence of the divine at times

of grave difficulties caused by political and military events. As against the various individual and public uses of icons that had grown to immense proportions, Iconoclasts and Iconodules represented two opposing attitudes, on different theological grounds.

The period was a time of struggle for survival for the Byzantine Empire defined by military setback, political instability, economic regression, cultural decay and grave insecurity all over the empire. The Byzantine religio-political establishment could provide neither material security nor spiritual guidance for the people who suffered most from various dislocations and turmoil. As a result of this situation, we have contended, it was natural for people to experience a deep crisis of confidence in the traditional religio-political establishment and to direct their attention to more individual modes of devotion, to paths of salvation that depended on a one-to-one relation between God and the individual Christian. This growing sense of insecurity probably caused an increasing desire on the part of the people for the palpable presence and intervention of the divine, and images could well have been seen as a means of bridging that gap.

We have also elaborated on different individual and public uses of icons and on the theories of their origins and concluded that Christians of late-sixth- and seventh-century Byzantium desired a palpable presence of the divine to support them in times of difficulty and hardship, to assuage their pains and answer their prayers. Images functioning as intercessors were used as intermediaries between their votaries and God. People expected images to act as providers of material benefits such as healing, protection, and security as well as spiritual blessings. According to the Iconoclasts, as providers of material and spiritual salvation on both the individual and social levels, images claimed a function that had been a prerogative of the official religio-political

establishment of Byzantium since the fourth century, as elaborated by the Eusebian "Imperial Theology." From this point of view, as central objects of popular devotion, images proved to be agents of Christian salvation, an alternative to the Byzantine Commonwealth as such and a subversive one, at least for the Iconoclastic interpretation.

Faced with the challenge of images, Iconoclasts reasserted the principles of traditional religio-political ideology, which, we argued, referred back to Eusebian "Imperial Theology." According to this project of Christian polity, the Christian commonwealth was an earthly copy of the celestial kingdom. As the symbolic representatives of political universality and religious universality, the empire and the church were two building blocks of the Christian commonwealth; their unity and cooperation was thus an essential principle of solidarity. The Christian commonwealth was a realm where Christian principles diffused into all strata of life including law, administration as well as worship and belief. The Christian commonwealth meant Christianization of the political sphere, since Eusebius defined the realm of politics as a major trajectory of salvation economy. Therefore, the material and spiritual well-being of the Christian commonwealth depended on the maintenance of principles that were "agreeable to God" in belief and worship, as well as in secular life, administration, and law.

It was such a theodicy, we concluded, that led the Iconoclasts to make a causal connection between the spread of icons and decline of the empire. Icons, according to them, were disliked by God as they were of pagan origin. In addition, the lifestyle they represented had a negative attitude towards the sacred role of the realm of politics in general. We concluded that the diversity and intensification of icon-veneration reveals

that a new religiosity, in a way an alternative Christianity, was developed around images; it would thus be more appropriate to think of iconodulism as an alternative theological worldview rather than simply as a devotional practice. Our analysis reveals a dialectical relation between this alternative worldview and the traditional ideology of the Byzantine religio-political establishment, which referred back to Eusebian "Imperial Theology." According to this, the former became increasingly exclusive of and subversive to the former. We argue that the Iconoclasts interpreted the phenomenon of icons as a substantial challenge to the traditional ideology of the Byzantine Empire. The ongoing debate would lead both sides to refine their positions as they developed opposing positions not only about icons but also about some major concepts of Christian theology. We argue that, during this process of refinement, Eusebian "Imperial Theology" was implied by the Iconoclasts as their main reference, whereas the Iconodules referred to Chalcedonian Christology as such.

Iconodules, on the other hand, highlighted the continuing validity of the incarnation as the only saving reality of post-resurrection history. Christians should seek salvation through their participation in the continuing reality of the incarnation. Icons were indispensable tools in Iconodule soteriology. They helped Christians focus on the earthly life and suffering of Christ and elevate their souls to the higher realities of the Godhead. Historically, Iconodule churchmen seemed to share the popular concern for the inadequacies of the establishment to provide enough spiritual care. They thus acknowledged that the church should accommodate more options for people's devotional needs, including images. Iconodules reasoned that the desire of an individual Christian to get in touch with the divine through an image was not wrong and, indeed, in perfect

congruity with what God had achieved through the incarnation. It was an act of divine grace to accommodate his transcendent being within a human body so that humans could experience and know him through their common senses. Iconodules argued that icons had a similar function in making the divine accessible to humanity through the human senses. This was to become the backbone of the Iconodule argument in their defence of images.

CHAPTER FOUR

FIRST ICONOCLASTIC DOCTRINES (726-741)

The Iconoclastic debate involves the most important issues of Christian doctrine. We should not underestimate the dispute by limiting it to the legitimacy of icon-veneration in Christian worship. This does not mean that the issue of images was not important, but that the scope of the debate was wider and it was two different theological worldviews that clashed in the debate. We claim that the ultimate issue at stake was salvation; to be more specific, the question was about Christian salvation in the post-resurrection history. The concept of salvation also constituted the organic link between the political and doctrinal aspects of the debate and rendered it a theological character. The Iconoclasts argued that it is through the Byzantine Commonwealth as it is defined by Eusebian "Imperial Theology" that Christians should receive salvation. This was a collective salvation granted by God to the Byzantine Commonwealth on the condition that their belief and actions as a community were pleasing to God: correct doctrine, righteous behaviour and just government were required of Byzantine society to obtain such salvation. Icons, however, as the central symbol of a different worldview, disqualified the Byzantine Commonwealth as the main agent of salvation. It is the purpose of this chapter

to elaborate the doctrinal presuppositions and arguments that constituted the Iconoclastic

understanding of images.

Iconoclastic doctrines revealed a certain development in content and sophistication

as the debate over images progressed and both the Iconodule and Iconoclast theologians

exerted considerable effort to prove their respective cases as the correct doctrine.

Nevertheless, Iconoclastic doctrines also maintained certain common principles all

throughout the debate (*ca.* 726-843). Historians generally divide the Iconoclastic Debate

into two main periods: first, between 726-787, i.e., from Leo III's edict against icons to

the second council of Nicea; and second, between 814-843, i.e., from the reassertion of

Iconoclastic measures by Leo V (813-20), Michael II (820-29), and Theophilus (829-42)

to the final vindication of icons by the new emperor Michael III's mother Theodora, who

ruled the empire on behalf of her two-year-old son, through an assembly of officials,

priests and monks. However, in terms of doctrinal developments it is more appropriate to

divide the first phase into two and join the later Iconoclastic phase (814-843) to the new

second phase. According to this, Christology is taken to be the main dividing line

between the first (726-741) and later Iconoclasm (741-787 and 814-843). First

Iconoclasm focused on the charge of idolatry and did not include any Christological

argument against images. As a reply to this, John of Damascus set the problem on

Christological grounds and thenceforward Christology became the central issue to the

end of the debate. John's counter-argument that anti-image positions of his rivals pointed

to their flawed notion of the incarnation led the Iconoclasts to develop their own

Christological stand as elaborated by the Iconoclastic council of Hiereia in 754. The

Iconoclasts thus developed their Christological argument to prove the impossibility of

legitimizing images in the Chalcedonian Christological terms. The second council of

Nicea in 787 then tried to disprove the Iconoclastic Christological argument and image

theory. The last two champions of Iconodulism, the Patriarch Nicephorus (758-828) and

Theodore the Studite (759-826) continued the theological work initiated by the council of

Nicea and produced what can be described as the culmination of the Iconodule doctrines

of Christology and images. Alongside the Christology and image theory, tradition,

imperial authority and church-empire relations were important issues at stake.

Three Issues: Idolatry, Tradition and Imperial Authority

Leo III, the first Iconoclast Emperor (717-741), initiated Iconoclasm with his edict of 726

against the use of images in Christian worship. Generally speaking, the doctrinal arsenal

of the first Iconoclastic onslaught consisted of three main components: first, the charge of

idolatry against the veneration of icons; secondly, a strong traditionalism in the sense that

icons are supported by neither the Scriptures nor the Patristic tradition; and thirdly, a

noticeable emphasis on the divine character and origin of imperial authority. With his

three treatises that constituted a comprehensive critique of the above-mentioned

challenges, John of Damascus (d. 749) marks the end of this first period. He also carried

the issue of images into the categories of Christology, marking the beginning of the

second period of Iconoclastic doctrine.[1] Christology was not at stake during the first

Iconoclastic attack, and the sources do not give us any hint that the first Iconoclastic

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[1] See John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, translation and introduction by Andrew Louth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003). These treatises provide us with a comprehensive picture of the first Iconoclastic doctrine from the Iconodule theologian's apologetic perspective.

emperor deemed the issue to be a matter of Christology.[2] It seems probable that the

Iconodule party, beginning with John of Damascus, first set forth the problem in

Christological terms.

The first proponents of Leo III's Iconoclastic measures were Constantine of

Nacoleia (modern Seyitgazi) and Thomas of Claudiopolis (modern Bolu), as we learn

through the letters of the first Iconophile theologian Patriarch Germanos.[3] The letters of

the Iconodule patriarch reveal the very first Iconoclastic doctrines. The two Anatolian

bishops' views revolved around the biblical prohibition against the worship of images.

This issue probably constituted the first battlefield of the controversy. Germanus

endeavours in his letters to interpret those biblical passages in an Iconophile sense.[4] The

passages include the second commandment,[5] the third commandment,[6] a prohibition from

Deuteronomy against graven images,[7] Wisdom 14:12-14,[8] Isaiah 44:10-11,[9] Romans

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[2] See Stephen Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III, with Particular Attention to Oriental Sources* (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1973), 130: "There is no sure evidence that Leo saw the image of Christ as central to the controversy, and that he cast the issues in terms of a christological dialectic."

[3] Cyril Mango, "Historical Introduction," in *Iconoclasm: Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin, eds., (Birmingham: Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1977), 1.

[4] Gero, *Iconoclasm During Leo III*, 103-4.

[5] Exod. 20:4-5: "You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God..." All biblical quotations in the present study are from *The New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition*.

[6] Exod. 20:7: "You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name."

[7] Deut. 4:23: "So be careful not to forget the covenant that the Lord your God make with you, and not to make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything that the Lord your God has forbidden you."

[8] "For the idea of making idols was the beginning of fornication, and invention of them was the corruption of life; for they did not exist from the beginning, nor will they last forever. For through human vanity they entered the world, and therefore their speedy end has been planned."

[9] "Who would fashion a god or cast an image that can do no good? Look, all its devotees shall be put to shame; the artisans too are merely human. Let them all assemble, let them stand up; they shall be terrified, they shall all be put to shame."

1:22:-23,[10] and a passage from Paul's Areopagus speech.[11] Germanus's apologetic letters imply that the Iconoclasts accused the Iconodules of paying excessive divine honours to saints and images, which they express by burning candles and incense before icons.[12] Perhaps the most important Iconoclastic accusation was that Iconodule churchmen taught and supported the idea that "the presence of *ex voto* images in the churches was a proxy for the worshippers."[13] This charge was particularly serious and potentially subversive to the establishment of the church, for once proved to be true it would mean that the church did contribute to the promotion of idolatry. Cyril Mango contends that:

Considering the fact that icons had for a long time been part of Christian life, their rejection would amount to an admission that the church had been in error—a precedent that would have the most disastrous consequences. Germanos was worried that "now whole towns and multitudes of people are in considerable agitation concerning this matter."[14]

A precedent that the church might not always be infallible in the doctrinal matters was probably one of the main reasons why the Iconophile theologians took the matter so seriously. John of Damascus gives us clear glimpses of this concern on the part of the Iconophile party. His statements imply that the issue of veneration of images was considered a relatively less important matter of orthopraxy by the first Iconoclasts. Indeed, the fact that during the early phase of the Iconoclastic policies, from the first

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[10] "Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles."

[11] Acts 17:29-30: "Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent."

[12] I depend here on Stephen Gero's extensive analysis of Germanus's letters; see *Iconoclasm during Leo III*, 105.

[13] Gero, *Iconoclasm during Leo III*, 105.

[14] Mango, "Historical Introduction," 1.

Iconoclastic edict of Leo III until the Iconoclastic council of Hiereia (726-54), no

significant suppression of images took place, might indicate such an attitude on the part

of the Iconoclastic reformers.[15] It might have been this triviality that the Iconoclasts

attached to the issue that prompted John to emphasize the importance of the matter in

justifying his ardent apologia for images:

> Therefore, holding firm in thought to the preservation of the ordinances of the church, through which salvation has come to us, as a kind of keel or foundation, I have brought my discourse to the starting point, as it were urging on a well-bridled horse. For it seems to me a calamity, and more than a calamity, that the church, adorned with such privileges and arrayed with traditions received from above by the most godly men, should return to the poor elements, afraid where no fear was, and, as if it did not know the true God, be suspicious of the snare of idolatry and therefore decline in the smallest degree from perfection, thus bearing a disfiguring mark in the midst of a face exceeding fair, thus harming the whole by the slightest injury to its beauty. For what is small is not small, if it produces something big, so the slightest disturbance of the tradition of the church that has held sway from the beginning is no small matter...[16]

The Iconoclastic challenge behind this apology implies that the church erred in a matter

of doctrine and that it was therefore necessary to take measures to correct her

wrongdoing. John makes it clear, however, how important it is to prove that the church

did not err in this matter. He also launched a more important counter-argument against

the Iconoclasts: they had failed to understand the post-resurrection implications of the

incarnation and were therefore wrongly opposed to holy icons.[17]

The first Iconoclastic doctrine thus involves a biblically-inspired reaction against

images which, as material objects, cannot be divine, such that paying divine honours to

them would amount to idolatry. Though the argument is simple, it entails substantial

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[15] For a general picture of the Iconoclastic policies during the reign of Leo III (726-41), see Milton V. Anastos, "Iconoclasm and Imperial Rule 717-842," *The Cambridge Mediaeval History*, vol. 4, *The Byzantine Empire,* ed. J. M. Hussey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 61-72.

[16] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* I, 2.

[17] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* I, 4.

implications: in the first place, as mere material objects, images could not be venerated in that this violated the monotheistic beliefs of Christianity; second, by sanctifying such a practice the church might have fallen into serious error and risked dissolution. Both Germanus and John of Damascus took the second issue particularly seriously and raised their own arguments against it. In fact, the simplicity of the first Iconoclastic doctrines seems to imply that they were more concerned with Iconodule practices than with their doctrines.[18]

The first Iconoclastic challenge also included a strong sense of traditionalism. They claimed that both the biblical and the written patristic testimonies were on their side; they claimed that both are replete with anti-image statements. As images had no roots in previous Christian tradition, Icon-veneration was an "innovation" and thus of demonic origin. Iconoclastic traditionalism is implied in John's statement where he tries to marshal unwritten tradition as a foundation of Christian doctrine: "Not only has the ordinance of the church been handed down in writings, but also in unwritten traditions."[19] A detailed comparison of the Iconoclastic and the Iconodule *florilegia* is not necessary here; but it suffices to observe that the Iconoclasts were in a much more advantageous position in terms of biblical and patristic support than their opponents. John's statement is an acknowledgment that the anti-image written testimonies exceeded pro-image testimonies in quantity. The Iconoclasts also had directness of content to their credit: the anti-image statements are unmistakable as the above-mentioned examples reveal. They

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[18] See Gero, *Iconoclasm during Leo III*, 105: "...the Asia Minor bishops [Iconoclasts] merely appealed to some obvious anti-idolatry passages in Scripture, and were probably moved to action by the honor, in their opinion excessive, paid to icons. Not much ideological sophistication is betrayed by these admittedly scanty notices."

[19] John of Damascus, *Divine Images*, I, 23.

rejected any honour paid to images on the basis of concerns about the principles of

Christian monotheism. By contrast, the Iconodule testimonies contain relatively indirect

support for the veneration of images.

The last important component of the first Iconoclastic doctrine relates to imperial

authority over doctrinal matters. First of all, the Iconoclastic emperors took action against

images as a part of their normal duties defined by the "Imperial Theology," and by the

Byzantine religio-political tradition in general.[20] Leo III and other Iconoclastic emperors

emphasized their role as divinely appointed emperors with responsibility for the material

and spiritual well-being of their subjects.[21] Such an emphasis could also be deduced from

John of Damascus's writings, which reject the emperors' authority to interfere in

doctrinal matters.[22] Unfortunately, we have very scanty evidence when it comes to

reconstructing their views on imperial authority. From the first phase of Iconoclasm, the

only direct evidence consists in several dodecasyllabic iambic poems, which have come

down to us through Theodore of Studite's writings, where they are quoted in their

entirety,[23] and in the *Ecloga,* the civil law-code written by Leo III. Both documents give

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[20] See Anastos, "Iconoclasm and Imperial Rule," 62: "Hence the emperors took action against the use of images (726-75, 815-43), they did not do so in order to increase their prerogatives or to assert the authority of the state over the church, as some have maintained, but for the sake of what they thought to be · theological propriety, with which they concerned themselves in the exercise of their normal functions, as understood by Constantine I or Justinian I, and in the Byzantine imperial tradition as a whole."

[21] For instance, see Leo III, *A Manual of Roman Law: The Ecloga: Published by the Emperors Leo III and Constantine V of Isauria,* translated with an introduction by E. H. Freshfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 66-70.

[22] See John of Damascus, *Divine Images,* I, 66: "We shall not suffer the custom of the fathers to be subject to an imperial constitution that seeks to overthrow it. For it is not for pious emperors to overthrow ecclesiastical laws. For this is not the way of the fathers; for it is piratical for these things to be imposed by force, and they shall not prevail. Witness to this is the second synod that took place at Ephesus, which came to be called the 'Robber Synod,' imposed by the imperial hand, when the blessed Flavian was done to death. These things are matters for synods, not emperors, as the Lord said, 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.' It was not to emperors that Christ gave the authority to bind and loose, but to apostles and to those who succeeded them as shepherds and teachers."

[23] PG 99, 435-477A.

us a rather plain picture of the emperor's idea of his office and the principles of the

Iconoclastic political theology.

Documents of the First Iconoclastic Doctrines: Iambic Poems and the Ecloga

The iambic poems were written by the first Iconoclasts and they give us a summary of

early Iconoclastic ideology in very simple terms. Their silence about the Christological

dimension of the issue suggests that they date from the pre-Constantinian period of

Iconoclasm.[24] One of the iambic poems is believed to have been inscribed on the Chalce

gate of the Byzantine imperial palace in Constantinople.[25] The poems emphasize that

images are voiceless matter and forbidden by the Scriptures, that the only legitimate

depiction of Christ is the cross, and that the divinely appointed rulers took action against

them to correct this grave error on the part of their subjects. For example, the replacement

of the Chalce image by a plain cross is celebrated as follows:

The ruler does not tolerate that Christ be depicted [as] a voiceless shape [εἶδος] and bereft of breath, with earthly matter, [which is] condemned by the Scriptures; Leo, with his son Constantine, marks the thrice-blessed image of the cross, the glory of believers, upon the gates of the royal palaces.[26]

This and some other poems summarize the above mentioned principles of early

Iconoclastic ideology. Their valuable witness reveals that the emperors took political

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[24] Stephen Gero analyzes the content of these poems in detail; he also gives the translation of each poem. See *Iconoclasm During Leo III,* 112-26.

[25] The sources mention that the first iconoclastic action taken was to break the famous image of Christ on this vestibule and place a cross in its place, which led to a skirmish between the people who opposed the action and the soldiers. See *Chronicle of Theophanes,* tr. Harry Turtledove (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 405. See Cyril Mango's monograph on the Chalce gate where he deals with the fate of the gate and its famous statue of Christ during the Iconoclastic period, *The Brazen House: A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (Kobenhavn: Kommission hos Ejnar Munksgaard, 1959).

[26] Gero, *Iconoclasm during Leo III,* 114-5.

action on the basis of their belief that they were responsible to God for the correct belief and practice of their subjects. Similarly, the authors of these poems envisage the realm of politics and religion as united and not separate. This fact supports our claim that the Iconoclastic debate was religio-political in the minds of the participants. This unification of religious and political discourses evidently points to the principles of Eusebian Imperial Theology.

Another surviving Iconoclastic document is the civil law-code of Leo III, the *Ecloga*. The document is a general manual of civil law, promulgated in 726. It is important to note that it is designed entirely on Christian principles as opposed to its predecessor, the code of Justinian I (527-65), which partly depended on the principles of Roman law.[27] Its preamble is of great importance to us, as it reveals the first principles of the political theology of the first Iconoclastic emperor, Leo III, which regulates not only his political and legal actions but also his ecclesiastical policies, including his anti-image sentiments. An analysis of the preamble thus gives us the chance to reconstruct the theological first principles of the Iconoclastic political theology, which find their origins in Eusebian "Imperial Theology." These principles make it clear that the Iconoclastic emperors reclaimed the prospects of the "Imperial Theology" by uniting the religious and political discourses under one theological principle: that the Christian salvation is provided by the Christian commonwealth, *sacerdotium* and *imperium,* and that such salvation depended on the maintenance of correct belief and practice on the religious level, and on the principles of justice and righteousness on the political and administrative levels.

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[27] Anastos, "Iconoclasm and Imperial Rule," 65; see Leslie W. Barnard, *The Graeco-Roman and Oriental Background of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 4: "This [the *Ecloga*] was a radical measure and the first attempt in Byzantium to apply Christian standards to private morals and family life."

The *incipit* of the introduction invokes the persons of the Trinity and continues as follows:

Our God the master and maker of all things who created man and granted him the privilege of free will and gave a law in the words of prophecy to help him and thereby made known all things which he should and should not do so that he might choose the former as sponsors of salvation and eschew the latter as the cause of punishment; and not one of those who keep His commandments or who, save the mark, disregard them, fails to receive the appropriate reward of his deeds. For it was God who declared both these things aforetime and the power of His unalterable words, judging every man according to his deeds, will not, as the Gospel tells us, pass away.[28]

As its founding principle is theological, the *Ecloga* can be best described as a theologico-legal document. The text assumes that the ultimate source of law, as established in the Prophetic Law, is God Himself. The document thus emphasizes a "theocentric" theology: it prefers God the Father rather than Christ as the divine agent in human salvation. This attitude marks a separation between the Iconoclastic and Iconodule theologies, for the latter always prefers a "Christocentric" economy of salvation. A comparison of the preambles of the definitions of the Iconoclastic Council of Hiereia (754)[29], and that of the Second Council of Nicea (787) reveals this important difference.[30] Iconoclastic theocentrism refers back to the "Imperial Theology," which emphasizes God the Father as the main agent of salvation history,[31] whereas the Iconodule theology depends on the Chalcedonian Christology which emphasizes Christ's saving incarnation.[32]

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[28] Leo III, *The Ecloga*, 66.

[29] Sahas, Daniel J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eight-Century Iconoclasm: An annotated translation of the Sixth Session of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicea, 787), containing the Definition of the Council of Constantinople (754) and its refutation and the Definition of the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 212B, 212E, 213A, 213D, 216 C.

[30] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 373E, 376A, 376B.

[31] Eusebius of Caesarea, *Laudibus Constantini,* I, 1-2, 4-5 (We use the following translation for Eusebius's Tricennial Orations: H.A. Drake, *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius's Tricennial Orations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

In addition to theocentrism, the text's theological origin is to be sought in its emphasis on salvation as the objective of the Prophetic Law and the highest happiness of the "Christian flock," as this goal is related to the imperial civil law. Accordingly, the divine law, the prospect of which is eternal salvation, and the imperial law are almost equated: their ultimate origin is God, and their ultimate goal is salvation. Imperial and Prophetic laws are intermingled as an extension of the prospect of the "Imperial Theology", which aims to unite the religious and political discourses.[33]

The concepts of law and salvation are related in a paradigm of salvation history. God created man with a free will and has made him capable of choosing between good and evil. He then gave human beings a law indicating what they should and should not do in order to obtain salvation and avoid punishment. Finally, at the end of time, humankind will be judged according to their deeds. Thus God is creator, law-giver and judge. As His representative on earth, the emperor shares the last two functions: he also makes laws and judges his people according to those God-given laws. Prophetic law and imperial law are therefore related; this relation is so obvious that the text is full of biblical quotations. Both laws aim at human salvation. Law, civil or prophetic, regulates the daily activities of people whether social or individual, so that the prospect of Christian salvation is to be sought in every segment of life. In other words, to practice Christian morality in everyday life is considered as a form of worship. For the emperors and their officers, implementing the principle of justice in all political and administrative activities is the most pleasing to God in that it is the best form of worship:

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[32] For the Chalcedonian *Horos* see John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Washington & Cleveland: Corpus Books, 1969), 13-4.

[33] See chapter one, pages 56-57.

Whence, busied with such cares and watching with sleepless mind the discovery of those things which please God, and are conducive to the public interests, preferring Justice to all things terrestrial as the promise of things celestial[34], and as being, by the power of Him who is worshipped in her, sharper than any sword against foes...[35]

The text states that God is worshipped in justice. This is the worship of emperors and rulers. Implementation of justice also renders the Christian commonwealth representative of the heavenly realm. Within this paradigm of "Imperial Theology," where the implementation of Christian principles in the Christian commonwealth would make it a *mimesis* and a representative of the heavenly kingdom of God, Leo III explains his view of imperial authority as follows:

Since therefore having delivered to us the Sovranty of the empire, as it was His good pleasure, He added this thereto, to make manifest our love with fear toward Him, in that He bade us, as He bade Peter the supreme Head of the Apostles,[36] to feed His most faithful flock: We can conceive nothing more acceptable by way of thanksgiving to Him than the righteous and just government of those entrusted to us by Him, so that henceforward the bonds of wickedness may be broken, the unjust breaches of covenants may be stopped, and the attempts of transgressors may be crushed, and thus by victories over our enemies, through His almighty hand, we may be crowned with the encircling diadem and the throne may be confirmed, more precious and honorable, and in peace to ourselves, and the republic established on a firm foundation....And thus we shall strive to uphold the sceptre of the empire placed in our hands by God. With such weapons and by God's almighty power, we desire firmly to resist our foes, and endeavor to increase and advance the highest happiness of those, sealed with the emblem of Christ, committed to our benevolence. And by such means we hope that the ancient jurisdiction of the empire will be established in us for ever.[37]

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[34] Gero prefers to translate this sentence as "...honoring justice above all earthly preoccupations, justice which is the agent of the heavenly [powers]" and states that the word Πρόξενος in the text has more the implication of "representative." We believe that this rendering of the word is a clear implication of the ideology of "Imperial Theology." The implication of righteousness in the Christian commonwealth would make it a copy of the heavenly kingdom of God (*Iconoclasm During Leo III*, 53).

[35] Leo III, *The Ecloga*, 67.

[36] This allusion to Peter is translated differently by Gero: "Since He handed the power of sovereignty to us, as it did please Him, making this the proof of our reverential love toward Him, commanding us (in the words of Peter, the highest eminence among the apostles) to tend the faithful flock..." Gero continues in footnote 14: "Zekharia correctly identified this as a free quotation of 1 Peter 5:2, where *the apostle Peter* commands the elders...Some scholars have taken this, quite wrongly, as a reference to the Petrine primacy. The phrase cannot be translated as: '[God] ordered us to feed his flock, like Peter the chief of the apostles'. *Iconoclasm During Leo III*, 51.

[37] Leo III, *The Ecloga*, 66, 67, 69, 70.

The emperor's sovereignty comes directly from God, who granted him the authority to rule over the Christian flock; and since it is a God-given duty, the fulfillment of this duty is the most pleasing act of a ruler in the eyes of God. The task is compared to Peter's commissioning the elders to serve the first Christian community. It is important to note that Leo III does not consider himself as playing the role of Peter but that of the elders, on whom the duty to serve is laid. Some scholars, who depended on the previous translation which reads: "in that He bade us, as He bade Peter the supreme Head of the Apostles, to feed his most faithful flock," took this passage as direct evidence of the Iconoclastic emperors' claim to Petrine supremacy (as if they claimed both priesthood and kingship) and concluded that the Isaurian emperors were Caesaropapist rulers.[38] Nevertheless, the implication of the passage is that the emperors were entrusted with the care of the Christian community, to protect them and to provide them with material and spiritual well-being. The biblical text alluded to here reads:

...I [Peter] exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it—not for sordid gain but eagerly (1 Pet. 5: 1-2).

The wider context of the biblical passage informs us that the authority given to elders is not absolute and will be taken over by the "chief shepherd" at the end of the world. As

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[38] See Schmemann, "Byzantium, Iconoclasm and the Monks," *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly.* 3 (1959), 29: "Behind the revolt against monasticism there was revealed the desire of the Isaurians to thoroughly subject the Church to the state, to render her in all respects "useful"....And Leo expressed this theocratic, absolutist state-consciousness in the preface to the "Eclogue"—a new code of laws which he published. "The Lord, having entrusted the realm to the emperors, hath likewise commanded them to tend Christ's faithful flock, after the example of Peter, the chief of the Apostles". Here is the final deduction from the Justinian "symphony.""

opposed to some "Caesaropapist" readings,[39] this passage is conspicuously humble in tone; it continues "do not lord over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock."[40] All in all, the text gives us the impression of a pious ruler who is eager to save his realm from the dire realities of the present situation by establishing the principles of Christian morals and justice so as to become "pleasing to God," rather than an absolutist dictator who tries to exercise control over the church.

At this point it is appropriate to discuss one prominent example of "Caesaropapist" readings of the *Ecloga,* which reads:

Though, as we have seen, it would be incorrect to make Leo explicitly arrogate to himself the office of Peter, the document is thoroughly 'Caesaropapist' in tone. There is no question of emperor and patriarch sharing the direction of the 'flock'; there is no intermediary between the Divinity and the emperor, who is the sole earthly interpreter and executor of the intentions of heavenly justice. [As opposed the preambles of Theodosian and Justinian code] the Ecloga, by contrast, has no complicated arguments about the diverse sources of authority. It simply does not envisage two powers on earth; if there are 'two swords', the emperor carries them both....But the general tone and explicit declarations of the preface to the Ecloga make it entirely credible that the promulgator of this code would have had no hesitation to decree the destruction of images, with or without patriarchal consent.[41]

We believe, however, that the text does not warrant these comments for the following reasons. First, the emperor does not claim to be the sole interpreter and executor of the intentions of heavenly justice. The implication of heavenly justice has more to do with the divine origin of the principle of justice. He does not claim any revelation directly from God in such matters; on the contrary, he acknowledges the specialists' consultation: "we ordered that these books be collected in our presence and having examined with

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[39] For example, Gero, *Iconoclasm during Leo III,* 53.

[40] I Pet. 5:3.

[41] Gero, *Iconoclasm during Leo III,* 55.

close attention..." Second, Caesaropapism presupposes an authoritative approach by the emperors in doctrinal matters, which is the specific area of churchmen, and this document warrants no such claim. Third, what we clearly see here is that governmental and spiritual issues pertaining to the well-being of the Christian flock are not categorically separated; they are considered to be issues of identical importance and the emperors are responsible for both. Fourth, Gero's personal orientation to situate the Iconoclastic reaction as a movement of imperial origin causes him to simplify the implications of the text. According to him, the *Ecloga* warrants the emperor's Caesaropapist views of authority. Yet the emperor does not claim anywhere the authority to make doctrinal decisions on his own without the consent of the church; he only claims authority to punish the heretics once they are decided to be so by the church. It is now a commonplace that authority to implement church laws was held and practiced by every Byzantine emperor after Constantine I.

Righteous and just government of the faithful flock is the emperor's thanksgiving to God; the citizens are entrusted to the emperor so that they be made safe from all kinds of evil, be they political or doctrinal. The emperor should endeavour to increase and advance "the highest happiness of those...committed to our benevolence". On the whole, political consolidation of the empire and the provision of the highest happiness (well-being in Gero's translation) of the flock are the missions that are given by God to the emperors. In view of this fact, the emperors are expected to maintain both the spiritual and material well-being of their subjects. This notion refers to the "Imperial Theology"; and the regulations put forward in the *Ecloga* are clearly in congruence with this double responsibility as they contain both civil and religious provisions.

The preamble to the *Ecloga* of Leo III thus establishes the five main principles of Iconoclastic political theology, which, as a whole, refers back to the Eusebian "Imperial Theology". The first principle is that prophetic and imperial laws are correlated to the principles of justice and righteousness as the founding principles of both. The second is that the concept of salvation is the common prospect of prophetic and imperial laws; accordingly, abiding by their rules brings salvation to Christians. This means a wide concept of worship: worship in the church or implementing the Christian principles of justice in everyday life—the preamble implies that abiding by the rules of this civil law-code is the type of worship that brings salvation—are equally valued. The third is that the material and spiritual well-being of the Christian flock is a God-given responsibility of the emperor, and this double well-being is the primary function and defining goal of the Christian commonwealth. In this regard, taking care of his people and delivering just government are core to the emperor's and his officers' personal worship and thanksgiving to God. The fourth is that the celestial kingdom is the model of the terrestrial Christian Commonwealth. The fifth and final principle is that the maintenance of divine principles of righteousness and justice in the realm of government ensures the political and spiritual welfare of the commonwealth. In other words, the welfare of the Byzantine commonwealth depends on its proximity to its heavenly model.[42]

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[42] As far as we are concerned this last principle best defines the aforementioned concept of Byzantine theodicy. It has two main principles itself: first the biblical concept of "Israel" denoting the historical relationship between God's chosen people and God; and second the Eusebian concept of the Christian commonwealth, that is constructed by the Platonic concept of *mimesis,* according to which the earthly kingdom becomes a true image and representative of the heavenly kingdom as far as the former establishes the Christian principles in the political and social realms. Therefore, we argue that the above-mentioned understanding of the concept as the emperors' eagerness to appease God to gain some political expediency is rather simplistic; and that the Iconoclastic emperors' efforts should be explained within the parameters of their political theology, which harks back to the Eusebian "Imperial Theology."

Summary

The doctrinal implications of the first Iconoclastic challenge were centered on the concept of salvation in post-resurrection history. The Iconoclastic reformers opposed the notion that images of Christ, Mary, or other saintly people could have any role in providing Christians with salvation. Though the first attack lacked any sophisticated theories of image, it denied any kind of sacred quality to images, as they were considered ordinary material objects. As elaborated above, Iconoclasts reacted more to the practical aspect of icon-veneration; since icons had no association with the divine, their veneration would amount to idolatry and re-paganization of Christianity. The first Iconoclastic attack was inspired by the biblical strictures against idols and a strong sense of traditionalism. The charge was thus two-fold: first, since the images are ordinary material objects, any kind of honour paid to them is idolatry, which is strictly prohibited by the Scriptures; second, images are not supported by the tradition, given the many patristic testimonies against such objects. Icon-veneration thus does not belong to previous Christian tradition; as such, the practice is an invention, and a novelty of pagan origin.

The Iconoclastic reformers also emphasized the divine character and role of the religio-political establishment and especially that of the emperor, the shepherd of the Christian flock, as building blocks of their soteriology. Both the Iconoclastic iambic poems and the *Ecloga* stress this point. As analyzed above, the *Ecloga* of Leo III provides us with a rather comprehensive description of the early Iconoclastic concept of salvation and the salvific role of the religio-political establishment. The most striking argument of the text is that it presupposes a collective salvation that comes through implementation of the Christian principles in all strata of the social life of the Byzantine

Commonwealth. Salvation is the ultimate prospect of this commonwealth where people of every position and rank fulfill their worship by implementing the Christian principles in the social and political life.

The first Iconoclastic decree of Leo III and his promulgation of the *Ecloga* came almost at the same time as two components of a larger project of reform.[43] Refusal of any salvific role attributed to images on the one hand, and reassertion of the salvific function of the imperial laws, on the other, can be taken as a connection between the two regulations. This analysis supports our argument that it was the concept of salvation that was at stake during the Iconoclastic debate; the early Iconoclasts' stand entailed an utter denial of images as legitimate agents of the Christian salvation and reassertion of the traditional salvific role of the Byzantine Commonwealth. The Iconoclastic soteriology thus presupposed a collective salvation as comprising the entire body of the Christian polity; the implementation of the Christian principles into social, political, and devotional aspects of life was aimed at making the Byzantine Commonwealth similar to its heavenly model.

By positing the problem along these lines, the Iconoclastic reformers were evidently referring to the principles of the Christian society as they were established in the Eusebian "Imperial Theology." Therefore, from early on we have a dialectical relation between the Iconoclastic prospect of a collective Christian salvation through the agency of the Byzantine Commonwealth, as it is defined by the Eusebian "Imperial Theology," and that of the Iconodules, who argued for an appreciation of the continuing validity of

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[43] Scholars generally date both events to somewhere between 726 and 730; see Gero, *Iconoclasm during Leo III*, 48 and 94.

the incarnation through images. During the second phase of the debate, both sides would elaborate their positions along these lines.

CHAPTER FIVE

JOHN OF DAMASCUS: FIRST CHAMPION OF ICONODULISM

John of Damascus (651-750 CE) wrote three treatises in defence of images. Dating from

approximately 730 to 750, they reveal the first full-fledged argument for making and using

images for Christian devotional purposes.[1] The issues raised by the first Iconoclastic

onslaught constituted the immediate context of the three apologies, which refute the

Iconoclastic arguments within a comprehensive soteriological paradigm. John's defence of

images widened the scope of the debate as it contained not only a refutation of the charges of

idolatry and a positive defence of images but also an exposition of an entire Christian

worldview that centered on the salvific implications of the incarnation.

On the whole, the main question addressed by John was how Christians might achieve

salvation in post-resurrection history. In contrast to Iconoclastic soteriology, which

emphasized the role of a universal Christian society, with a Christian commonwealth as the

main vessel of salvation, John's soteriological standpoint was rather more spiritual and

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[1] Full English translations are available in English. Unless otherwise indicated we will use the following: St John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images,* translation and introduction by Andrew Louth (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003). As for the modern scholarly works on John of Damascus we should first mention a fine critical edition of nearly all his prose works in five volumes by Dom Banifatius Kotter (*Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos,* Berlin, de Gruyter, 1969). Andrew Louth's *St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) is the only comprehensive monograph on John's life and works. As for John's defense of images and involvement in the Iconoclastic controversy almost all the theological works on the debate mentioned earlier has a separate section on John.

mystical: Christians should seek salvation through their participation in the continuing unity of the divine and human which had been accomplished by the incarnation. Images function as mediators between Christians and the divine in this process, which ultimately aims at deification (*theosis*):

...I venerate the Creator, created for my sake, who came down to his creation without being lowered or weakened, that he might glorify my nature and bring about communion with the divine nature.[2]

John's *apologia* might be seen as contextualized around the three main issues raised by the first Iconoclasts: a) against the Iconoclastic charges of idolatry, John defended images on the grounds of the incarnation as well as through his theories of images and veneration; b) against Iconoclastic traditionalism, John developed the Iconodule stand on the tradition; and c) against the salvific definition of imperial authority, John developed Iconodule ecclesiology and a revision of the principles of church-empire relations. It is important to note that the inner logic of the treatises connects the doctrinal principles of Iconodule theology with politics on the basis of theological first principles. In other words, it was John's soteriology that determined the role and place of the body politic in Christian Byzantium.

Given his importance to this very Byzantine debate, it is all the more remarkable that John lived his entire life outside the empire as a subject of the Islamic Umayyad state. He served the caliph as a high ranking civil servant in Damascus. Later in life he retired to a monastery in Palestine where he spent the rest of his life. He probably produced most of his works during this latter period.[3]

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[2] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, I, 4.

[3] For the life and times of John see Louth, *St. John Damascene*, 3-14.

Idolatry versus the Incarnation

The importance of the incarnation in John's theology can hardly be exaggerated. Against the Iconoclastic charge that the church had fallen into idolatry by promoting icon-veneration, John replied that their accusation of idolatry revealed an essential flaw in their understanding of the incarnation. According to his understanding, one has to underestimate the material dimension of the incarnation in order to assume that images are idols. In order to correct this misunderstanding, John undertook a full exposition of the salvific implications of the incarnation.

Generally speaking, his Christological views are not substantially different from those of the Iconoclasts as set forth in the definition of the Iconoclastic council of Hierea (754 CE).[4] Both sides agreed on the Chalcedonian definition of the hypostatic union of divine and human in the person of Jesus Christ without separation or confusion. Both would have concurred that the incarnation was the most important event of the entire salvation economy. John and later Iconodules differed from their rivals in interpreting the meaning and function of the incarnation, however, especially in relation to post-resurrection history. The Iconoclasts claimed that the incarnation fulfilled its function after the resurrection and gave way to the establishment of the church and later the Christian empire so as to provide humanity with material and spiritual guidance and salvation.[5] Iconoclasts claimed that the incarnation was a once-and-for-all event, limiting its function to its actual occurrence during the earthly life of Jesus Christ. In other words, the incarnation was instrumental to restoring a

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[4] Daniel J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-Century Iconoclasm: An annotated translation of the Sixth Session of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicea, 787), containing the Definition of the Council of Constantinople (754) and its refutation and the Definition of the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 237E.

[5] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 217A, B; 225D.

godly order within which Christians could receive salvation. According to John of Damascus, however, such an instrumentalist approach to the incarnation was unacceptable and utterly wrong. He claimed that the unity of the divine and human natures in the person of Jesus Christ would continue until the end of the world, which made the incarnation an ongoing salvific reality. In actual fact, he made it the fundamental salvific reality of post-resurrection history. Images, accordingly, gave Christians access to the salvific benefits of the incarnation, as they were also justified by it.

The first distinctive aspect of the Iconodule interpretation of the incarnation, then, was its continuing reality. As opposed to the Iconoclasts, who would later claim that the human nature of the Incarnate Christ was assumed into glory after the ascension,[6] John claimed that the incarnate Christ remained intact after the assumption:

The flesh assumed by Him is made divine and endures after its assumption. Fleshly nature was not lost when it became part of the Godhead, but just as the Word made flesh remained the Word, so also flesh became the Word, yet remained flesh, being united to the person of the Word. Therefore I boldly draw an image of the invisible God, not as invisible, but as having become visible for our sakes by partaking of flesh and blood. I do not draw an image of the immortal Godhead, but I paint the image of God who became visible in the flesh...[7]

A truthful image of the incarnate Christ was possible and desirable, for it would represent an actually present prototype. The incarnation was an act of Grace in which God accommodated Himself in flesh so that human beings could know Him through their common senses and become deified. Salvation was thus defined as knowing God and being united with him hypostatically. According to John, during the life of Jesus images were not necessary, for the incarnate God was already present to be seen. However, since the ascension, images became

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[6] The Iconoclastic Council of Hiereia (754) quoted in full Eusebius of Caesarea's letter to the empress Constantia on the issue of a pictorial image of Christ. The letter is a profound exposition of the Iconoclastic position and will be analyzed in the next chapter. See Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 313A-313D.

[7] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* trans. David Anderson (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), I, 4.

necessary to convey an idea of God incarnate so that Christians could elevate their spirits into the higher reality of Godhead. In other words, John argued that the incarnation was still valid after the resurrection and would continue to be so until the second coming. The legitimacy of images, accordingly, derived from this continuing validity of the incarnation:

For if we were to make an image of the invisible God, we would really sin; for it is impossible to depict one who is incorporeal and formless, invisible and uncircumscribable. And again: if we were to make images of human beings and regard them and venerate them as gods, we would be truly sacrilegious. But we do none of these things. For if we make an image of God who in his ineffable goodness became incarnate and was seen upon earth in the flesh, and lived among humans, and assumed the nature and density and form and color of flesh, we do not go astray. For we long to see his form; as the divine apostle says, "now we see puzzling reflections in a mirror [I Cor. 13:12]."[8]

The second distinctive feature of the Iconodule notion of the incarnation was to make it the dividing line of the entirety of salvation history. As opposed to the Iconoclasts who assumed a continuity between the Old and New dispensations, John presumed a discontinuity between them. As a result of the descent of the transcendent God in order to unite with matter in the form of a human body, the entire creation has been renewed and everything has been redefined including salvation, the law and the prophets, and more importantly, the human condition whereby human beings had been elevated as a consequence of this incarnation from corruption into incorruption.

John argues that there were three main reasons for the biblical prohibition of images. First, before the incarnation, God transcendent was not accessible through the senses and therefore a visible representation of the invisible was out of the question. Secondly, there was an insurmountable chasm between God and matter, which made any material representation of Him impossible. Thirdly, humanity was not mature enough to perceive God through the senses. When God became incarnate in the flesh of Jesus, however, all of these

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[8] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 2.

circumstances completely changed. First, God become immanent and visible. Secondly, as a result of the mysterious unity of the divine and human, the gap between the transcendent and the material was closed. Thirdly, humanity had matured and gained a new cognitive state enabling perception of God as incarnate. That is to say, all the concerns about idolatry were removed as a result of the incarnation. Thenceforward, it was not possible for Christians who actually saw God, not as transcendent but as incarnate, to slide into idolatry. Therefore, John concludes, Christians can and should make images of God the incarnate:

It was, therefore, for the Jews, on account of their sliding into idolatry, that these things were ordained by law. To speak theologically, however, we, to whom it has been granted, fleeing superstitious error, to come to be purely with God, and having recognized the truth, to worship God alone and be greatly enriched with the perfection of the knowledge of God, and who, passing beyond childhood to reach maturity, are no longer under a custodian, have received the habit of discrimination from God and know what can be depicted and what cannot be delineated in an image...For it is clear that when you see the bodiless become human for your sake, then you may accomplish the figure of a human form; when the invisible becomes visible in the flesh, then you may depict the likeness of something seen...[9]

The third difference between the Iconoclastic and Iconodule interpretations of the incarnation relates to the alienation of human beings from God that came as a result of the fall and, in connection with this, to the restoration or salvation that came with the incarnation. It is important to note that both Iconoclasts and Iconodules understood the incarnation as an act of divine grace to save humanity from the alienation caused by the fall. Iconoclasts seem to have understood this alienation epistemologically. That is to say, human kind had been deprived of the knowledge of God and accordingly both the law and the prophets and the incarnation provided humanity with the correct teaching of the Godhead, hence their categorical identity and the essential continuity of the two covenants.[10] John, on the other

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[9] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* I, 8.

[10] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 212B, E, 213A, 213D, E, 216C, 217A, B.

hand, emphasized the ontological aspect of the alienation, which could only have been healed

through the incarnation. Humankind had been deprived of the divine nature and been

imprisoned in corruptible flesh and matter. The unique function of the incarnation was to

save humanity from this ontological deprivation and reunite them with the divine nature.

According to John, to assume that the incarnation aimed to bring humanity a new teaching

would be nonetheless a misunderstanding. God had united with human nature not only to

teach humanity about himself but also and, more importantly, to glorify and deify human

nature:

> I venerate one God, one divinity, but also I worship a trinity of persons, God the Father and God the Son
> incarnate and God the Holy Spirit, one God. I do not venerate the creation instead of the creator, but I venerate
> the Creator, created for my sake, who came down to his creation without being lowered or weakened, that he
> might glorify my nature and bring about communion with the divine nature.[11]

The fourth distinctive feature of John's Iconodule interpretation of the incarnation, which is

closely related to the type of salvation offered by the incarnation, is the emphasis on the

material aspect of the incarnation and the essential role given to matter in human salvation.

According to John, God preferred to save humanity through matter. The divine nature

descended into matter in the body of Jesus, and as a result of this unity matter was elevated to

divine nature and became deified. Accordingly, salvation initiated by this unity was defined

as deification. Matter thus gained an exalted position in the new dispensation. As a result of

its unity with the divine nature, it had become the main instrument of salvation. It was

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[11] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, I, 4.

because of this elevated position bestowed upon matter that images were believed to partake of the divinity of their prototypes.[12]

John explained that after the incarnation the human condition had changed, rendering it mature enough to perceive the divine glory while in the flesh. This new cognitive state enabled Christians to discern God from idols. Since matter had been deliberately chosen to be the instrument of salvation, the possibility of perceiving God through matter with human sight and to unite with the divine hypostatically was the main purpose and consequence of the incarnation. Because of the indwelling of the divine, matter was elevated and became the key instrument of salvation. It is thus honoured not because it is matter but because it became the dwelling-place of the spirit:

I do not venerate matter, I venerate the fashioner of the matter, who became matter for my sake, and in matter made his abode, and through matter worked my salvation...I reverence therefore matter and I hold in respect and venerate that through which my salvation has come about, I reverence it not as God, but as filled with divine energy and grace.[13]

A simple charge of idolatry thus led John to embark on a full-fledged exposition of the soteriological implications of the incarnation. He argued that such a charge, which might have been considered a simple issue of practice by his opponents, could not be possible without a misconceived notion of the incarnation. For this reason, he replied to the Iconoclastic charge of idolatry with a more powerful counter-argument that the Iconoclasts had misunderstood the incarnation and had to review their doctrinal principles on that score. His critique pointed to the fact that the Iconoclastic hostility to images derived from their tendency to emphasize sharply the distinction between the two natures. They emphasized the

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[12] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* II, 13-4.

[13] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* II, 14.

divinity of Christ over against his humanity. A balanced view of Christology, argued John, must also be maintained in soteriology. That is to say, Christian soteriology must not lose sight of the suffering humanity even after the resurrection and ascension. The Chalcedonian Christological formula should be replicated in Christian soteriology while the mysterious unity of the divine and human should be taken as the model to be emulated. For John, then, the major Christological flaw of the Iconoclastic position was that the Iconoclasts overlooked the cardinal fact that salvation came through human flesh in the person of Jesus:

> The Son of God did not become an angelic nature hypostatically; the Son of God became hypostatically a human nature. Angels do not participate in, nor do they become sharers in, the divine nature, but in divine activity or grace; human beings, however, do participate in, and become sharers of, the divine nature, as many as partake of the holy Body of Christ and drink his precious Blood; for it is united to the divinity hypostatically, and the two natures are hypostatically and inseparably united in the Body of Christ of which we partake, and we share in the two natures, in the body in a bodily manner, and in the divinity spiritually, or rather in both in both ways, not that we have become identical [with God] hypostatically (for we first subsisted, and then we were united), but through assimilation with the Body and the Blood.[14]

That God had chosen to dwell in a human body and in this way glorify his nature was a reality that had to be replicated in all Christians' salvation. Moreover, the hypostatic union with the incarnate Christ is comparable to the mystery of the Eucharist. From a Christological point of view, the mystery of the Eucharist represents the unity of the divine and human in the person of Christ. John's emphasis on the incarnation derives from his Christology that emphasizes the suffering servant, the humanity of Christ. According to John, the Eucharist is a realistic representation of the incarnate body where Christ's divinity glorified his humanity. At the same time this mystery provides Christians with the chance to participate in the incarnate body and, in this way, to hope for the glorification of their own bodies. The prospect of salvation as deification is then signified by a Christian's participation

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[14] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 26.

in the Eucharist. John and later Iconodules[15] insist on this realistic understanding of the doctrine of the Eucharist, i.e., after the consecration the Eucharistic elements become the very body and blood of Christ. John's critique would later be answered by the Iconoclasts in the definition of the Iconoclastic Council of Hierea where the Eucharist is defined as the only true image of the incarnate Christ (754 CE).[16] Similarly, John developed his entire argument for images on the grounds of the salvific implications of the incarnation, where the making of images and their veneration are justified by the continuing validity of the mysterious unity of the divine and human.

The Iconoclastic claim that images were of common matter without any holiness is responded to by John who says that it was through mere common matter that God worked human salvation. Therefore, the salvific role of matter is one of the major building blocks of John's defense of images. His emphasis on the material aspect of the incarnation carries therefore an implicit charge of Docetism, for the Iconoclastic degradation of matter suggested sympathy with Docetists who denied the reality of Christ's humanity. John furthered his charges by claiming that the Iconoclastic degradation of matter had also Manichean dualistic tendencies:

Do not abuse matter; for it is not dishonorable; this is the view of the Manichees. The only thing that is dishonorable is something that does not have its origin from God, but is our own discovery, by the free inclination and turning our will from what is natural to what is unnatural, that is sin.[17]

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[15] For the Eucharistic doctrine of the later Iconodules see chapter VII, heading "Image, Veneration and the Eucharist."

[16] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 261E, 264A, B, C.

[17] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, I, 16.

In conclusion, although the first Iconoclasts did not consider icons as an issue of Christology, John observed that the real debate related to the interpretation of the incarnation. Therefore, he elaborated extensively on the salvific implications of the incarnation, making it the foundation of his defense of images as well as of his critique of the Iconoclasts. It was John who first contextualized the debate within a substantially doctrinal framework. His defense of images also deployed sophisticated theories of images and veneration that specifically aimed to refute the Iconoclastic claim that icons and their veneration were of pagan origin and as such had no place in Christian tradition.

Theories of Images and Veneration

The first Iconoclasts claimed that images were of pagan origin and had no place in previous Christian tradition. Since the phenomenon of images as objects of Christian devotion appeared only as late as the second half of the sixth century, they seemed historically right.[18] Moreover, the notion of images and the devotional practices that developed around them were almost identical with those of pagans. The Iconoclastic understanding of these new phenomena thus was simply to refute them as idolatry.

John's theories of images and veneration primarily aimed to secure a place for image-making and their veneration within Christian tradition.[19] The former achieves its purpose on three levels. First, his definition of an image provides it with a substantial representative quality and thus establishes a connection between the image and its prototype, while also providing a common structure according to which other types of images can be classified and

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[18] Ernst Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954), 95.

[19] For the theory of images see John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* I, 9-13 and III, 16-26; for the veneration theory see III, 27-40.

connected to each other. Secondly, a detailed elaboration of the types of images proves that

the image-prototype relation is widely used by the Christian tradition and, therefore, that

icons were only a natural extension of this time-honoured structure. Images thus could be

legitimately used to facilitate Christian salvation. Thirdly, John elaborates on the functions of

images to prove their instrumentality and usefulness in Christian soteriology. Lastly, John

points to the fact that the Iconoclasts contradicted themselves by approving all other features

of the image-prototype structure and by condemning icons that were only another feature of

the well-established phenomenon of Christian tradition.

As the first theologian to develop a complete theory of images in the controversy,

John begins with the definition of an image:

An image is therefore a likeness and pattern and impression of something, showing in itself what is depicted; however, the image is certainly not like the archetype, that is, what is depicted, in every respect—for the image is one thing and what it depicts is another—and certainly a difference is seen between them, since they are not identical.[20]

An image depicts and represents its archetype. It is a likeness of its archetype. Image and

archetype, then, are linked by an identity or likeness. There is a relationship of 'participation'

between image and prototype.[21] An image has also some differences from its prototype.

Image and its prototype, then, are partly convergent, partly distinct. Images are made and

honoured with the intention of reaching what is depicted through the image. Their identity

with their prototypes is what makes images valuable, indeed indispensable in the eyes of the

beholder. Images convey hidden knowledge of their prototypes and make them manifest to

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[20] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 16.

[21] Kenneth Parry, *Depicting the Word: Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 25.

the beholder. John emphasizes this mediatory position of images as he elaborates on their functions:

Every image makes manifest and demonstrates something hidden. For example, because human beings do not have direct knowledge of what is invisible, since their souls are veiled by bodies, or [knowledge] of future events, or of things distant and removed in space, since they are circumscribed by space and time, the image was devised to guide us to knowledge and to make manifest and open what is hidden, certainly for our profit and well-doing and salvation, so that, as we learn what is hidden from things recorded and noised abroad, we are filled with desire and zeal for what is good, and avoid and hate the opposite, that is, what is evil.[22]

The above passage suggests that images are indispensable devices for the human condition. Since humans are incapable of receiving direct knowledge of the invisible, they require the help of images to get an idea of their prototypes. In other words, images serve as mediators between divine and human beings. John goes on to elucidate the types of images that have some form of identity of likeness with their prototypes as well as the function of informing human beings about what is otherwise invisible and inaccessible.

The first type of image is the natural image. According to orthodox Trinitarian formula, the Son is the Father's natural, undeviating image. He is in every respect like the Father except for being unbegotten and possessing Fatherhood. Similarly, the Spirit is a natural image of the Son, being different only in 'proceeding' from the Father, as distinct from being 'begotten'. In the scale of images, therefore, the natural image outweighs artificial representations.[23] The second kind of image is God's foreknowledge of things that have yet to happen. John explains that this type contains images and paradigms of what God will bring

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[22] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 17.

[23] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 18.

about, which is called 'predetermination' by Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite.[24] The third

kind is the human being made in the image and likeness of God. Comparing the Trinitarian

theology to human nature, John argues that just as the divine intellect (the Father), the Word

(the Son) and the Holy Spirit constitute one God, so also are the mind, word (or reason) and

spirit one human being. Similarly, human kind bears a resemblance to God in his being self-

determined and sovereign, namely as 'will'.[25]

The fourth kind of image is the use in Scripture of forms and types of invisible and

incorporeal things. These convey a faint conception of God and the angels and other invisible

realities in visible images. The divine Word provides Christians with these images in order to

accommodate these realities into their human conditions. For example, images of the sun, its

light and its rays are used to make an analogy with the Trinity.[26] John refers here to the

anagogical function of scriptural symbols that is elaborated in the writings of the Pseudo-

Dionysius. These analogies and types help Christians ascend to the truth they represent.[27]

The fifth type of image prefigures future events, such as the burning bush and the rain

on the fleece which prefigure the Virgin Mother of God or the sea, the water and the cloud

which prefigure the spirit in baptism.[28] These are the typological images in Scripture. Lastly,

there are images that are reminders of past events, either acts of virtue for the glory and

honour of the bravest and those who excel in virtue, or acts of wickedness to the scandal and

shame of wicked men. The purpose of these images is to encourage us to do good deeds and

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[24] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 19. See Pseudo-Dionysius, *On the Divine Names*,
translated with an introduction by John D. Jones (Mikwaukee, Wisconsin: Magquette University Press,
1980), V. 8.

[25] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 20.

[26] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, III, 21.

[27] Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 40-41.

[28] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, III, 22.

avoid shameful acts, and can be either recorded in books (for the written word itself is also an image) or depicted in material images such as the jar and the rod that had been placed in the ark as a memorial.[29] Here John identifies the painted icon with this last type of image, equating its status with written scripture.[30]

John develops a subtle critique of the Iconoclastic notion of tradition by elaborating on the types of images. Kenneth Parry suggests that John took this broad view of images from his understanding of the nature of Iconoclasm; that is to say, the Iconoclastic attack against images was not restricted to the painted icon but, more importantly, it posed a threat to a system of images that is essential to the Christian faith.[31] Indeed, the common structure of the types of images —in each case, images being "a likeness and pattern and impression of their prototypes"[32]—seems to constitute one of the building blocks of the Christian tradition for a variety of reasons. First of all, the relationship among the three persons of the Trinity is explained and understood through the concept of image. Secondly, image is essential to explain the dogma of God's foreknowledge. Thirdly, image had been one of the major principles of Christian hermeneutics of the Bible with the Old Testament having long been considered to be an image of the New. Typological interpretation of the Old Testament was essential to the Christian understanding of the Law and Prophets. Fourthly, Christian anthropology always defined man as having been made in God's image. These fundamental uses of the image-prototype notion refer to one main reality, i.e., that "…we cannot behold the bodiless without using shapes that bear some analogy to us, as Dionysius the [Pseudo-]

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[29] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, III, 23.

[30] Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 41.

[31] Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 42.

[32] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 16.

Areopagite says who had great insight in matters divine."[33] In other words, images solve the problem of mediation between circumscribed humanity and the transcendent divine. Therefore, they were indispensable to the Christian tradition which made extensive use of this providential tool in the structuring of its foundations. The same structure could be used by the same tradition, argues John, in different contexts according to the circumstances, in order to convey to Christians the redemptive benefits of the incarnation. The use of painted icons in Christian liturgy, then, was a perfectly acceptable indeed much encouraged practice according to the tradition.

John also observes that the Iconoclasts were inconsistent in regard to their notion of tradition, for they readily accepted all the types of images listed by John except for the painted icon, which conformed perfectly to the others both by definition and function. John recognizes a certain pattern and logic in the development of the tradition, which eventually brought about the fabrication and veneration of Christian images. Having become stuck on the obsolete prohibition of idolatry, Iconoclasts seemed to miss the main point in this matter. He therefore challenges his rivals saying, "Therefore, either destroy every image and establish laws against the One who ordered that these things should be, or receive each in the reason and manner fitting to each."[34] John's observation of inconsistency in the Iconoclastic use of images is reiterated in relation to their attitude towards different kinds of veneration. He directs the same critique against the Iconoclasts at the end of his veneration theory. One should remember, however, that both critiques are founded as a long series of premises, most of which were not accepted by the Iconoclasts. In other words, John's accusation of

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[33] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 21.

[34] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 23.

inconsistency was only valid as long as both sides agreed (which they did not) upon his

definitions of tradition, images, as well as his classification of images and veneration.

The various types of veneration offered to images had long been practiced when the

Iconoclasts attacked them with the charge of idolatry.[35] Scholars today observe that the

actual practices of veneration did not differ greatly from pagan worship of idols.[36] In order to

justify the veneration offered to images, John further develops a veneration theory according

to which certain types of veneration are defined as symbols of submission and honour and

classified as the worship offered to God alone (λατρεία), while other types of veneration

(προσκύνησις) are paid to saintly people, holy places, or to people of honour and rank.[37] He

develops this classification in the third oration where he lists the five types of worship

offered to God and the seven types of veneration offered to different places and people,

stressing in this way his distinction between worship and veneration.[38]

In terms of veneration as worship, the first of the five types is the veneration of

service that is given to God alone who is God by nature.[39] The second type is the veneration

of wonder and desire, which we show to God because of his natural glory.[40] The third is

thanksgiving for all the blessings that He has bestowed upon humans.[41] The fourth consists

of the petitions and prayers of Christians for all His blessings, in recognition that "we cannot

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[35] Kitzinger, "Icons before Iconoclasm," 99.

[36] For a detailed description of the Christian practices of icon-veneration see the information given in chapter III under the headings, "Rise of Icons," and "Origins of Icons."

[37] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* I, 14.

[38] Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 169.

[39] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 28.

[40] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 29.

[41] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 30.

do or have anything good without Him."[42] The fifth kind of worship is that of repentance and confession.[43]

As for the seven kinds of veneration offered to others (as found in the Scriptures), John identifies the first kind as offered to those upon whom God rests, like the *Theotokos* and the saints. They are the ones who, through their own will and indwelling and cooperation with God, have become deified not by nature but by adoption. They are thus truly called 'gods'.[44] The second type of veneration is offered to places and things through which or in which God worked human salvation, either before the incarnation or in his incarnate dispensation. These include Mount Sinai and Nazareth, the manger in Bethlehem, the holy place called Golgotha, the wood of the cross, etc.[45] The third type of veneration is offered to things dedicated to God, including the holy books of the Scriptures and liturgical utensils such as patens, chalices, thuribles, censers, etc.[46] The fourth kind of veneration is offered to the images seen by the prophets or to images of things to come such us Aaron's rod and the jar of manna prefiguring the mystery of the Virgin.[47] The fifth is people's veneration of each other, since human beings are created in the image of God and therefore bear the divine image.[48] The sixth type of veneration is offered to those who have been placed in positions of rule and authority over others, in accordance with the Paul's dictum, "Pay to all of them your

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[42] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 31.

[43] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 32.

[44] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 33.

[45] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 34.

[46] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 35.

[47] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 36.

[48] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 37.

dues,...honour to whom honour is due (Rom. 13:7)."[49] The seventh and last kind of veneration is the one offered by a slave to his or her master or by a needy person to his or her benefactors, as Abraham venerated the sons of Emmor, when he acquired a cave as a double inheritance.[50] John concludes that veneration offered out of fear, desire or honour is also a symbol of submission and humility. It is only God who is to be worshipped as God, and what is due to all others is given for the sake of the Lord.[51]

It is important to note that John was defending a practice that had been largely appropriated from pagan tradition. Both sides of the controversy knew that icon veneration had not existed in the Christian tradition prior to the sixth century.[52] Just as with the theory of images, however, John developed the veneration theory to secure a place for icon veneration within the Christian tradition and in this way to justify their use in Christian worship. The first Iconoclastic attack aimed at a specific veneration and marked that out as "idolatry." It claimed that any honour paid to the pictorial representations of Jesus Christ and saintly people was idolatry. Instead of replying to this charge, John preferred to widen the scope of the debate by making a wide definition of veneration and enumerating various types of veneration that had all been attested in Christian tradition. He detected a common structure shared by all types, i.e., they all reveal some kind of submission and humility caused by fear, desire, or honour. Among the various kinds of veneration so attested, some were offered directly to God, which he called "veneration of worship" (λατρεία), while some others were offered to various objects such as saintly people, holy places and people of authority derived

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[49] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 38.

[50] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* 39.

[51] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 40.

[52] Kitzinger, "Icons before Iconoclasm," 99.

from God, which he termed "veneration" (προσκύνησις). The latter type also aimed to please God, but indirectly and through a mediatory object. John claims that God would certainly be pleased at his saintly people, holy places, and objects dedicated to him being venerated on account of himself, as these help Christians to come closer to the divine. John argues that the latter type of veneration had an instrumental function in Christian salvation, and since the veneration of images also aimed at making Christians closer to God by creating awe, desire and zeal towards him they could also be considered instruments of Christian salvation. He accuses the Iconoclasts of insisting on a literal understanding of the tradition and missing the main point. This lack of understanding again resulted in a contradictory attitude towards the Christian tradition: "Either, therefore, reject all veneration or accept all of these forms with its proper reason and manner."[53]

The distinction between the absolute worship offered to God and the relative veneration offered to others on account of God points up an essential problem of the whole debate: mediation. John's argument revolves around the question whether God had worked human salvation directly or by means of a material medium. The incarnation brought a salvation that worked through matter. Accordingly, human flesh and matter became the principal media of human salvation. The position of matter had been elevated to divinity, not by nature but by adaptation because of the indwelling of the divine in it. Matter became holy and sacred, and indeed it would be the unique feature of the new dispensation that salvation would be provided through and within matter. Matter therefore could and should be venerated, not because of its proper nature but for its becoming the abode of the divine. Such matter mediates veneration of God himself. Most of the seven categories of veneration listed

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[53] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* I, 14.

by John are offered to the objects that had somehow been chosen by God to mediate salvation to Christians; they thus had a privileged status in the eye of God owing to their valuable contribution to human salvation. Thus, argued John, images could also mediate to the divine any honour paid to them by the sincere worshipper.

To conclude, against the Iconoclastic charge of idolatry, John developed a defense of images that worked at many levels. His argument started with a brilliant observation: that the Iconoclastic charge must have originated in a misconceived notion of the incarnation. The mysterious saving unity of fully human and fully divine natures in the person of Jesus without separation or confusion, as the Chalcedonian definition puts it, was a continuous reality of post-resurrection history. In John's eyes, Christian salvation should take this unity as its model while Christians themselves should strive to be deified in accordance with this model.

In a paradigm where salvation is defined as "deification" (θεώσις), images were given an essential role in mediating between the divine and human and of helping Christians concentrate and meditate upon this unique saving event. He specifically emphasizes two things in this context: first, because of the indwelling of the divine, matter has gained a new status and Christian salvation must therefore work through matter. Secondly, as a result of the incarnation, human nature matured to the point of being able to differentiate between an idol and an image. Christians no longer had to fear confusing the creation with the creator, for they saw the divine as incarnate in the person of Jesus.

John basically argued that an image could represent its prototype and that this representative quality justified a relative veneration to be paid to images. Basil the Great's famous formula that "any honour paid to the image passes to the prototype" is quoted by

John to prove that images could mediate any honour to the divine—another way of justifying their devotional use.[54] Lastly, John's classification of images that had been established in the Christian tradition aimed to secure their place therein. A similar strategy was used by him to widen the scope of veneration to prove that image-veneration is part and parcel of other types of lesser venerations that had already been attested and practiced in the Christian tradition. This argument depended on a distinction between absolute worship (λατρεία) that is offered only to God, and lesser veneration (προσκύνησις) paid to other beings on account of God, such as sacred places, things dedicated to God, etc. Since the latter group was attested by Christian tradition as providing the faithful with indirect ways of devotion, image-veneration should also be classified among them.

A time-honoured aspect of the Christian tradition, the image-prototype structure had been used by the church as a founding principle of the Christian hermeneutics of the Bible, the notion of humans as the image of God on earth, and the Trinitarian theology. Similarly, Christians venerated many places, people, and objects on account of their sacredness or authority. Rigid Iconoclastic conservatism on the issue of icons and their veneration, concluded John, was an inconsistency in their notion of tradition. They took some of the practices attested by the tradition and rejected others arbitrarily. John argued that such arbitrariness must point to a major flaw in the Iconoclastic understanding of tradition.

Tradition: Written or Unwritten

The Iconoclasts also invoked tradition in their attack against images. They claimed that the previous Christian tradition had no such practice of veneration. Moreover image-worship had

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[54] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* I, 35; II, 31; III, 48. See Basil Caesariensis, *De Spiritu Sancto,* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. VIII (New York: Continuum, 1989), p. 28.

always been detested both by the Scripture and patristic authorities as pagan idolatry. The Iconoclasts supported their argument with a *florilegium* that included several biblical and patristic testimonies against images.[55] As a result of this, compliance with tradition became one of the major battlegrounds of the debate. We must however rely on John of Damascus for the main lines of the Iconodule stand on the issue. Indeed, his defense of images through image and veneration theories involved a substantial critique of the Iconoclastic notion of tradition.

By the time the Iconoclastic debate started, appeal to tradition to prove the veracity of a doctrinal claim had long been an established practice in the Church. Since the Christological disputes of the fourth and fifth centuries, theologians had been collecting biblical and patristic quotations in *florilegia* to prove the veracity of any given doctrinal stand. When opposing parties came up with seemingly contradictory *florilegia,* the issue began to extend over everything related to the process of collecting the quotations as well as their interpretations.[56] A similar dispute over tradition was a major feature of the Iconoclastic debate, where both sides not only collected biblical and patristic quotations in this fashion, but also developed their own stands on how to evaluate and interpret them.

As mentioned before, making pictorial images of Jesus and other saintly people and offering them veneration as part of Christian devotion were historically new phenomena that had only started to spread in the latter half of the sixth century. This being the case, one should not expect to find much of biblical or patristic support that directly encouraged the making of images or their veneration. Moreover, Christian tradition is replete with dicta

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[55] Iconoclastic *florilegia* is preserved in full within the deliberations of the Second Council of Nicea where each quotation is followed by a refutation. See Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 280E-324E.

[56] For the use of *florilegia* in early Christianity see Louth, *St. John of Damascene,* 35-7.

against "graven images." The Old Testament and New Testament both express their views against idolatry at various times. Similarly, the early patristic tradition had fought against paganism.[57] Therefore, as far as the Christian tradition was concerned, veneration of pictorial images was not only a novel phenomenon, but also had a notorious reputation.[58] We may thus reasonably argue that the Iconodules were in a disadvantageous position in finding traditional support for their cause as compared to their opponents.

It was John of Damascus who developed a sophisticated stand for the Iconodule party on the issue of tradition. In doing so he faced a double challenge: the Iconoclasts charged the Iconodules with deviating from the orthodox tradition and in this way also suggested that the infallible church might have fallen into idolatry. He thus justifies his ardent apologia as follows:

I see the Church, which God built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ his Son being the head cornerstone, battered as by the surging sea overwhelming it with the wave upon wave, tossed about and troubled by the grievous assault of wicked spirits, and Christ's tunic, woven from top to bottom, rent, which the children of the ungodly have arrogantly sought to divide, and his body cut to pieces, which is the people of God and the tradition of the Church that has held sway from the beginning, I do not believe it right to keep silence and bridle my tongue...[59]

John of Damascus considered the Iconoclastic charges to be an onslaught against the church, which was the main repository of orthodox tradition. We will discuss his view on ecclesiology and church-empire relations under a separate heading; however, it would suffice here to observe that, contrary to his Iconoclastic rivals, he emphatically denies the emperor

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[57] For a detailed treatment of the issue see Moshe Barasch, *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1992), 95-157.

[58] See Kitzinger, "Icons before Iconoclasm," 95: "In any case, however, there can be no doubt that in the second half of the sixth century the cult of images was vastly increased and intensified, primarily in the East, and that it maintained this new strength throughout the seventh century and, indeed, until the outbreak of Iconoclasm."

[59] John of Damascus, *On the Holy Icons*, I, 1.

any authority to speak about tradition. According to him, the church *apart from the emperor* is the only legitimate repository of the orthodox tradition, which is guided by the Holy Spirit.

The Iconoclasts brought forward many biblical and patristic witnesses against idolatry. Their patristic quotations belonged to earlier times as compared to those of the Iconodules whose witnesses mostly came from the sixth and seventh centuries when image-veneration had already begun to spread among Christians.[60] In order to disprove his opponents' claims of veracity on the grounds of tradition, John developed a critique of the Iconoclastic use of the latter.

John criticized the Iconoclasts for their blind literalism, which prevented them from grasping certain patterns and functioning paradigms that had been giving shape to the entire Christian tradition. The theory of images, for example, involved a critique of a contradictory attitude. The Iconoclasts, argued John, had approved all other applications of the image-prototype paradigm in shaping crucial principles of the tradition such as the Trinitarian theology, Christian hermeneutics of the Bible, and the like. However, when it came to images, their conservative literalism prevented them from seeing that tradition develops according to certain principles and paradigms to accommodate the salvific needs of Christians through different ages. Thus the Christian tradition, according to John, could well accommodate new means such as images to facilitate Christians' devotional and salvific requirements. John takes a progressive view of tradition and argues that as long as they are in compliance with the established principles of the Christian tradition, new elements can always be accommodated. The charge of idolatry on the grounds of the biblical prohibition against making images was an attitude similar to that of the Judaizing Christians who

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[60] For a survey of the chief patristic witnesses used by the Iconodules see Ambrosios Giakalis, *Images of the Divine: the Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 34 ff.

followed a blind literalism in understanding the life and death of Jesus. He thus replies his

rivals in the words of Paul:

But they say, God said through Moses the lawgiver, "You shall venerate the Lord your God and him alone shall you worship," and "you shall not make any likeness, of anything in heaven or on the earth." Brothers, those who do not know the Scriptures truly err, for as they do not know that "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life [2 Cor. 3:6]," they do not interpret the spirit hidden beneath the letter.[61]

Charging Christians with idolatry on the grounds of Mosaic Law, therefore, was an

unacceptable anachronism that had potentially Judaizing tendencies. That is to say, the

Iconoclasts put themselves in the position of preferring the old-fashioned and abrogated

Mosaic Law and, by doing so, seem to dismiss the salvific benefits of grace:

If, because of the law, you prohibit images, watch that you keep the Sabbath and are circumcised; for these the law unyieldingly commands. But know that if you keep the law, "Christ is no use to you; you who would be justified by the law, have fallen from grace." Israel of old did not see God, "but we, with unveiled face, behold the glory of God [2 Cor. 3:18]."[62]

Against the strict traditionalism of the Iconoclasts, which emphasized written testimony,

John argued that from the beginning, the Christian tradition had always used oral and written

traditions, giving them equal prominence. He argued that images had been attested by

unwritten tradition, and as such, their veracity did not need the additional support of written

tradition. He quotes Basil the Great and Paul for the importance of oral tradition and gives

several examples of time-honoured customs that had been established by oral tradition:

Not only has the ordinance of the Church been handed down in writings, but also in unwritten traditions...What is the origin of the threefold [immersion in] baptism? Whence praying facing the East? Whence the tradition of mysteries? Therefore the divine apostles says, "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which

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[61] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, I, 5.

[62] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, I, 16.

you were thought by us, either by word of mouth or by our letters." Since many such things have been handed down in unwritten form in the Church and preserved up to now, why do you split hairs over images?[63]

The Iconoclasts were then criticized once again for their contradiction: while they accepted many customs in Christian tradition that had been established on the basis of oral tradition, when it came to images, they insisted on the support of written testimonies.

John attached long *florilegia* at the end of his treatises together with comments following each quotation. Generally speaking, the comments mirror the arguments in the main body of his texts. A detailed analysis of John's *florilegia* is not necessary here.[64] However, some key examples require elaboration. First of all, as compared to the Iconoclasts' *florilegia,* John's quotations usually date to between the 5th and 7th centuries. Pseudo-Dionysius is quoted several times to the effect that images of the divine are media that facilitate human contemplation and comprehension of the divine. The quoted passages and their comments suggest that, through the contemplation of sensible images, one can ascend to the divine.[65] John quotes Basil the Great's famous passage which reads:

Because the image of the emperor is called the emperor, and yet there are not two emperors, for neither is the power divided nor the glory shared. For as the principle and authority that rules over us is one, so also is the praise that we offer one and not many, because the honour offered to the image passes to the archetype. What the image is by imitation here below, there the Son is by nature. And just as with works of art the likeness is in accordance with the form, so with the divine and incomposite nature the union is in communion of the divinity.[66]

John uses this formula, which had originally been used to explain the Trinitarian theology, to argue that the honour paid to images of Christ passes to Christ himself. The formula was

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[63] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* I, 23.

[64] For a detailed analysis of John's quotations see Louth, *St. John Damascene,* 209-13.

[65] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* I, 28-33.

[66] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* III, 48, the quoted passage, Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit,* 18.45.15-23 (ed. Pruche, 406).

often used by later Iconodules as a primary patristic support for the claim that any honour paid to an image of Christ passes on to its prototype.[67] John also quotes Basil's homilies in praise of martyrs, where he explains the importance of pictorial representations of the noble deeds of the martyrs as an inspiration for Christians wanting to follow in their footsteps. John uses them to support his view that pictures of Jesus and saints were useful in encouraging Christians to acquire their virtues.[68]

One of the most effective supports for John's arguments comes from Leontios, bishop of Neapolis in Cyprus (7th century). In his "Treatise against the Jews on the veneration of the Cross of Christ and the images of the saints, and on the relics of the saints",[69] Leontius defends the veneration of the wooden cross and icons of the saints against Jews, using most of the arguments that had also been used by John—the difference between an icon and idol, examples from the Old Testament of veneration of people and places, the dignity of matter, and the differentiation between veneration and worship.[70]

In conclusion, John's *florilegia* mostly consisted of biblical and patristic quotations that could directly or indirectly support his claims. Basil's passage is taken out of its context to claim that veneration offered an image passes on to its prototype. Pseudo-Dionysius (late 5th, early 6th century) was quoted in further support of the idea that an image provides access

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[67] For instance, see Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons,* trans. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1981), II, 28.

[68] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* I, 37-47.

[69] The treatise against the Jews is preserved only in fragments in iconodule florilegia such as John's. For further information of the content see Louth, *St. John Damascene,* 210-11, Giakalis, *Images of the Divine: the Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 39.

[70] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* I, 54-57. For a detailed elaboration of Leontius's defense of images see Norman H. Baynes, "The Icons before Iconoclasm," in his *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London: Althon Press, 1955), 230-39.

to what it images.[71] The most relevant material is quoted from Leontius, bishop of Neopolis in Cyprus (7th cent.) and Stephen of Bozra (7th-8th cent.). Both wrote treatises against the Jews in which they argued for the veneration of images with arguments similar to those of John.[72] Perhaps in order to set off the advantageous position of his rivals in finding direct biblical and patristic support for their Iconoclastic stand, John argued that the authority of unwritten tradition was equally as important as the written tradition, suggesting that traditional support for images should be sought in the unwritten traditions of the church. The Old Testament strictures against image-making, argues John, was annulled in the New Dispensation. One significant patristic quotation of the Iconoclasts' from Epiphanius against images is moreover rejected on the grounds of spuriousness by John.[73] The main argument of John, however, was to criticize his opponents for their literalism in interpreting tradition according to the letter but to the detriment of spirit.

Political Theology and Church-Empire Relations

In order to reconstruct the Iconodule political theology and principles of church-empire relations, one should start with an awareness of the fact that the available iconodule sources do not contain any clear statements about the political aspect of the debate so that most of the time we have to work through indirect evidence. Although John of Damascus is the most explicit Iconodule theologian when it comes to stating his views on imperial involvement in the debate, he does not give any clear explanations of the issues mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, i.e., the relationship between the political and theological aspects of the

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[71] Louth, *St. John Damascene*, 210.

[72] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, III, 72-73.

[73] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, I, 25.

controversy; how the Iconodules differed from their opponents in defining church-empire relations; and how their doctrines related to the political realities of their time. However, as mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, the treatises exhibit clear indications that the doctrinal and political aspects of the debate are correlated under an over-arching theological paradigm.

As was also mentioned earlier, John spent all his life outside the Byzantine Empire under Islamic Umayyad rule; he worked for the caliph as a high ranking civil servant in Damascus, and later in his life retired to a monastery near Jerusalem where he spent the rest of his life. As an outsider, John was not obliged to declare any political loyalty to the Christian emperor and perhaps that is why he could criticize Leo III in such harsh words as to deny him any authority to interfere in Church matters.[74]

Moreover, in contrast to the circumstances of the fourth century, when Eusebius of Caesarea preached his gospel of political and religious universality under one Christian empire, in John's time political universality under Christian rule was out of the question. Therefore, John's soteriology assumed only one universal institution to which the mission of salvation was entrusted: *ecclesia*. John states the gist of his ecclesiology in these words: "...holding firm in thought to the preservation of the ordinances of the Church, through which salvation has come to us, as a kind of keel of foundation..."[75] According to John, the church was the only divinely guided institution responsible for the salvation of Christians on a universal scale. This was a striking contrast to the Iconoclasts' attitude, according to which

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[74] For the life and times of John see Louth, *St. John Damascene,* 3-14.

[75] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, I, 2.

the *ecclesia* and *imperium* were twin institutions equally responsible for the salvation of Christians. They believed that both were divinely guided.[76]

We likewise mentioned in the third chapter that the Iconoclastic movement was the result of a collective self-evaluation within a paradigm of Byzantine theodicy. According to the Iconoclastic rulers and churchmen, the political decline of the empire was related to God's anger caused by the collective sin of idolatry as well as the new worldview centered on images that alienated Christians of Byzantine society from social and political involvement. Scholars have pointed out that such a paradigm of direct collective relation between the Byzantine society as the "new Israel" and God was a well-established notion in Byzantine tradition.[77] John, however, did not reveal any interest in the Christian commonwealth. He never dealt with the problems of political decline of the "new Israel" either. As a theologian and a monk from outside the Christian empire, his main concern seemed to be defending the infallibility of the church against the charges of idolatry:

> ...For it seems to me a calamity, that the Church, adorned with such privileges and arrayed with traditions received from above by the most godly men, should return to the poor elements, afraid where no fear was, and, as if it did not know the true God, be suspicious of the snare of idolatry and therefore decline in the smallest degree from perfection, thus bearing a disfiguring mark in the midst of a face exceeding fair, thus harming the whole by the slightest injury to its beauty...[78]

John believed that salvation was a mission entrusted to the *ecclesia* to the exclusion of the *imperium*. He believed that the church was found by God and guided by the Holy Spirit and therefore was infallible. Salvation was entrusted to her care to the exclusion of the political

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[76] For Iconoclastic emphasis on the salvific roles of the *imperium* see chapter VI, heading "Iconoclastic Theological First Principles."

[77] For example see John A. McGuckin, "The Theology of Images and the Legitimation of Power in Eight Century Byzantium," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37 (1993), 42.

[78] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, I, 2.

establishment. His treatises unequivocally argue for a separation of duties between the

church and empire. This is not to say that John was anti-establishment; on the contrary, he

clearly acknowledged the divine origin of political order:

For there are few who would utterly neglect the royal constitutions established from above, who know that the
king reigns upon earth from above, and as such the laws of kings hold sway. [79]

According to him, political order and secular well-being are the duty and responsibility of

emperors, for which reason Christians owe their civic loyalties to them. However, when it

comes to religious matters such as images, it is the church that is responsible. Political

involvement in such an issue, argued John, is an unacceptable piracy:

Political good order is the concern of emperors, the ecclesiastical constitution that of pastors and teachers. This
is piratical attack brothers…We submit to you, O Emperor, in the matters of this life, taxes, revenues,
commercial dues, in which our concerns are entrusted to you. For the ecclesiastical constitution we have pastors
who speak to us the word and represent the ecclesiastical ordinance. We do not remove the ancient boundaries,
set in place by our fathers, but we hold fast to the traditions, as we have received them. For if we begin to
remove even a tiny part of the structure of the Church, in a short time the whole edifice will be destroyed.[80]

Therefore, it would be wrong to assume that John defended an anti-political stand during the

controversy; but he might be defined as a-political, a position which was considered by his

opponents as potentially destructive to the foundation of the Christian commonwealth.

It is important to note that John was a monk in order to contextualize better his stand

on soteriology. That all of the three major Iconodule theologians were monks explains in

great part why the Iconoclasts were right to identify icon-veneration and the related

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[79] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* I, 1.

[80] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* II, 12.

worldview with a monastic perspective.[81] John's soteriology represented the idealization of monastic principles. Both the leading concepts, such as deification, indwelling of the spirit, and ascension of the soul to higher realities, and John's ideological ancestors such as Pseudo-Dionysius, Basil and the like, support our contention that during the Iconoclastic debate the monastic (and Iconodule) worldview came to dominate the orthodox church and became the official ideology. We previously defined this worldview as otherworldly, spiritual, mystical and at the same time apolitical.[82]

Iconoclastic concerns about negligence of the social and political regulations of Christianity might be better understood in this context. The worldview that the Iconodules proposed was a-political, and proposed seclusion of Christians from the social and political realms of the Byzantine society for the sake of a soteriology that seemed to focus on the philosophical and mystical problems of alienation between the transcendent and the immanent, or the divine and the human. John separated secular issues from spiritual concerns and this meant secularization of worldly life for Christians. There should be no significance, from the point of view of salvation, in one's involvement with politics, or social life. Salvation was therefore to be seen as an individual concern severed from social and political implications; the wider prospect of salvation that included all aspects of individual and social life was challenged and indirectly rejected.[83]

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[81] Cyril Mango, "Historical Introduction," in *Iconoclasm: Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies,* Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin, eds. (Birmingham: Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1977), 4.

[82] For a detailed exposition of the Iconodule worldview, see chapter III, heading "*Politeuma*" versus "*Iconomachy*".

[83] As the first civil law-code, the *Ecloga* of Leo III was written to apply Christian principles on the social and political spheres of Byzantine society. The existence of such an initiative on the part of emperors witnesses to the wide-spread of such a worldview. Leo III, *A Manual of Roman Law: The Ecloga: Published by the Emperors Leo III and Constantine V of Isauria,* translated with an introduction by E. H. Freshfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926).

We argued in the previous chapter that the Iconoclastic emperors, Leo III and Constantine V, reclaimed the salvific functions and authority for the empire that had been weakened due to the catastrophic circumstances of the seventh century. On the basis of the Eusebian "Imperial Theology", they claimed that they were responsible for the material and spiritual well-being of their citizens. John's treatises, by contrast, defy the imperial claims on spiritual authority. They give the impression that the debate—theological notwithstanding— took place between the emperors, who unjustifiably interfered with ecclesiastical matters, and the Iconodule churchmen. Those churchmen who were the real authors of the Iconoclastic claims seem to have been deliberately bypassed. This deliberate strategy of John, which was more or less followed by the later Iconodules who also considered Iconoclasm an imperial heresy, was taken over by modern scholars who portrayed the debate as occurring between politically ambitious Iconoclastic rulers, bent on subduing the church, and the Iconodule churchmen who defended the independence of their institution.[84] What we argue here is that such readings overlook the simple historical fact that both parties to the debate consisted of churchmen and their imperial associates. This being the case, the Iconoclastic debate cannot be situated simply between church and empire as such. Rather, the debate took place between two factions within the church and their imperial associates, each side arguing from the standpoint of a distinctive soteriology.

The theological underpinnings of the Iconoclastic party derived their origin from Eusebian "Imperial Theology" and assumed a peculiar soteriology that gave a privileged position to the *imperium* within the *ecclesia*. The Iconodule party, alternatively, derived its theological paradigm from a soteriology that heavily stressed the continuing validity of the

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[84] For the political readings of the controversy, see Introduction, footnote 8.

incarnation. We argue that the Iconoclastic and Iconodule soteriologies and political

theologies both originated in their respective Christologies. On the one hand, the

Christological outlook underlined by the Eusebian imperial theology and the Iconoclasts of

the 8th and 9th centuries emphasized the transcendent divinity of Christ. In this outlook, the

divinity of Christ, the *Logos* is the principle of a cosmic order. Iconoclastic Christology thus

supports the role of the Christian empire as the *mimesis* of the Heavenly order, and of the

Emperor who is seen as the visible representative of the divine logos according to the

Eusebian "Imperial theology."

As a result of such Christology, Iconoclasts believed that salvation is attained by

establishing and maintaining a Christian commonwealth, a *mimesis* of the heavenly kingdom,

where Christians achieve material and spiritual salvation. Therefore, such a Christology and

soteriology support the political theology of Eusebius, where the empire as the *mimesis* of the

heavenly order and the emperor as the visible representative of the divine Logos are given an

active share in Christian salvation. This interconnection between the Iconoclastic

Christology, soteriology, and political theology can be seen in Eusebius's Tricennial

Orations,[85] in the preamble of Leo III's *Ecloga*,[86] as well as in the preamble of the definition

of the Iconoclastic Council of Hiereia (754).[87]

Iconodule Christology, on the other hand, emphasized the incarnation of the Word,

shifting the focus to the Logos as hidden the suffering servant. Soteriological implication of

the Iconodule Christology is the possibility of salvation through the union of the divinity and

humanity. Similarly, John's emphasis on the continuing validity of the incarnation

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[85] For a detailed exposition of the orations see Chapter I, heading "Imperial Theology and Its Implications."

[86] The *Ecloga* is analyzed in Chapter IV, under the heading, "Documents of the first Iconoclastic doctrines: Iambic Poems and the *Ecloga*."

[87] This document is analyzed in Chapter VI, "Iconoclastic First Principles."

establishes the unity of human and the divine as the main salvific reality of post-resurrection history. Iconodule salvation thus defined as deification, one's participation in the incarnate body of Christ, and one's embodiment of Christ's presence in his or her self. Matter is given a central role in Iconodule soteriology as the abode of the divine.[88]

The themes of the central role of matter (and images) in salvation, of deification, the embodiment of Christ's presence in one's self as the ultimate prospect of salvation, as elaborated by John of Damascus and other Iconodules, represented a soteriology that had been shaped by a monastic interpretation of Chalcedonian Christology. As a natural corollary of such outlook, the Iconodules assigned the empire as body politic, and the emperor no active share in the work of salvation. The Iconodules acknowledged the divine origin of political order as provider of material well-being, but they utterly denied the divine role of the emperors in Christian salvation. Moreover, salvation as deification underlined the work of salvation as a mystical individualised prospect and, by implication, excluded ordinary social and political life from the perspective of salvation, and tended to define them as profane, secular matters.

Summary

We assume that in shaping his outstanding defence of images, John took all the implications of the Iconoclastic critique elaborated in the fourth chapter into consideration. In replying to the Iconoclastic challenges, John pinpoints one cardinal fact, namely that everything related to the debate revolves around the diverging interpretations of the incarnation. This observation leads the theologian to elaborate on the meaning of the incarnation for

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[88] See John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* I, 16: "Therefore I reverence the rest of matter and hold in respect that through which my salvation came, because it is filled with divine energy and grace."

Christians, and how the Iconoclastic interpretation of the event misled them into denial of images and a flawed soteriology.

The Christological aspect of John's critique relates to the Iconoclastic Christology. The latter emphasized the concept of a *logos* who came down and became incarnate in a human body to teach humanity about God and eventually to establish a universal order, as elaborated in the Eusebian "Imperial Theology." This attitude implied a neglect of the human side of the incarnation on the part of the Iconoclasts. Actually, the main reason for the Iconoclastic negligence of suffering humanity was the supposition that the humanity of Christ had been subsumed by the divinity after the ascension. As a logical consequence of this attitude, the Iconoclastic soteriology could not give any significant role to "suffering humanity" in post-resurrection history. John pointed out the imbalanced Christology of his rivals and emphasized that the incarnate state of Christ remained intact after the ascension; he thus made the continuing reality of the incarnation the main salvific reality of post-resurrection history. He argued that the Iconoclasts overlooked the human, material aspect of the salvation provided by the incarnation, thus basing themselves on a soteriology that stressed a universal order comprised of both the church and empire as the main vehicle of salvation.

John claimed that the Iconoclastic degradation of icons as being "mere matter" was closely linked to their one-sided Christology that overlooked "suffering humanity" and the essential role given to matter in the process of salvation as deification. The core of John's defence of images thus relates to the essential role of matter in the incarnation. The human body of Christ was elevated to become the "abode of the divine." Similarly, images were venerated for the sake of the "indwelling of the spirit" in them.

Image and veneration theories aim to secure a place for images in Christian tradition. The "identity of likeness" between an image and its prototype gives it a representative quality. This kind of relationship between an image and its prototype, argued John, had been widely used in Christian tradition for explaining the relations among the persons of the Trinity, in Christian hermeneutics of the Bible for explaining the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament, and in various other crucial aspects of Christian tradition. Images, similarly, represent Christ, Mary, and other saintly people and as such they deserve a relative veneration (προσκύνησις), which he distinguishes from veneration of worship (λατρεία), offered only to God. As against the Iconoclastic insistence on written patristic support, John argued that unwritten testimonies were similarly important in Christian tradition and that images were supported by the unwritten tradition of the church.

John defines salvation in terms of one's participation in the continuing validity of the incarnation. Through prayer, meditation, and concentration on the suffering of Jesus, a Christian gradually participates in the redemptive unity of the divine and human and becomes deified. Images play a substantial role in this process of deification by facilitating concentration on and elevation to higher spiritual states. What John proposes is a spiritual, mystical, and individual salvation that implies a transcending of the social and political aspects of the Christian life from the perspective of salvation. We argue that this implied negligence of the social and the political posed a challenge to official (i.e. Eusebian) religio-political ideology that had hitherto provided an essential role to the body politic in the Christian definition of salvation.

The political implications of John's soteriology, then, relate to his central contention concerning the continuing validity of the incarnation. He argued that the humanity of the

incarnate Christ remained intact after the ascension and continues to save humanity together with his church. Emperors had no active share in a redemptive process in which Christ and his church actively participate. John argued that the political order is divinely established to take care of the material and secular needs of the Christians such as taxes, revenues, and the safety of its citizens. Christ did not commission emperors to act as his mediators and to continue his redemptive work. Similarly, John's ecclesiology denies the *imperium* any authority over church tradition. Emperors thus had no authority to speak on matters of tradition. This being the case, John sternly criticizes the Iconoclastic emperors' involvement in the issue of images, an attitude he designates as "piracy."[89] The salvific work in post-resurrection history, argues John, is under the direct control and guidance of the incarnate Christ, who accomplishes Christians' salvation together with his *ecclesia*.

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[89] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* II, 12.

CHAPTER SIX

LATER ICONOCLASTIC DOCTRINES (741-787 and 814-843)

The transformation of the center of the debate from charges of idolatry to arguments over

Christology marks the beginning of the second phase of Iconoclastic doctrine. As far as

we are concerned, the aforementioned shift of focus was brought about by John of

Damascus, who situated the problem on Christological grounds for the first time, and

made a substantial counter argument that the Iconoclasts had failed to understand the full

implications of the incarnation.[1] This counter challenge was replied to by the Iconoclastic

Council of 754, the definition of which depended mainly on the views of Constantine V,

who was a theologian, and other Iconoclastic bishops. Thus, John's sophisticated

Christological argument prompted the Iconoclasts to develop their own Christological

argument as well as a theory of images. Christology and the theory of images would

henceforth occupy pride of place during this phase of the Iconoclastic debate. The period

also witnessed the refinement of both the Iconoclastic and Iconodule doctrines and their

differences in terms of concepts of salvation history, incarnation, Old and New Testament

dispensations and Scriptural interpretation, as well as the concept of imperial authority.

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[1] See John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images,* translation and introduction by Andrew Louth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), I, 4: "I do not venerate the creation instead of the creator, but I venerate the Creator, created for my sake, who came down to his creation without being lowered of weakened, that he might glorify my nature and bring about communion with the divine nature."

As discussed above, the first Iconoclasts did not consider icons to be a matter of Christology. That they did not situate the problem along Christological lines until the Iconodules developed their own Christological argument can be taken as proof of this contention. According to the early Iconoclasts, veneration of icons was a practice not supported by tradition, an innovation of pagan origin. They also opposed the worldview and the concept of salvation represented by images. Soteriology was the main battleground during the first Iconoclastic onslaught, with Iconoclasts arguing that no divinity can be attached to images and that, as lifeless matter, they cannot fulfill any salvific role.

Iconoclastic Theological First Principles

As document of this period in the debate we have at our disposal the definition—*horos*—of the Iconoclastic Council of Hiereia (modern Fenerbahçe, a district of Istanbul) of 754 and the attached Iconoclastic patristic testimonies, the *florilegia* of which has came down to us within the minutes of the sixth session of the Second Council of Nicea (modern Iznik) of 787. The council preserved the Iconoclastic *horos* in its entirety, along with a refutation of each of its main points.[2] The Iconoclastic *horos* of 754 is a document of impeccable credentials for our argument: first, it is the only substantial Iconoclastic document at our disposal; and second, it gives us a full recital of the Iconoclastic

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[2] We have a full translation of the sixth session of the Second Council of Nicea in Daniel J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-Century Iconoclasm: An annotated translation of the Sixth Session of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicea, 787), containing the Definition of the Council of Constantinople (754) and its refutation and the Definition of the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 204A-364E. In addition, Stephen Gero gives a full translation of the *horos* of the Council of Hiereia in *Byzantine Iconoclasm During the Reign of Constantine V: With Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources* (Louvin: Secrétariat Du Corpus, 1977), 68-94. Unless otherwise indicated we will refer to the former.

doctrine. The preamble to the *horos* gives us a bird's-eye view of the principles of the Iconoclastic doctrine and as such it deserves our perusal.[3]

First of all, the text is marked by theocentrism in that it emphasizes God the Father as the active agent of salvation history: He is the creator and cause of all beings; he created an order (*cosmos*) in which every being is responsible for the maintenance of its appointed position. We have observed a similar theocentrism in reading the preamble of the *Ecloga* above. It was God the Father who acted against the rebellion of Lucifer to save humanity from idolatry, first by sending the Law and Prophets and then by sending His own Son to complete the salvific mission. After Christ, He commissioned first his church and later on the emperors to guide the Christian flock to the right path. Compared with the Christocentrism of the Iconodules, this marked theocentrism proves to be an important characteristic distinctive of Iconoclastic doctrine.[4]

Second, the *horos* gives us the parameters of Iconoclastic salvation history. It is a cosmological history according to which God created existence *ex nihilo* to establish an order in which human beings were "to conduct themselves in a proper and orderly manner."[5] Next, Lucifer rebelled against his Creator and darkness resulted. Lucifer fell from the light-giving divine order and then deceived human beings into worshipping the created instead of the Creator.[6] God then sent the Law and the Prophets to save humanity and to return them to "the previous kingship"; upon the failure of the first attempt at restoration, God sent his own Son and Word. The Word was incarnated in the human

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[3] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 208D-229E.

[4] The introduction to the Iconodule *horos* of 787 begins with Christ; see Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 373E ff.

[5] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 212B.

[6] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 212E-213A.

Jesus, who suffered in the flesh, and accomplished his duty of salvation by teaching humanity the correct way of worshipping God and by freeing human beings from the error of worshipping idols. Thereafter, Christ ascended into heaven and was assumed by divinity.[7] Before this, however, Christ had first commissioned his disciples to guide Christians and preserve his teachings; later on He also commissioned the emperors for the same purpose, and guided them, like his disciples, through the Holy Spirit.[8] Lucifer however again deceived the Christians by making them worship idols instead of God, forcing the emperor to take action against this error with the support of conciliar authority.[9]

This brief salvation history has a number of features some of which are common with those of the *Ecloga*. First, God the Father is the author of the salvation economy as well as creator and ruler of the heavenly order. Second, the incarnation is a cardinal point in both; its main purpose was to redeem humanity from the alienation that resulted from the fall and to teach them the correct ways of worshipping God. It was a once and for all event and a unique happening, and indeed, the text of the *horos* emphasizes that Christ has fulfilled his salvific dispensation. Third, the law and the prophets and the incarnation are not categorically different in terms of their purposes: they both serve to save humanity from worshipping idols and to restore it to its pristine position in the heavenly order. Similarly, salvation history before the incarnation and after the incarnation is all the same; the Iconoclasts consider the Old Testament and the New Testament dispensations to form a perfect continuity. Fourth, the preamble is worded in accordance

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[7] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 213D-213E, 216C, 217A.

[8] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 217A-217B.

[9] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 225D.

with the principles of the "Imperial Theology", for it establishes the church and the empire as the divinely appointed agents of salvation in post-resurrection history. Guidance and protection of the Christian people is entrusted to the church, the heir of the apostles, and to the emperors as the heads of the political establishment.

As for icons, the preamble of the *horos* of 754 considers them to be of diabolical origin, devices designed by the evil one to distract Christians from the correct worship of God; they are thus idols. The effect of these "likenesses with colors" was to lower the human mind from the high worship proper to God down to the base and material worship of creatures...."[10]

According to the preamble, icons are situated in the post-resurrection period in salvation history: they function as an extension of the earlier deceptive instruments of Lucifer, who now presents them in a new format. Since the mission of Christ was fulfilled with the ascension, the issue is not related to the incarnation. The *horos* defines the incarnation as a completed process, and by doing so, flatly rejects any justifiable connection between icons and the incarnation.

The preamble of the *Horos* of 754 places a marked emphasis on the divine origin of the ecclesiastical and imperial authorities and their God-given responsibilities of protecting and guiding Christian society. In post-resurrection history, these authorities discharge the duties that Christ commissioned them to do:

Afterwards He ascended into heaven in that which He had assumed, having left behind his holy disciples and Apostles as teachers of his redemptive faith. They, having beautified our Church as his bride with various brilliant doctrines of piety, raised her to be beautiful and splendid, surrounded by and decorated

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[10] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 229E.

with golden tassels. It is this beauty of hers that our renowned Fathers and teachers, and the six holy and Ecumenical Councils, have received and preserved undiminished.[11]

The church, states the text, has successfully fulfilled her duty by teaching the correct redemptive faith and preserving the sacred tradition as these are recorded in the definitions of the six holy and ecumenical councils. However, the same Lucifer introduced idolatry in the name of Christianity "in order to subdue the human race to his power."[12] This part of the passage reveals a characteristic of Iconoclastic thinking: it sees a perfect continuity in salvation history, and assumes that Lucifer can still deceive Christians in post-resurrection history. On the other hand, the Iconodules replied to this notion with their claim of the infallibility of the church after the incarnation.[13] This marks a substantial division in the Iconoclastic and Iconodule ecclesiologies. In view of this, Jesus commissioned the emperors, just as he had commissioned the apostles before, to protect and teach the Christian doctrines:

For this reason, therefore, Jesus, the author and agent of our salvation, as in the past he had sent forth his most wise disciples and Apostles with the power of the most holy Spirit in order to eliminate completely all such things, so also now He raised his devotees, our faithful kings - the ones comparable to the Apostles, who have become wise by the power of the same Spirit - in order to equip and teach us, as well as to abolish the demonic fortifications which resist the knowledge of God, and to refute diabolic cunning and error.... Moved by the divine zeal which was in them, and not tolerating the ravaging of the church of the faithful by the deception of the demons,...they called together the entire sacerdotal congregation of the bishops who love God, in order that, after they gathered together into a council, and after they searched the Scriptures...motivated by God this [council] may pronounce that which seemed good to it. They did so because they knew what is written in [the book of] the Prophets: For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at their mouth: for they are the messengers of the Lord Almighty.[14]

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[11] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 217A-217B.

[12] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 221D.

[13] That Christians are protected from idolatry by the New Testament dispensation is one of the main claims of John of Damascus; see *On the Divine Images,* I, 8.

[14] Cf. Mal. 2:7; the passages: Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 225D, 229A, 229E.

This passage sets out with parameters of the traditional political theology of the Byzantine Commonwealth, as they had been defined in the Eusebian "Imperial Theology." Christ entrusted Christian society to the care of the church and the empire. He, as the agent of salvation, commissioned the apostles, and later on, the emperors, to teach, protect and preserve the Christian tradition. As for the church, the emphasis was on her responsibility for teaching and preserving the true Christian doctrine, which she fulfilled by convening ecumenical councils to determine and promulgate the doctrine. As for the emperors, their function lay in the power of execution and political action in order to protect and implement those religious doctrines. As they were both inspired by the Holy Spirit, the role of teaching seems to be shared by the priesthood and the emperor. The borderline separating these territories seems rather blurred.[15] However, the Iconoclastic emperor was careful enough not to trespass his limits; indeed, upon noticing wrongdoing on the part of his Christian subjects, he consulted the expertise of the priests by convening a council. As the quoted verse states, in doctrinal matters it was the priests who were "the messengers of the Lord Almighty." The passage thus underlines the concept of the Christian commonwealth: it was the religio-political establishment, both *sacerdotium* and *imperium,* which was responsible for the salvation of the Christian society. Their unity and cooperation constituted the single most important principle of this establishment; yet the text emphasizes a subtle division of tasks: when necessary, the emperors were to convene the conciliar authority to discuss and search for a doctrinal solution, and, accordingly, impose a binding decision on Christians. The emperors, then, implemented the decisions of the councils in the form of legislation and took care of their

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[15] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 217A-217B.

execution. On the whole, the text bestows on the political establishment and the emperor a divine role in Christian salvation.

Iconoclastic Christology and Concept of Image

After the introduction comes the *horos* of the council. It starts with a detailed recital of the decisions of the first six ecumenical councils,[16] which are diligently approved by the entire council, who also openly adhered to the Orthodox Chalcedonian definition:

These six holy and Ecumenical Councils, therefore, having made a pious and pleasing to God, exposition of the doctrines of the immaculate faith of us Christians - instructed by the gospels which are delivered by God - have handed down that in the one Christ, who is our Lord and God, there is one hypostasis in two natures, wills, and energies. They have also taught that both the miracles and sufferings have been of the one and the same [Christ.][17]

The commitment of the Iconoclastic bishops to adhere to the doctrines of the previous councils does not give the impression of mere formality; on the contrary, the *horos* reveals a dedicated adherence to the principles of dyophysite Orthodoxy. The overt meaning of the text tells us that the Iconoclastic reaction against the images of Christ and the saints was based on their own interpretation of the Chalcedonian Christology:

Having looked into these matters with great diligence and deliberation, under the inspiration of the all-holy Spirit, we have also found that the unlawful art of the painters constitutes a blasphemy against this very fundamental doctrine of our salvation, that is, against the dispensation in Christ, and that it subverts these very holy and Ecumenical six councils, convened by God,...while it reinstates Nestorius, who divide the one Son and Word of God, Who for us became man, into a duality of sons.... Not only he, however, but also Arius and Dioscorus, and Eutyches and Severus, who, with regard to the two natures of the one Christ, teach that these were confused and mixed.[18]

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[16] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 232E, 233C, 233D, 236A, 236D, 237D.

[17] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 237E.

[18] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 240C, 241E, 244D.

The Iconoclastic Christological challenge was based on the claim that making an image of Christ and naming it "Christ" would either imply separating divinity and humanity in the incarnate Christ and thus adding a fourth person to the Trinity, (which would amount to Nestorianism) or confusing the two natures, (which would mean Monophysitism). The so-called "Christological dilemma" runs as follows: An image is made and called "Christ," a name which designates the unique unity of divine and human during the incarnation. At the time of the incarnation the divinity of Christ united with the man Jesus, who consisted of a body and a soul. Since the divinity is united with both the flesh and the soul of Jesus, the three hypostases always existed in unity, and, consequently, neither the flesh nor the soul of Jesus had an existence without divinity. On the other hand, the divine is uncircumscribable. Only the human Jesus is circumscribable and it never existed separately from divine. Therefore, to claim that one can depict "Christ" would mean that either the divinity is circumscribable, which is open blasphemy against God, and confused with the flesh, which is Monophysite heresy, or—if the painter says that it was only the humanity of Christ that he is depicting—separation of the flesh from divinity, which amounts to adding another person to divinity, i.e., Nestorian heresy.[19]

It appears plausible that the Iconoclasts clearly hold their ground within the legitimate boundaries of Chalcedonian Christology. They also revealed a significant genius in presenting themselves as the defenders of dyophysite Christology against the dangers of Monophysite and Nestorian deviations through their reaction against icons. The charge was that the Iconodule interpretation of Chalcedonian Christology would necessarily lead one either to Monophysitism or Nestorianism.

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[19] Paraphrased from Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 248E, 253A, 252B, 256B, 257A-B, 260A-B.

The Christological dilemma presupposes an essential relation between the image and its prototype. The argument implies that in order for an icon to be a true representation of Christ, it has to be of the same substance—that is to say, *homoousios*—with its prototype. It is this commonality of substances which makes an image a true representative of its prototype. It is obvious that the Iconoclast theologians use here the concept of image as it was expressed in the Trinitarian doctrine of the fourth century as the Nicene Creed of 325 defined the Son as "homoousios" with his Father.[20] As long as the concept of the image was defined in this essentialist approach, the Iconoclastic "Christological dilemma" was hard to refute. The image of Christ consisted only of "lifeless matter" and no sacred component; no divinity was attached to it. For this reason, Patriarch Nicephorus would try to establish a different definition of the relationship between the icon and its prototype, a new theory of image which will be dealt with in the next chapter.[21]

To those who desired a true icon of Christ, the Iconoclastic *horos* offers an alternative, one which is truly sacred: the Eucharist. According to the text, Jesus Christ intentionally avoided bestowing on his followers his pictorial image so that they would not fall into idolatry again. Instead, he gave bread and wine as the true image of his incarnate body. The Eucharist thus is the only real image of Christ; it is the only symbol that can represent the incarnate body, humanity and divinity. When the priest offers the bread and wine, they receive sanctity by the Holy Spirit from above through this priestly prayer of consecration; and in this way, the bread and wine of the Eucharist become true

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[20] For the Nicene Creed see, J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1950), 211-16.

[21] See Charles Barber, "The Body within the Frame: A Use of Word and Image in Iconoclasm," *Word and Image* 9 (1993), 143.

images of Christ. The Eucharist is an institution attested to by the tradition of the

Scripture and the Fathers, and it has the consecration of the Holy Spirit. On the other

hand, icons have none of these qualities to render them true representations of Christ:[22]

On the contrary, the ill name of the falsely called 'icon' neither has its existence in the tradition of Christ, or the Apostles, or the Fathers, nor is there any prayer of consecration for it to transpose it from the state of being common to the state of being sacred. Instead, it remains common and worthless, as the painter made it.[23]

In accordance with the same principle, the Iconoclastic *horos* rejected the images of

Mary, the prophets, the apostles and the martyrs. The image of Christ constituted a test

case for other such images and, as a consequence, images of other saintly people could

not claim any holiness either.[24] Instead, the *horos* encourages emulation of the saints'

virtues and studying their writings, as their letters are considered true images of the

saints.[25] The definition quotes a passage from Theodotus of Ancara:

We have received the tradition to revitalize the notions about the saints; not, however, on icons with colors which are material. Rather, we have been taught to refurbish their virtues and, through what is said about them in writings, as if animate icons, stimulate ourselves towards the same zeal as theirs.[26]

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[22] Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 261E, 264A-B-C, 268C, 269D. Peter Brown defines the Iconoclastic debate as "[A] debate on the position of the holy in Byzantine society. On the issue of what was holy and what was not the Iconoclasts were firm and unambiguous. Certain material objects were holy because they had been solemnly blessed by ordained priests. This blessing had raised them from the material to the supernatural: such was the Eucharistic bread...Icons could not be holy because they had received no consecration from above. They had received only an illegitimate consecration from below." "A Dark-Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy," *The English Historical Review* 88 (1973), 5-6. For the roots of the Iconoclasts' symbolic view of the Eucharist see Stephen Gero, "The Eucharistic Doctrine of the Byzantine Iconoclasts and its Sources," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 68(1975), 4-22.

[23] Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 268C

[24] Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 272D.

[25] Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 301D, 300B.

[26] Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 312A.

Eusebius of Caesarea on Images: Ad Constantiam

One of the most important patristic testimonies brought forward by the Iconoclasts was a letter of Eusebius of Caesarea to the Empress Constantia, who asked the bishop to provide her with a picture of Christ.[27] The argument that Eusebius offered against making an image of Christ is a powerful one, and in many ways resembles that of the *Horos* of 754; nevertheless, there are also significant differences between the two documents.[28] It was a powerful support for the Iconoclastic case and for that reason the Patriarch Nicephorus felt obliged to write a special apology refuting Eusebius.[29]

The argument of Eusebius's letter runs as follows: in answer to the request of the empress Constantia for a picture of Christ from Eusebius, the bishop replies that by an "image of Christ" one could either mean an image of "the Lord of Glory" or of "the form of a servant." The former option is naturally impossible, argues the bishop; as for the latter, the one who humbled himself by assuming a body, any image of this is also impossible. For during the incarnation the human body was fused with divinity; therefore, even during the incarnation such an image would have been impossible, for any such image could only represent the humanity of Christ at the time of the incarnation, and yet such separated humanity never existed. Moreover, after the resurrection, the form of a servant ascended into heaven and was assumed by divinity and transformed into the form of Glory. Therefore, any image of Christ is out of the question. There can be no image of

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[27] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 313A-313D.

[28] We will discuss below the similarities and differences between Eusebius's letter and the *horos* of 754 when we deal with how some prominent modern scholarship seems to overlook the differences in particular for the sake of a "Monophysite" interpretation of the Iconoclastic doctrine.

[29] For a discussion and summary of the Patriarch Nicephorus's *Contra Eusebium* see, Paul J. Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople: Ecclesiastical Policy and Image Worship in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 173-78.

Him that could claim to be a true representation. This being the case, if anybody makes

an image of Christ it would necessarily be a false one.[30]

Based on the witness of Eusebius's letter, George Florovsky, one of the leading

Byzantinists of the twentieth century, claimed that:

[T]he whole tenor and ethos of Origenism was undoubtedly favorable to that course of theological reasoning which was actually adopted by the Iconoclasts. Therefore, the defense of the Holy Icons was, in some sense, an indirect refutation of Origenism, a new act in the story of the "Origenistic controversies."[31]

Florovsky contended that the main issue at stake was symbolism and history in which the

Iconoclasts stood for "an un-reformed and uncompromising Hellenistic position, of an

Origenistic and Platonic trend,"[32] whereas the Iconodules defended a position of "historic

Christianity."[33] He claims that the Iconoclasts followed an Origenistic symbolism that led

them to an inadequate Christology, according to which the "historic Cross" of Jesus was

only a symbol of something higher.[34] The aim of their Scriptural interpretation is

explained as follows:

The exegetical method of Origen, by whatever name we may label it, was meant precisely for that ultimate purpose—to transcend history, to go beyond the veil of events, to go beyond the "letter" which would inevitably kill even under the New Dispensation of Grace,...Ultimately, we have to "transform" the "sensual" Evangelium into the "spiritual;" that is to say that the New Testament is to be interpreted in the same manner as the Old—as an anticipation. This basic orientation towards the future, towards that what is to come, implies a definite devaluation of the past, of that which had already happened.[35]

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[30] Paraphrased from, Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 313A-313D.

[31] George Florovsky, "Origen, Eusebius, and the Iconoclastic Controversy," *Church History* XIX (1950): 87.

[32] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 96.

[33] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 96.

[34] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 88.

[35] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 87-8.

Under the effect of such an Origenistic mind-set, claims Florovsky, it was very natural

that the Iconoclasts should have rejected the material representation of past events.[36] The

author contends that Iconoclasm and the Monophysite tradition were products of the

same un-compromising Hellenistic tradition of Alexandria; he thus relates the

Iconoclastic mind-set to that of Monophysitism.[37]

This is a well-structured argument and a ground-breaking achievement in that it

defined the Iconoclastic controversy as an inner conflict within Christianity "between a

Christian Hellenism and an Hellenized Christianity, or possibly between Orthodoxy and

Syncretism,"[38] in a time when the scholars had began searching for the origins of the

controversy in the external Semitic influences that came as a reaction to the Hellenization

of Christianity.[39] Nevertheless, the sophistication and attractiveness of the argument

cannot stand against the historical evidence and reveals significant anachronisms and

reductionisms. Florovsky structures his thesis on two shaky presuppositions: first, an

exaggerated emphasis on the similarities between the thoughts of Origen and Eusebius

that virtually equates them by overlooking the contrary historical evidence; and second,

an excessive highlighting of the similarities between the philosophical and doctrinal

presuppositions of Eusebius's letter to Constantia and those of the Iconoclastic thought.

On the first count, reading excessive Origenism into the letter cannot be justified,

even if we assume that Eusebius's letter can be taken as a perfect representation of

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[36] Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 92.

[37] Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 96.

[38] Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 96.

[39] For an excellent treatment of the origins of the controversy see, Leslie W. Barnard, *The Graeco-Roman and Oriental Background of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (Leiden: Brill, 1974).

eighth-century Iconoclastic views. It is a commonplace that Eusebius followed the legacy of Origen, together with his master Pamphilus, in Palestine Caesarea.[40] However, this should not be taken to mean that he emulated Origen's symbolism to the fullest. First of all, far from depreciating history, Eusebius is the originator of the genre of church history, as he wrote the first such account. We have also demonstrated that his "Imperial Theology" is itself a historical construction: that the divine providence coincided with the incarnation and the *Pax Romana* to provide humanity with a religio-political structure that would grant them political and religious well-being on a universal scale. Similarly, this salvation-historical perspective is evidently at work in the *Ecloga* and the Iconoclastic *horos* of 754. Second, far from being symbolical interpreters of the Scripture, the Iconoclasts proved to be proper "literalists" in taking seriously the biblical strictures against images. In the same vein, the Iconoclastic Emperors' insistence upon the implementation of the principles of Christian ethics in social life—the *Ecloga*—to realize the well-being of the Byzantine Commonwealth, was also an indicator of a conception of historic Christianity. Third, the implication of a Monophysite spirit in that of the Iconoclasts is not justifiable, given their clear avowal of the Chalcedonian Christology in the *Horos* of 754. To our understanding, the Iconoclastic dispute was neither one of the many debates over Origenism, nor was it primarily a continuation of the Chalcedonian Christological debates. It was rather a dispute between two different interpretations of Chalcedonian dyophysiticism. The main question was how to understand the continuing validity of the incarnation in post-resurrection history. Fourth, we have demonstrated in this chapter that as opposed to Florovsky's claim that the

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[40] D. C. Wallace-Hadrill, *Eusebius of Caesarea* (London: A.R. Mowbray & Co., 1960), 12-16.

Iconoclasts stood for symbolism, they stood for historic Christianity, as it is defined in the Eusebian "Imperial Theology." This historic Christianity aims to implement the principles of the Christian religion not only in the devotional lives of Christians but also in every strata of social and political life. The Iconoclastic attack against images refuted a worldview that limited the religion into a way of individualized salvation, which emphasizes the renunciation of the worldly life and especially secularizes the political sphere. Gerhard Ladner observes a sense of "sur-realism" in the Byzantine religion and art prior to and during the Iconoclastic Controversy:

It may, perhaps, be said that in the era which just preceded and accompanied the Iconoclastic Controversy, the Byzantine approach to religion and art changed from the historic to the speculative and that, therefore, also the problem of the similarity of the images was treated more in philosophical than in a practical way. [41]

Similarly, we have also detected a sense of "sur-realism" in the Iconodule religiosity that reveals itself in various forms of icon-veneration and the miracle qualities attributed to images. To put it differently, we contend that the Iconodule behaviour of expecting the fulfillment of their needs through the miraculous intervention of the divine via images in exclusion of the normal workings of history has a connotation of "sur-realism" or a-historicism in itself. When this form of behaviour and that of the *Ecloga* is compared, the Iconodule worldview proves to be "a-historical," whereas the Iconoclastic worldview becomes historical Christianity.

On the second score, Florovsky's thesis presupposes an identity between Eusebius's letter and the Iconoclastic Christology. It is true that they have substantial similarities and

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[41] See G. Ladner, "The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers and the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy," in *Images and Ideas in the Middle Ages: Selected Studies in History and Art* (Rome: Edizioni Di Storia e Literatura, 1983), 106.

that is why the Iconoclastic *horos* included the letter as a patristic support for its case. Nevertheless, written more than four hundred years after the Eusebius's letter to the Empress Constantia, the *horos* has some substantial differences as well. First of all, Iconoclastic Christological dilemma has the advantage of using the categories of the Chalcedonian dyophysite doctrine; it defines the incarnation on proper orthodox doctrines, and criticizes images as an inevitable deviation from Chalcedonian Orthodoxy, either towards Monophysitism or towards Nestorianism. On the other hand, having been written long before Chalcedon, Eusebius's letter seems to emphasize the glory of the divinity as implying a Monophysite disposition. He gives the example of transfiguration, and refers to the biblical passages that emphasize divinity.[42] Second, the Iconoclastic Christological argument claims that an image of the incarnate Christ at the time of the incarnation is impossible on Orthodox Christological grounds, whereas the Eusebian argument relates to the picturing in the post-resurrection dispensation where the "form of a servant" is already assumed by the Glory and transformed into divinity. Therefore, Florovsky's argument fails to consider the substantial differences between the Eusebian argument and those of the Iconoclasts.

On the other hand, *via* a meditation on Eusebius, J. Meyendorff makes the same charge of Origenism.[43] He claims that the Iconoclastic Christology takes the *communicatio idiomatum* to its extreme limits, to the point that it cannot conceive of a proper hypostatic union between the human and divine characters of Christ:

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[42] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 313D.

[43] John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Washington & Cleveland: Corpus Books, 1969), 135.

Iconoclastic Christology, therefore, does not assimilate the conception of a properly *hypostatic* union, implying a real distinction between nature and hypostasis, and making possible the preservation of the natural characteristics of the Divinity and of the humanity within a single or personal existence. It does, however, seem to indicate that the deification of the humanity of Christ suppresses the reality of the properly human natural character. Such a notion of deification certainly contradicts the former tradition on the participation in God as a natural element of humanity...While formally accepting the decisions of the councils of Chalcedon and of Constantinople; iconoclastic Christology places itself clearly on Monophysite or Monothelite positions, and therefore it is not surprising that Michael the Syrian should approve of it.[44]

In order to push his interpretation, Meyendorff ignored the open avowal of the *horos* of all the decisions of the previous ecumenical councils by attaching them a "formality." Yet the *horos* of 754 does not deny the human reality of Christ—but it emphasizes the inseparable union between the two.[45] The only evidence that Meyendorff could provide was the approval of Constantine V by the Monophysite Patriarch Michael the Syrian (twelfth-century).[46]

We argue that the Iconoclastic challenge was primarily focused on salvation in post-resurrection history. The controversy became Christological when the Iconodules blamed the Iconoclasts for failing to understand the implications of the incarnation. Indeed, the Christological dimension of the debate is situated in the post-resurrection implications of the incarnation. By positing the Iconoclasts on the Monophysite side, Meyendorff contextualizes the Iconoclastic Debate as a continuation of the disputes over Chalcedonian Christology. However, the available sources do not warrant any interpretation against the Iconoclastic Party's dyophysite Chalcedonian disposition. Therefore, we argue that Iconoclasm was not primarily a Christological debate; it was mainly about soteriology. The primary focus of the Iconoclastic challenge was on

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[44] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 139-140.

[45] S. Gero finds this "forced" charge of Monophysitism unjust and contends that looking beyond the interpretation of the council would be wrong. *Iconoclasm during Constantine V,* 105, footnote 168.

[46] Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought,* 139.

salvation in post-resurrection history, where they claimed a collective salvation through the agency of the Byzantine Commonwealth, *sacerdotium* and *imperium*. They tried to revitalize the principles of the "Imperial Theology". From the perspective of Christology, the debate thus becomes a dispute between two different interpretations of the Chalcedonian Christology. The Iconoclasts openly acknowledge all the principles of the Chalcedonian dyophysitism, yet they considered the incarnation a once and for all event, a complete process as such. The institutions of the church and the Christian empire are the only direct and legitimate consequences of this event; for Christ, having fulfilled his duty and ascended into heaven, directly entrusted his salvific role to these two twin institutions. To the Iconoclasts, then, the Byzantine Commonwealth becomes the only legitimate means or intermediary of Christian salvation in the post-resurrection history.

Summary

To conclude, the second phase of the Iconoclastic debate (749-843) was a time of sophisticated theological disputes between the two sides. As a reply to John's Christological challenge, the Iconoclasts developed their own Christological arguments to prove that icons cannot be justified on the Chalcedonian dyophysite terms. The dialectic between the Iconoclastic concept of salvation through the Byzantine Commonwealth, and that of the Iconodules that insisted on the necessity of experiencing the continuing validity of the incarnation through images, continued to be the center of the debate. The two sides gradually refined their respective views mainly on this battleground.

The most explicit manifestation of the Iconoclastic doctrines can be found, as we saw, in the definition (*horos*) of the Iconoclastic council of Hiereia (754). The

introduction to the *horos* is a full recital of the central tenets of the Iconoclastic doctrines expressed within a paradigm of salvation history. The foremost feature of this history is its marked theocentrism, an important difference as compared to the Iconodule Christocentrism.

The Iconoclasts consider the incarnation as a major turning-point of salvation history, when God sent his Son to restore humanity to God. However, as a unique event of this history, the incarnation is defined as a once and for all complete process. As for the post-resurrection implications of the incarnation, the Iconoclastic theology noticeably points to the church and the empire to which Christ entrusted material and spiritual care of the Christian flock. The Iconoclastic theology argues that Christ became man to restore humanity's relation to God, to teach humankind the correct belief in God and the ways of proper worship of Him. Having fulfilled his mission of salvation, Christ entrusted the mission of salvation after himself to the church and the empire, both of which were guided by the Holy Spirit. In short, for the Iconoclasts, the Byzantine Commonwealth is the main vehicle of salvation in post-resurrection history.

Iconoclasts claimed that both the Law and the Prophets and the incarnation aimed to teach humanity how to worship God; therefore, they considered the Old and the New Testament dispensations as a perfect continuum. Iconoclastic theology does not assume any qualitative difference between the two dispensations. The struggle between good and evil is all the same before or after the incarnation. The incarnation does not provide Christians with a different disposition concerning the belief. Lucifer, the principle of evil, strives at deceiving people and leading them from the right path in similar ways before or

after the resurrection. In particular, the Iconoclastic ecclesiology does not attach infallibility to the church in the New Testament dispensation.

As for their Christology, the Iconoclasts affirmed and accepted all the decrees of the previous ecumenical councils, and as such they were proper dyophysites. They differ from the Iconodules on one point: that the principles of the Chalcedonian doctrines apply to the worldly experience of Christ during the incarnation. His resurrection and following ascension marks the beginning of a new era in salvation history, where Christ entrusted the mission of salvation to the Byzantine Commonwealth, both the church and the empire. As for the remembrance of the incarnation, his suffering for the sins of humanity, the Iconoclasts were firm traditionalists: it was only through the traditional means consecrated by the church that Christians could remember the incarnation. In this regard, they saw the Eucharist as the central institution, the only legitimate means to cherish the implications of Christ's incarnation. In doctrinal terms, the Iconoclasts believed that, within a paradigm of salvation history, Christology and the Iconoclastic political theology coordinate each other; all of which eventually are subordinated to their soteriology. In their concept of the salvation economy, the Law and the Prophets, the incarnation, and the Byzantine Commonwealth all constitute a continuum as divine means of guidance and providers of salvation. In the same way, images perfectly coordinate with the previous practices of idolatry; therefore, they have no place in the Christian salvation economy.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SECOND COUNCIL OF NICEA (787 CE):

THEODORE THE STUDITE AND PATRIARCH NICEPHORUS

John's defence of images on the basis of the incarnation prompted the Iconoclasts to

elaborate their own appropriate Christological argument. The Iconoclastic position denied

any substantial relation between the incarnate Christ and his pictorial representation that

would justify their manufacture or veneration. The dialectic between John and the authors

of the Iconoclastic council of Hiereia (754 CE) (the foremost among them being the

emperor Constantine V) generally determined the content of the rest of the debate.

Therefore the second council of Nicea dealt mostly with the doctrinal issues raised by this

dialectic. During the second revival of Iconoclasm (813-45 CE), the two prominent

Iconodule theologians Patriarch Nicephorus (758-828 CE) and Theodore the Studite

(759-826 CE) continued the theological disputes initiated by the Iconoclastic council and

produced what can be described as the culmination of the Iconodule doctrine of images.[1]

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[1] The Iconoclastic council of St. Sophia (815 CE), which acknowledged the decisions of the council of
Hiereia (754 CE) with some changes of emphases, might be given a place in this context. However, since
its definition did not contribute much to the debate in terms of original theological arguments, we prefer to
avoid it here. For the definition and general content of the council consult, Paul J. Alexander, *The Patriarch
Nicephorus of Constantinople: Ecclesiastical Policy and Image Worship in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 1958), 137-40; and "The Iconoclastic Council of St. Sophia (815) and Its
Definition (*Horos*)," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 7 (1953): 35-66a.

In order to contextualize the rest of the debate, a concise reconstruction of the Iconoclastic 'Christological-dilemma' and related arguments is in order.

The Iconoclastic Christological challenge was based on the claim that making an image of Christ and naming it "Christ" would either imply separating divinity and humanity in the incarnate Christ and thus adding a fourth person to the Trinity (which would amount to Nestorianism), or confusing the two natures (which would mean Monophysitism). The so-called "Christological dilemma" is as follows: An image is made and called "Christ," a name which designates the unique unity of divine and human in the incarnation. At the time of the incarnation, the divinity of Christ united with humanity in the person of Jesus, who consisted of a body and a soul. Since the divinity is united with both the flesh and soul of Jesus, three hypostases always existed in unity, and, consequently, neither the flesh nor the soul of Jesus had separate existences without divinity. On the other hand, the divine nature is uncircumscribable. Only the human Jesus is circumscribable who never existed separately from the divine. Therefore, to claim that one can depict "Christ" would mean that either the divinity is circumscribable, which is open blasphemy against God, or that it is confused with the flesh, which is Monophysite heresy, or—if the painter claims only to be depicting the humanity of Christ—that it constituted separation of the flesh from divinity, which amounts to adding another person to divinity, i.e., Nestorian heresy.[2] Any veneration offered to such an image would similarly be wrong and amount to the denial of the orthodox faith.

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[2] Paraphrased from Daniel J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-Century Iconoclasm: An annotated translation of the Sixth Session of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicea, 787), containing the Definition of the Council of Constantinople (754) and its refutation and the Definition of the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 248E, 253A, 252B, 256B, 257A-B, 260A-B.

The Christological dilemma presupposes an essential relation between the image and its prototype. The argument implies that, in order for an icon to truly represent Christ, it has to be of the same substance—that is to say, *homoousios*—with its prototype. To the Iconoclastic theologians, it is this commonality of substances which makes an image a true representative of its prototype. It is obvious that the Iconoclasts use here the concept of image as it was expressed in the Trinitarian doctrine of the fourth century. The Nicene Creed of 325 defined the Son as "homoousios" with his Father.[3] As long as the concept of image was defined in this essentialist approach, the Iconoclastic "Christological dilemma" was hard to refute. The image of Christ consisted only of "lifeless matter," such that no sacred component and no divinity was attached to it. For this reason, the Iconophiles tried to establish a different definition of the relationship between the icon and its prototype.[4]

To those who desired a true icon of Christ, the Iconoclastic *horos* offers an alternative, one which is truly sacred: the Eucharist. According to the text, Jesus Christ intentionally avoided bestowing his pictorial image on his followers so that they would not fall into idolatry again. Instead, he offered bread and wine as the true image of his incarnate body. The Eucharist thus is the only real image of Christ; it is the only symbol that can represent the incarnate body, humanity and divinity. When the priest offers the prayer of consecration, the bread and wine receive sanctity from the Holy Spirit from above; and in this way, the bread and wine of the Eucharist become the true images of Christ. The Eucharist is an institution attested by the tradition of the Scripture and the

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[3] For the Nicene Creed see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950), 211-16.

[4] For Nicephorus's theory of image, see Charles Barber, "The Body within the Frame: A Use of Word and Image in Iconoclasm," *Word and Image* 9 (1993): 143.

fathers, and it has the consecration of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, icons have none

of these qualities that would render them true representations of Christ.[5]

The Iconoclastic arguments thus challenged the Iconodules on the three most

important issues, on which the Iconodule theology would develop its own stand: a)

Christology, b) image theory, and c) the doctrine of the Eucharist.[6] The Iconodule

theologians, nevertheless, did not elucidate these issues as such, instead, their arguments

related to the redemptive implications of the incarnation. In their general outlook, they

simply followed John of Damascus who first established the issue of image within a

soteriological paradigm where the continuing reality of the incarnation is the only key to

salvation. As far as the roles of the *ecclesia* and *imperium* in Christian salvation were

concerned, the Iconodule theologians had their own stands on ecclesiology and political

theology. Therefore, these last themes will also be elaborated under a separate heading.

The Christological Issue

The Christological dilemma set the problem of images within the main question of

Christology, that is, the unity of the divine and human natures in one hypostasis without

separation or confusion in the person of Christ. Iconoclasts had emphasized the

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[5] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 261E, 264A-B-C, 268C, 269D. Peter Brown defines the Iconoclastic debate as "[A] debate on the position of the holy in Byzantine society. On the issue of what was holy and what was not the Iconoclasts were firm and unambiguous. Certain material objects were holy because they had been solemnly blessed by ordained priests. This blessing had raised them from the material to the supernatural: such was the Eucharistic bread...Icons could not be holy because they had received no consecration from above. They had received only an illegitimate consecration from below." P. Brown, "A Dark-Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy," *English Historical Review* 88 (1973): 5-6. For a detailed treatment of the Iconoclastic doctrine of the Eucharist and its sources see Stephen Gero, "The Eucharistic Doctrine of the Byzantine Iconoclasts and Its Sources," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 68 (1975): 4-22.

[6] There are a number of other issues involved; however, we prefer to focus on the most important issues as they directly relate to our overall argument. For a comprehensive exposition of the Iconophile theology see Kenneth Parry, *Depicting the Word: Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996).

Chalcedonian principle of "the unconfused union" of the two natures, i.e. that both natures maintained their own properties in the incarnate Christ. Emphasizing thus the separateness of the natures, they argued that any claim to circumscribe this unity in an image was wrong, for circumscription was not applicable to the divine nature in the hypostatic union.

The second council of Nicea underlined for the first time that icons depicted Christ's perfect humanity and not his divinity, which was uncircumscribable even during His earthly life. This Iconodule council gave examples in support of the argument that circumscription, and all other experiences of Christ's earthly life, belonged to his perfect humanity. They suggested that the two natures existed separately within their own properties:

Thus, the Lord, in so far as He was a perfect man, when He was in Galilee, was not in Judea. This is something to which He Himself gives testimony when He says: *Let us go into Judea again.*[7] Also, talking to his disciples about Lazarus, He said this: *And for your sake I am glad that I was not there.*[8] In so far, however, as He is God, He is present at every place of His sovereignty, and He remains altogether uncircumscribed.[9]

The Iconoclasts seemed to have a substantial point to make when they raised the issue of the relation between the divine nature that was united to the flesh and an image purporting to circumscribe it. The Iconodule council rightly observed that the heart of the problem lay in the delicate relation between the two contradictory notions: separateness of natures and their unity in one hypostasis. It was a matter of emphasizing one or the other. In trying to disprove the Iconoclastic emphasis on the former, the Iconodule

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[7] John 11:7.

[8] John 11:15.

[9] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 253C-D.

theologians appealed to the tradition of the fathers and suggested that the concept of division was something in the realm of thought, whereas in actuality it was his hypostasis that Christians experienced in so far as he became a perfect man. According to the council, to make such an excessive emphasis on the division of natures would imply Nestorianism:

Obviously they are unaware of what the Fathers say. For all of them speak expressly of a division of the two natures in thought, as we have said above, although not in actuality, as Nestorius dared to say blasphemously.[10]

The council also suggested that the Iconoclasts confused hypostasis and nature, assuming them to be the same thing. In order to eliminate this confusion, the Iconophile theologians made the following distinction:

We call hypostasis a substance with properties of its own, beyond subsistence; while we call nature something self-existing, which is in need of nothing else in order to be constituted, beyond birth.[11]

What the council of Nicea achieved then was only to identify the exact nature of the problem raised by the Iconoclasts: i.e., the relation between the divine nature and the property of 'circumscription.' However, considering the solutions proposed by the council, it is hard to suggest that it was successful in fully addressing the problem. The Christological issue was thus subjected to further elaboration by the patriarch Nicephorus and Theodore the Studite.[12]

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[10] Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 257C

[11] Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 261A

[12] Some examples of modern scholarly works on Patriarch Nicephorus and Theodore the Studite: Paul J. Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople. Ecclesiastical Policy and Image Worship in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958); Patrick O'Connell, *The Ecclesiology of St Nicephorus I (758-828) Patriarch of Constantinople*, OCA 194 (Roma: Typis Pontificiae Universitatis

The patriarch Nicephorus develops much of his Christological argument in the context of his refutation of the Iconoclastic position associated with Constantine V.[13] The patriarch argues that the mistake made by Constantine was to begin with the separateness of the natures. According to the patriarch, the way that the emperor posited the Christological dilemma arose from a misconception that denied the unity of the one hypostasis in Christ.[14] Nicephorus accuses Constantine of having failed to understand the relation between the two natures in the hypostatic union in Christ. As the council of Nicea had previously observed, the cause of the Iconoclastic problem was an unbalanced insistence on the separateness of the two natures. Nicephorus argues that Constantine misrepresented the hypostatic union in order to maintain the principle of the division of those natures.[15]

The patriarch maintains that this mistake invalidated the mystery of the hypostatic union, the unconfused unity of the divine and human natures, which was providentially designed to work for the salvation of humanity. As a substantial step towards resolving the problem, Nicephorus suggests to the principle of the sharing of natural properties (*antidosis idiomaton*).[16] According to this, the divine and human natures share their properties because of their unity in the hypostasis, making it possible for them to share one name in the union. Therefore Christ is both God and human. This refers to the

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Gregorianae, 1972); Kenneth Parry, "Theodore Studites and the Patriarch Nicephoros on Image-making as a Christian Imperative," *Byzantion* 59 (1989): 164-83; John Travis, *In Defense of the Faith: The Theology of Patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople* (Brookline, Massachusetts: Hellenic College Press, 1984); Patrick Henry, *Theodore of Studios, Byzantine Churchman* (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1968); Roman Cholij, *Theodore the Stoudite: The Ordering of Holiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Georgios Metallidis, "Theodore Studium against the Iconoclasts: The Argument of His Letters," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 46.2 (2002): 191-208.

[13] Parry, *Depicting the Word*, 78; Barber, "The Body within the Frame," 141.

[14] Travis, *In Defense of the Faith*, 70.

[15] Travis, *In Defense of the Faith*, 70.

[16] Travis, *In Defense of the Faith*, 71.

redemptive formula of the Chalcedonian definition that the incarnate Christ is fully human in relation to his humanity and fully divine in relation to his divinity. It would be absurd, argues Nicephorus, to indicate only one nature to the exclusion of the other in naming Christ. He thus concludes that since Christ "is both God and man, it follows that he is both capable of being depicted and incapable of being depicted."[17] Nicephorus argues that the incarnation was the event in which the two opposite natures could be contemplated in Christ. The incarnate Christ may thus be considered a kind of *coincidentia oppositorum.*[18]

The patriarch next elaborates on the concept of "circumscription" since much of the Iconoclastic Christological argument depended on the notion of God's uncircumscribable nature. John of Damascus did not deal with this issue; he only suggested that, inasmuch as the *Logos* became flesh, Christ can be depicted. John thus made circumscription of the divine in a human body and the experience of this phenomenon by human beings the main justification of his defense of images. Elaborating further on the incarnation, Nicephorus argues that to deny circumscription to the hypostatic union of both natures in Christ would deprive Christ of his complete human nature, a position which he labels as "Arianism."[19] On orthodox soteriological grounds, the patriarch argues that in order for human salvation to be complete, the human component of Christ had to have been whole: "If Adam sinned only half as much, his adoption and salvation would be half; but if he is totally united to God, the whole [man]

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[17] Travis, *In Defense of the Faith,* 71.

[18] Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 79.

[19] Travis, *In Defense of the Faith,* 73.

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also is saved."[20] Therefore, argues Nicephorus, it is necessary to acknowledge that after the union, when the Word became flesh and dwelt among people, the uncircumscribed divinity was circumscribed together with the flesh.[21] In other words, Nicephorus states that the church teaches that the incarnate Christ was of the same essence (*homoousius*) with God according to his divinity and of the same essence with humans according to his humanity. This double nature was essential for human salvation, for what is not fully assumed is not saved.[22] Therefore, according to the patriarch, icons derive their legitimacy from Christ's complete circumscription.

As opposed to Constantine V, who believed that Christ's circumscription ceased at the resurrection, Nicephorus claims that this phenomenon is a permanent reality. Along the same lines as John of Damascus, the patriarch argues that the Iconoclastic denial of the continuing validity of the incarnation means the denial of the entire Christian economy, the path to salvation through Christ.[23] Essentially, therefore, Nicephorus believes that retention of Christ's humanity in its complete form is vital for salvation. Unless the hypostatic union of the distinct divine and human natures is permanent, salvation is impossible. For this reason, argues the patriarch, Christ's circumscription must be permanent.[24] Nicephorus then makes a distinction between "circumscription," a concept that designates the incarnation of the divine in a human body; and "representation," a concept that designates the relation between an image made by an

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[20] Travis, *In Defense of the Faith,* 73.

[21] Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 79.

[22] Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 79. For the Chalcedonian teaching see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines,* 2nd ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1960), 338-343; and Basil Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation,* trans. Matthias Westerhoff and ed. Andrew Louth (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 214-5.

[23] Barber, "The Body within the Frame," 143.

[24] Barber, "The Body within the Frame," 144.

artist and its prototype. But since it is also related to his image theory, we will discuss

this distinction when we elaborate on Nicephorus's notion of image in the next section.

Theodore the Studite similarly believed that Iconoclasm devalued the redemptive

implications of the incarnation.[25] By describing it as a "once and for all" event in

salvation history, the Iconoclasts depreciated the importance of "suffering humanity." As

mentioned earlier, Iconoclasts limited the circumscription of Christ to the period between

his conception and passion and claimed that after the ascension, Christ's human nature

was assumed by divinity. Theodore argues in response that Christ retained his humanity

even after the resurrection.[26] He describes what he calls "the novel mystery of the

dispensation" as the incarnate body where the divine and human natures meet in one

hypostasis and share their properties. According to the theologian, this is a great mystery,

which is worthy of God. The greatness of the mystery makes it worthy to depict the

incarnate Word in an image, for it was God himself who condescended to partake in

human nature.[27]

According to Theodore, Iconoclasm primarily derives from a misconceived notion

of the incarnation. In order to maintain an orthodox soteriology, one must fully

acknowledge that the human and divine natures met in one hypostasis. Iconoclasts seem

to forsake the redemptive aspects of suffering humanity when they say that:

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[25] Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 76.

[26] Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 76.

[27] St. Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons,* trans. Catharine P. Roth (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1981), I, 4; Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 75.

It is a degradation ...and a humiliation, to depict Christ in material representations. It is better that He should remain in mental contemplation, as He is formed in us by the Holy Spirit, who sends into us a kind of divine formation through sanctification and righteousness....[28]

Theodore argues that such a conceptual understanding of the incarnation would deprive it of its salvific functions. By making images and offering them relative veneration, argues the theologian, Christians cherish the redemptive benefits of the suffering humanity:

If merely mental contemplation were sufficient, it would have been sufficient for Him to come to us in a merely mental way; and consequently we would have been cheated by the appearance both of His deeds, if He did not come in the body, and of His sufferings, which were undeniably like ours.[29]

Echoing John of Damascus and Nicephorus, Theodore criticizes the Iconoclasts for depreciating the continuing validity of the incarnation. He argues that the Iconoclasts were wrong in assuming that the hypostatic union was limited to the phase between his conception and suffering, and that after his suffering Christ became disincarnate. Theodore elaborates on the circumscription of the risen Christ in the form of a conversation with a heretic, who argues that, "Admittedly it is agreed that our Lord Jesus Christ is circumscribed, but only up to His passion, and by no means after His resurrection."[30] Theodore counters that Christ's circumscription continues after the resurrection and that there is no difference between the way he was circumscribed before the resurrection and the way he was in its aftermath. That is to say, salvific reality of the Incarnate Christ continues until the second coming and the incarnation continues to

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[28] Theodore, *On the Holy Icons,* I, 7.

[29] Theodore, *On the Holy Icons*, I, 7.

[30] Theodore, *On the Holy Icons*, II, 41.

generate salvation for Christians. Images, accordingly, refer to and derive from this continuing validity of the incarnation.[31]

By extending the reality of the incarnation until the end of the world, Theodore establishes Christology as the backbone of the Iconodule soteriology. Christian salvation and Christology was then intertwined in post-resurrection history, and images are considered to be one essential building block of this paradigm, as they represent the suffering humanity and communicate its benefits to Christians. This being the case, it is understandable why Theodore and other Iconodules charge their opponents with Docetism; for they believe that images were essential tools to maintain the full humanity of Christ.[32]

Theodore deals with the Christological problem in the context of his refutation of the Iconoclastic Christological dilemma. Similar to John, Theodore refers to the distinction between *theologia* and *oikonomia*; i.e. uncircumscribability applies to God as the doctrine of *theologia,* and circumscribability as He revealed Himself according to the doctrine of *oikonomia.* The incarnate Christ can be depicted in relation to the reality of his *oikonomia*:

And in regard to the doctrine of theology, so far from inventing some kind of circumscription or comprehension (perish the idea! For this was an invention of pagan thought), we do not even know that the Godhead exists at all, or what sort of thing it is, as it alone understands about itself. But because of His great goodness one of the Trinity has entered human nature and become like us. There is a mixture of the immiscible, a compound of the uncombinable: that is, of the uncircumscribable with the circumscribed, of the boundless with the bounded, of the limitless with the limited, of the formless with the well-formed (which is indeed paradoxical). For this reason Christ is depicted in images, and the invisible is seen.[33]

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[31] Theodore, *On the Holy Icons*, II, 41-7.

[32] Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 76.

[33] Theodore, *On the Holy Icons,* I, 2.

The center of the contention between the two sides seems to be the relationship between these two terms in the hypostatic union.[34] As Theodore remarks, the paradoxical situation is the unity of the uncircumscribed and circumscribed. He argues that circumscription is what belongs to human nature; since the incarnate Christ is defined as the hypostatic union of the fully divine and fully human, it becomes imperative to acknowledge the human property of circumscription for Christ. The contradiction in the Iconoclastic position is that they seem to acknowledge all other properties of a fully human nature such as visibility, tangibility, and graspability and yet they deny his circumscription. This was an essential flaw, argued Theodore, in their notion of the incarnation:

Therefore you must either accept the "circumscribed," or if not, then take away the "visible" and "tangible" and "graspable" and whatever adjectives are in the same category. Then it would become obvious that you utterly deny that the Word became flesh—which is the height of impiety.[35]

Theodore argues that the Iconoclasts try to avoid Christ's circumscription by making his uniqueness exclusive of the human characteristic of circumscription.[36] He quotes his rivals that "Circumscription...is characteristic of a mere man: therefore Christ is not a mere man, because He is not circumscribed."[37] The theologian agrees that Christ did not assume a particular man, but man in general. However, this whole human nature is assumed in an individual manner. Therefore, he assumed all properties of a normal individual. It is thus imperative to acknowledge all human properties including circumscription in the person of the incarnate Christ. To avoid circumscription, argues

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[34] Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 100.

[35] Theodore, *On the Holy Icons,* I, 3.

[36] Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 101.

[37] Theodore, *On the Holy Icons,* I, 4.

Theodore, has potential docetic tendencies. On the other hand, his uncircumscribed

attributes must also be admitted. [38]

Theodore next elaborates on the Iconoclastic charge of Nestorianism in relation to

an image in the context of an Iconoclastic objection:

If the Word assumed human nature in His own hypostasis, since this nature is invisible and formless, it if should be given form by circumscription, a second person will be admitted in the hypostasis of Christ—but this is absurd, and is allied to the heresy of Nestorius, to preach a duality of persons in Christ. [39]

Theodore argues that such a claim would only be plausible if one assumes a separate

hypostasis belonging to the flesh. However, this is not the case and the orthodox church

confesses only one hypostasis—that of the Word—common to both natures. Therefore,

the orthodox belief admits that the divine and human natures united in one hypostasis and

this did not add a fourth person to the Trinity. This being the case, argues the theologian,

the Iconoclasts have to deny circumscription in respect to Christ's humanity, and that

would mean eliminating a property of one of the two natures, relating this mistake to

Acephaloi and Apollinarius. [40] In addition, such a denial would also mean that he did not

have assumed humanity in truth, but only in likeness and form of the flesh, and such an

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[38] Theodore, *On the Holy Icons*, I, 4.

[39] Theodore, *On the Holy Icons*, III, 22.

[40] Theodore, *On the Holy Icons*, III, 22-3. Both groups had negative attitudes against the humanity of Christ. Daniel Sahas (*Icon and Logos*, 84, footnote 14) gives the following information: "*Acephaloi* means 'those lacking a head,' that is, a bishop. This name was applied to the extreme Monophysites, who after the Council of Chalcedon (451) continued arguing in favour of 'one nature' in Christ, rejected the *Henoticōn* (a 'Volume of Union' drafted by Emperor Zeno in 482 to bring the orthodox and the Monophysites together), and finally broke away from their Patriarch of Alexandria, Peter III the Dumb (482-490), a moderate Monophysite who had signed the *Henoticōn* – thus remaining 'headless.' The same name was afterwards used for all the Monophysites who did not accept the *Henoticōn*, which among other provisions declared a moratorium on any further discussion of the wording of the state of the divine and human natures after their union in Christ. Against the *Acephaloi* John of Damascus wrote a treatise, *On the Composite Nature. Against the Acephaloi*, PG 95:112C-125B; Kotter, IV, 409-417." Apollinarius (310-390), on the other hand, rejected the human mind in Jesus. According to him, the Incarnate was a 'compound unity in human form' and there is one nature composed of impassible divinity and passible flesh. For further information on Apollinarianism see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4th ed. (London: Black, 1968), 289-95.

idea belongs to Montanist teaching. Therefore, concludes Theodore, in order for Christ to mediate in truth between God and man he has to be uncircumscribed according to his divinity and circumscribed according to his humanity.[41]

Image, Veneration and the Eucharist

Certain aspects of the Iconoclastic Christological argument provided the context for Iconodule image and veneration theories as well as the doctrine of the Eucharist. First, Iconoclasts formulated the essential definition of an image. In order for an icon to truly represent Christ, it has to share its essence. To use the terminology of the Trinitarian doctrine, it has to be *homoousius* with its prototype. This definition constituted the first point of contention between the two sides. At the second council of Nicea, Patriarch Nicephorus, and Theodore the Studite all elaborated on the Iconodule concept of image to refute the exclusivist and narrow definition of image made by the Iconoclasts.

Second, the Iconoclastic Christological dilemma used the concept of "circumscription" to describe the work of an artist who makes a pictorial representation of Christ. Circumscription was a term that designated the incarnation of the Logos as far as he put on a human body and became human, so much so that he became apprehensible through the human senses. The Iconoclasts then compared the circumscription of the divine in the body of Jesus to a pictorial representation of the incarnate Christ. This issue had been discussed by the Iconodule theologians, who, on doctrinal grounds, argued that the two situations must be differentiated.

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[41] Theodore, *On the Holy Icons,* III, 24.

Third, the Iconoclastic Christological dilemma concluded that any claim of circumscribing Christ in a pictorial image would lead either to blasphemy against God, or one of the two Christological heresies: Nestorianism or Monophysitism. Depending on the premise, the Iconoclastic council applied these charges to the Christians who venerate images. This forced the Iconodules to justify icon veneration along Christological lines.

Fourth, the Iconoclastic council defined the Eucharist as the only real image of Christ, the only symbol that can represent the incarnate body, humanity and divinity. The Iconodules, on the other hand, rejected the Iconoclastic designation of the Eucharist as an image of the Incarnation, and argued, on Scriptural grounds, that after the prayer of consecration the Eucharistic elements become the very flesh and blood of Christ.

The Iconoclasts also discredited image-making due to the professional motivations of the painters:

What is this senseless contrition on the part of the painter of caricatures who, for the sake of cheap profiteering, has occupied himself in doing something that cannot be done, that is, with profane hands giving form to things that are believed with the heart and confessed with the mouth?[42]

In refutation of the latter charge, the council of Nicea argued that Christian tradition recognized and sanctified many other paid religious tasks, such as copying the gospels. Similarly, in Old Testament times there were many paid jobs such as masonry of the temple, and yet these people were guided by the Holy Spirit as stated in the Bible. Moreover, the Icon painters were devout Christians who painted not only for professional

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[42] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 248E.

motivations but also—and more importantly—"they set their mind to the remembrance of them."[43]

This issue is doubly interesting as it reveals the economic dimension of image-making—so much so that a special occupational class seemed to be implied by the Iconoclastic accusations. The Iconodule council also pointed out that the painters always had the church's sanctification for their arts. First, they were not ordinary people, but were committed to the meaning and purpose of their art. This particular argument points to the fact that the development of a special culture that regulated the art of image-making was well under-way. Second, the council also made a distinction between the idea and art of making images, and argued that the idea and dispensation of making images belonged to the fathers and the tradition of the ancient church, and it was only the art that belonged to the iconographer.[44]

As for the relation between image and prototype, the council redefined the image in a non-essentialist way. According to the council, an icon shared only the name of its prototype, not necessarily its essence. It also criticized the Iconoclasts for holding that an icon shared the same essence with its prototype.[45] The council argued that what caused the Iconoclasts to attack images was their misconceived notion of the latter. Nevertheless, in terms of a sophisticated image theory that could disprove the one advanced by the Iconoclasts, the council of the second Nicea could not do more than to say that it was only the name that an icon and its prototype shared:

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[43] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 249A-E.

[44] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 252C.

[45] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 252D.

In the same way also they say that the icon of Christ and Christ Himself do not differ from each other in essence. If they had known the difference, they would not have spoken of these novelties with exaggerations. For it is quite clear to everyone that 'icon' is one thing and 'prototype' another; the one is inanimate, the other animate.[46]

According to the council, to bestow on an icon the name of its prototype is enough to transfer the honour to the prototype; and, in this way, an icon becomes a mediator between the worshipper and prototype. Accordingly, the council justified a relative veneration to be paid to images:

In the same way, when we signify an icon with a name, we transfer the honour to the prototype; and by embracing it and offering to it the veneration of honour, we share in the sanctification.[47]

The patriarch Nicephorus approaches the problem from a different perspective in that he defines on the term 'circumscription' as meaning a sharing of properties between the two natures in the hypostatic union.[48] His main argument is that the Iconoclasts were wrong in equating 'circumscription' of the divine nature of Christ with 'representation' by an artist of the visible form of Christ in a picture or statue. According to the patriarch, circumscription and representation are entirely different concepts.[49]

Nicephorus explains that a being can be circumscribed either by place, or by time and beginning, or by apprehension.[50] A body circumscribes a being by enclosing it within a place; time and beginning limit that being by time; and as a result, we apprehend that being which is limited by space and time. Christ's humanity was circumscribed in three

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[46] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 261A.

[47] Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 269E.

[48] For a concise reconstruction of Nicephorus and Theodore's theologies of image consult, John Meyendorff, "The Iconoclastic Controversy," in his *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974), 46-50.

[49] Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 110.

[50] Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 110.

ways: when the non-corporeal was given a body; when the non-temporal was enclosed in time; and when the incomprehensible was thus made known to us.[51] He argues that Constantine distorts the truth by confusing representation with circumscription, for what a painter does in relation to a certain archetype cannot be called circumscription, as he accomplishes none of the above-mentioned dimensions of circumscription. What a painter accomplishes, on the contrary, is only to bring about a visible and bodily form of what is being circumscribed. An image is related to its prototype only by resemblance. It is a separate being from its model. Circumscription, on the other hand, has nothing to do with resemblance or difference. It exists by itself and it does not represent something else.[52] Nicephorus concludes that the term circumscription cannot be applied to the art of a painter. He or she does not and cannot circumscribe Christ but can only represent whatever was circumscribed of the divine in the hypostatic union in time, place, and apprehension.[53] An icon thus has a referential quality; it relates to its archetype by resemblance and only leads to it and reminds us of it.

Nicephorus thus defended the existential and historical reality of God-man as the prototype that icons represent. According to him, the Iconoclastic insistence on the separateness of natures in the hypostatic union is only another type of Docetism.[54] He also argued that since they convey the memory of those they represent, icons are worthy of veneration of honour. Nicephorus maintains that the veneration offered to images is

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[51] Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 110-1.

[52] Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 111.

[53] Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 111.

[54] Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 99-100.

only a relative veneration of honour, which has to be distinguished from veneration of worship, which can only be offered to God.[55]

Theodore the Studite also deals with the issue of image and likeness to refute the iconoclastic objections against the representative quality of images in relation to their prototypes. First of all, he makes a distinction between 'idol' and 'icon,' which had been equated by the Iconoclasts. Etymologically, they have similar meanings; *eidolos* means 'form' and *eikon* means a 'likeness'. Theodore underlines the fact that icon and idol and their other synonyms are similarly forbidden concepts when applied to the limitless nature of the Godhead. He argues that Christians specifically use the word 'icon' in reference to the bodily form of Christ. This use of icon derives from Genesis where God says: "Let us make man in our image (*eikonos*) and likeness [Gen. 1:26]." Nevertheless, the theologian argues that, despite their similar meaning, Christians never use the word idol in place of icon:

For it is restricted to the ancient worshippers of the creation and to anyone now who does not venerate the Trinity indivisible in nature, in glory, and in power, or who does not confess the incarnation of the Word.[56]

Theodore separates 'artificial' images from 'natural' images. A natural image is identical with its prototype in both its essence and likeness. Christ is thus a natural image of the Father in his divinity and a natural image of his mother in his humanity. Conversely, an artificial image is identical with its prototype only in likeness and not in essence. An image of Christ is His artificial image.[57] He argues that since God made man in his

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[55] Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 105.

[56] Theodore, *On the Holy Icons,* I, 16.

[57] Theodore, *On the Holy Icons,* III, B2.

image, the work of iconography is a divine action, since the art of the painter contemplates the divine action.[58] Theodore argues that the relation of likeness makes an image a participant in the grace and honour of the prototype. Just as in the case of the cross and other sacred objects, images are deified objects due to their relative participation in the grace and honour of the prototype, but not by union of their natures with the prototype.[59]

According to the theologian, the relative participation of an image in the grace and honour of the prototype justifies its veneration. He argues that by venerating an image, the mind ascends towards the prototype.[60] Theodore, like Nicephorus, also categorizes various types of veneration. First, there is veneration of worship offered to God alone. Veneration of kings and rulers, servants' veneration of their masters or children's veneration of their parents are enumerated among other types of veneration. The theologian contends that venerations vary in intention. One's awareness of the diversity of veneration makes him or her able to differentiate the worship of God from other venerations.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the Iconoclastic council of Hiereia defined the Eucharist as the only true image of Christ. According to the Iconoclastic *horos,* Jesus Christ intentionally avoided bestowing his pictorial image on his followers so that they would not fall once again into idolatry. Instead, he gave bread and wine as the true image of his incarnate body. The Eucharist thus is the only real image of Christ; it is the only symbol that can represent the incarnate body, humanity and divinity. When the priest

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[58] Theodore, *On the Holy Icons,* III, B2.

[59] Theodore, *On the Holy Icons,* I, 12.

[60] Theodore, *On the Holy Icons,* I, 12-3.

offers the bread and wine, they receive sanctity by the Holy Spirit from above through priestly prayer of consecration; and, in this way, the bread and wine of the Eucharist become true images of Christ. The Eucharist is an institution attested by the tradition of the Scripture and the fathers, and it has the consecration of the Holy Spirit.[61]

The second council of Nicea rejected the Iconoclastic definition of the Eucharist as "an image" of Christ, arguing that the Scriptures express clearly that its elements constitute "the very body" and "the very blood" of Christ. According to the council, the patristic tradition never supported the Iconoclastic argument, even though some fathers such as Eustathius and Basil thought that it was convenient to call the Eucharistic elements prior to their consecration the "antitypes". The council argued that the fathers believed that the elements become the real body and blood of Christ after the prayer of consecration, thus confirming its position.[62]

Nicephorus develops his argument in the context of his refutation of Constantine V's doctrine of the Eucharist, which was also the source of the Iconoclastic Eucharistic doctrine proposed by the *horos* of the council of Hiereia.[63] Briefly, the Iconoclastic emperor had argued for the impossibility of describing the twofold nature of Christ, and adduced the elements of the Eucharist as legitimate, eternal memorials of the incarnation. He argued that, in the Last Supper, Christ gave to mankind a representation (*typos*) of his body, which was defined as properly and truly His body by participation and adoption.

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[61] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 261E, 264A-B-C, 268C, 269D.

[62] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 264D-268B; Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 185.

[63] For a detailed treatment of Constantine's doctrine of the Eucharist and its sources see Stephen Gero, "The Eucharistic Doctrine of the Byzantine Iconoclasts and Its Sources," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 68 (1975): 4-22.

Constantine held, in short, that the Eucharist is an image only of the body or the flesh of

Christ and that it is a true image not made by hands (*acheiropoieton*).[64]

Nicephorus asserts that Constantine's doctrine of the Eucharist derives from his

essentialist definition of image, i.e., the assumption that a true image must be of the same

essence (*homoousius*) with the prototype. The patriarch agrees with Constantine that the

Eucharist is a perpetual memorial of the incarnation, but argues for the extension of the

notion of memorials to images as well. He claims that, just as the Eucharist reminds

Christians of Christ, an image of Christ does much the same thing. Therefore, there is no

reason not to extend the notion of a memorial to images as well.[65]

Constantine's designation of the Eucharist as the image of Christ's body was thus

rejected by the patriarch who, on Scriptural grounds, argued instead for an essentialist

understanding of the sacrament. According to him, immediately upon consecration, the

Eucharistic elements become the true deified body of Christ, but not an image of it. He

concedes that the elements might be designated as 'antitypes' of the body of Christ prior

to the consecration. However, as soon as the consecration is made, the bread and wine

turn into the actual body and blood of Christ.[66]

Theodore the Studite similarly argues that the Eucharistic elements become the

very body and blood of Christ. According to him, it was blasphemy and atheism on the

part of the Iconoclasts to call the Eucharist 'the image of Christ.' Basing themselves on

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[64] Stephen Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Constantine V: With Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources* (Louvain: Secretariat Du Corpus, 1977), 45-6.

[65] Parry, *Depicting the Word,* 188; Travis, *In Defense of the Faith,* 115.

[66] Parry, *Depicting the Image,* 189; Travis, *In Defense of the Faith,* 117.

God's own declaration, argues the theologian, Christians confess that by their participation in the Eucharist they receive the actual body and blood of Christ.[67]

Political Theology and Church-Empire Relations

As stated earlier in connection with John of Damascus's views on the political aspect of the controversy, the available sources of the last phase of Iconodule theology do not deal with the subject directly. We thus suggest that a reconstruction of Iconodule political theology is possible by using the indirect evidence in two ways: first, by drawing an overall picture of the theological first principles of Iconodule theology and its worldview, centered on the images, which discounted the body politic as an active agent in the work of Christian salvation; and second, by recalling that, as opposed to the Iconoclastic emphasis on a Christian commonwealth comprised of both the empire and the church as the community of believers, the Iconodules explicitly emphasized the *ecclesia* to the exclusion of the *imperium* as denoting the community of believers. That is to say, their ecclesiology denied the *imperium* any role in the spiritual salvation of Christians, thus limiting the role of the body politic to rather more secular functions.

The second council of Nicea underlined *oikonomia* as opposed to the Iconoclastic emphasis on *theologia*. In other words, the Iconodule soteriology stressed the suffering humanity of the incarnate Christ, as opposed to the Iconoclastic soteriology, which underlined the establishment of a religio-political order as the main vessel of salvation. This distinctive feature of Iconodule theology can be seen in the early proceedings of the sixth session of the council and that of its *horos*, both of which start with Christ rather

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[67] Theodore, *On the Holy Icons,* I, 10.

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than God the Father and generally emphasize the role of Christ's saving dispensation over against the role of God the Father. [68]

Iconodule soteriology also focused on the continuing validity of the incarnation. In post-resurrection history, the incarnate Christ continues his salvific work through his church. As opposed to Iconoclastic soteriology, which presupposed the empire and the church to be co-agents of Christian salvation, Iconodules seemed ready to divest the *imperium* of its previous salvific functions as established by Eusebius of Caesarea and maintained by the official religio-political establishment. Therefore, the main themes of the council of Nicea are the continuing validity of the incarnation (providing Christians with the redemptive benefits of the mysterious unity of the divine and human), a structure where images have an essential role, and an *ecclesia* that excludes the *imperium* as the sole institution of salvation. In this context, the council aimed to correct two misunderstandings on the part of the Iconodules:

Having reviewed, therefore, what has been chattered about on the basis of the Scriptures and of the Fathers, diligently and with consideration, we shall be able…to demonstrate to everyone, in clear exposition, that their tongues have spoken lies when they raised them against the knowledge of the only-begotten Son of God and against the Church, and when spoke iniquities against the stature of his incarnation.[69]

The whole debate, then, revolved around these two themes: the Iconoclasts' condemnation of the church for having fallen into idolatry by promoting images, and their devaluing of the stature of the incarnation. Both of these points had heavy political implications. By singling out the church as the main agent of salvation and defending her infallibility on the grounds of her being guided by Christ, the Iconodules flatly denied

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[68] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 204A, 373E.

[69] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 205E.

any redemptive function to the empire. In addition, by emphasizing the incarnation as the only redemptive reality of post-resurrection history, to which images give access, they refuted its alternative, i.e., the official religio-political ideology, which established the Christian commonwealth and the social project that it represented.

Iconodule soteriology, which focused on the reality of the incarnation and the crucial role of images, represented a worldview that had mostly been shaped by monastic ideals. The fact that all of the three major Iconodule theologians were monks and that they were staunch defenders of images cannot have been mere coincidence. Their contribution confirms our argument that the traditional religio-political ideology of the Byzantine Empire had come to face a challenge from one type of monasticism. Monastic soteriology, marked by seclusion, individualism and, to a certain point, contempt for political involvement, underlined the notions of deification and unity of the divine and human as the highest ideals of a Christian's life.[70]

In this context, it would be useful to engage with John Meyendorff's thoughts on the role of monasteries in support of the case for images. Reflecting on the lasting significance of the iconoclastic issue, Meyendorff contends that in the Orthodox victory over the Iconoclasts, the real credit should be accorded to the monks rather than the high

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[70] For Monasticism and the influence of the monks and holy men in early Byzantine History see Cyril Mango, "Monasticism" in his *Byzantium: the Empire of New Rome* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980): 105-24; William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Daniel Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002); Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *The Journal of Roman Studies,* vol. 61 (1971): 80-101 and "A Dark-Age: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy," *The English Historical Review* 88 (1973): 1-34.

ecclesiastical dignitaries; for it was the monks who resisted the Iconoclastic emperors and

their claims of caesaropapism.[71] Meyendorff continues as follows:

Thus the iconoclastic controversy was largely a confrontation between the state and a non-conformist, staunchly independent monasticism, which assumed the prophetic role of standing for the independence of the Gospel from the "world." The fact that this role was assumed by the monks, and not by the highest canonical authority of the Church, underlines the fact that the issue was the defense, not of the Church as an institution, but of the Christian faith as the way to eternal salvation...Theologically they maintained a tradition of faithfulness to the past, as well as a sense of the existential relevance of theology as such. Their role in later-Byzantine theological development remained decisive for centuries.[72]

We earlier expressed our reservations over the 'Caesaropapist' reading of the controversy

in the introduction and chapter IV when elaborating on the *Ecloga*. The gist of our

argument was that the Iconoclastic emperors were essentially motivated by theological

reasons rather than political ones, and that their Iconoclastic position also represented a

well-established theological stand within the church. This is why we emphasized that

both parties were constituted by churchmen and their imperial associates.[73] However, we

largely agree with Meyendorff's view on the role of the monks. His contention that the

true issue at stake was the role of the Christian faith as the path to eternal salvation

supports our argument that the controversy was essentially a clash between two different

soteriologies. We argue that the Iconoclastic soteriology derived its principles from the

Eusebian "Imperial theology", while that of the Iconodules represented a monastic

interpretation of the Chalcedonian soteriology. Meyendorff's last remark on the

everlasting influence of the monks on later Byzantine theology supports our argument

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[71] Meyendorff, "The Iconoclastic Crisis," 51.

[72] Meyendorff, "The Iconoclastic Crisis," 51.

[73] See above, page 193.

that the final victory of Iconodulism also meant that certain principles of the monastic

worldview were appropriated as the official ideology of the Byzantine Church.[74]

According to the Iconodules, Christ's experience of the incarnation is the only

key to salvation. After the ascension, Christ, maintaining his incarnate position, guides

his church, and the church promotes and communicates the benefits of his redemptive

dispensation. Icons, accordingly, are providential media that help Christians remember

and cherish the redemptive benefits of the mysterious unity of the divine and human. The

Iconoclasts thus were wrong to claim that the church had fallen into idolatry, for the

images were established by the church under the direct guidance of Christ in order to help

Christians remember the redemptive dispensation and, eventually, join the mysterious

unity of the divine and human:

> However, they have dared to anathematize what has been handed down by Christ to us, his holy Church, for the remembrance of his redemptive dispensation, failing to understand that nothing that exists in the Church has been done without Him.[75]

Repetition of the theme of the church's infallibility on various spheres suggests that the

Iconoclastic accusations against the church had a big impact on the Iconodules. The

council expresses one of its most explicit views on the priestly role of the body politic in

reply to the Iconoclastic *horos* that had posited such a role for the emperors. The

Iconoclastic *horos* argued that Christ entrusted Christian society to the care of the church

and later to the empire. Christ commissioned his disciples and apostles and later on the

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[74] For a detailed exposition of the Iconodule worldview, see chapter III, heading *"Politeuma"* versus *"Iconomachy"*.

[75] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 212C.

emperors, all of whom were guided by the Holy Spirit, to teach doctrine, protect

Christians, and provide them with salvation. The text thus bestows on the political

establishment and emperors a divine role in the Christian salvation.[76] The council of the

second Nicea, conversely, rejects the Iconoclastic argument that the emperors were ever

given the right "to equip and teach us."[77] Calling for a clear-cut separation of functions,

the council of Nicea held that teaching was the privilege of the priests, and that the

emperors had no such authority:

When, therefore, they say, 'to equip and teach us,' they must be thinking that they are offering now a certain great grace, greater than that of the holy Apostles. However, since the participants of that council were bishops, entrusted with the perfection of the apostolic commandments, they ought not to have taught otherwise, nor to have been taught by others.[78]

Those churchmen argued the council, who acknowledged such an apostolic privilege as

having been bestowed upon the emperors, must have been doing this not on any

justifiable principle but only to gain some mundane benefits. Their attitude therefore was

nothing but "flattery for rulers."[79] On the other hand, the rulers who appropriated such

priestly functions to themselves, which essentially belonged to Christ and his church, are

motivated by their shameful desires for glory. On the whole, the council accuses the

Iconoclasts of appropriating a wrong soteriology:

Because they have been oblivious of the birth of God the Word from a virgin, and of his great and redemptive mystery which He granted to us when He came in flesh, delivering us from the error of the

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[76] Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 225D.

[77] Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 225D.

[78] Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 228C.

[79] Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 228E.

idols and from the insane worship of them, and because they have misappropriated this salvation in their desire to gain glory for themselves, they are publicized by the catholic Church ingloriously.[80]

The council thus blamed the Iconoclasts for misreading the scriptures to subvert the mystery of salvation, in order that they ascribe the glory to themselves:

They take, therefore, the words of the Apostle and of the Scripture wickedly and maliciously, and they hasten to subvert the great mystery of salvation—that of the dispensation of Christ our God, through which we were freed from the error of the idols—and to ascribe the glory to themselves. However, none of the Christians takes heed of them. For all of us confess that Christ, our true God, by his advent in flesh, separated us from the error of idols and from every pagan religion. If they do not confess that this has happened, they do not bear his name either [i.e., 'Christians'].[81]

Iconodule theologians maintained that the church is the only agent of salvation through which Christ himself works salvation and fights against the enemies of the truth. The council thus assumes a separation of functions between the church, as the agent of spiritual salvation and teaching, and the empire that functions as provider of material salvation. If emperors assume salvific roles, they are blamed with piracy, as it is Christ who works Christian salvation:

However, if, as they say, it was the council of bishops and presbyters and the power of kings which delivered us from the error of idols, then the human race has been deceived about the truth, since one person has saved it but someone else is boasting that he did. For, while it was Christ our God Who delivered us from the error and the deception of the idols, they boast that they are the ones who have accomplished the redemption...Having disregarded the praise which is fitting to and proper for kings, they have addressed the kings with what, instead, refers to Christ our God. They ought rather to have praised the braveries of them, their victories over the enemies, the defeat of the barbarians—which many of them have depicted on icons and on wall paintings for the purpose of remembering the narrative, this way urging the spectators to exert themselves in desire and zeal—their keeping safe their subjects, their council meetings, their trophies of victories, their social gatherings, the civil ordinations, and the reconstruction of cities. These are deeds which for a king are worthy of praise, deeds which invite every citizen to be of good will.[82]

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[80] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 232A.

[81] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 288B-C.

[82] Sahas, *Icon and Logos,* 356A, B.

The above passage suggests that the Iconodules assumed these priestly functions as being fulfilled by the church and political well-being of Christians was to be taken care of by emperors. This understanding ran counter to the traditional Byzantine religio-political ideology, which had given emperors priestly and civic roles as they were established by the Eusebian "Imperial Theology."

To Patriarch Nicephorus, Christ's incarnation was essential to man's salvation.[83] The salvation that had been worked through the incarnation was not a "once and for all" and complete phase of salvation history. On the contrary, the incarnation commenced a new era and its benefits for humanity are perpetual. The patriarch explains the irrevocable gifts brought by Christ's redemptive work as follows:

It was his voice that renewed the nature of man, cleaned the air, threw open the heavenly gates for us, opened the entrance to the holy of holies for us, established men as companions of angels, loosed the barrier [of death], and reconciled us, who were adversaries because of [our] sin, with God the Father.[84]

Christ's priestly ministry involved his mediation between God and man, reconciliation with the Father, and more importantly, it inaugurated a new era for humanity, where the latter is given a new existence.[85] The Incarnation and its continuing redemptive benefits thus are central to the salvation of Christians in post-resurrection history.

One of the most important themes of the patriarch's soteriology is Christ's ever-present redemptive work. In this context, he emphasizes the theme of eternal sanctification of the church by Christ.[86] The ever-presence of Christ in the Christian

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[83] Travis, *In Defense of the Faith*, 87.

[84] Travis, *In Defense of the Faith*, 88.

[85] Travis, *In Defense of the Faith*, 89.

[86] Travis, *In Defense of the Faith*, 90.

salvation makes him the active agent of salvation. The theme contrasts with the Iconoclastic notion that Christ commissioned his church and later emperors to do the redemptive work in post-resurrection history. The patriarch thus holds that in post-resurrection history Christ operates as the active agent of salvation, which saves Christians in cooperation with his church. By implication, political institutions and emperors had no share in this soteriological paradigm.

Nicephorus defines human salvation in terms of achieving likeness to God.[87] Man can achieve salvation through active participation in the mysterious unity of the divine and human as initiated by Christ. Christians can achieve salvation through the renewal of their natures, which elevate them to immortality and incorruptibility. As a consequence of such a restoration, they become new men, glorified and similar to God (*kath'homoiosin*).[88] Nicephorus' concept of salvation is a mystical union with the divine nature and entirely depends on one's focusing on the reality of the incarnation. Images take a crucial role in this process to help Christians concentrate on the redemptive realities of the incarnation and also to mediate between the divine and individual Christians.

Taken as a whole, Nicephorus's soteriology is charged with monastic ideals and notions. Glorification and deification are the highest goals of salvation. As mentioned before, this soteriology has no immediate reference to social and political aspects of Christianity. As opposed to the Iconoclastic soteriology, which defines righteousness as

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[87] Travis, *In Defense of the Faith,* 91.

[88] Travis, *In Defense of the Faith,* 91-2.

being a good citizen of the Christian commonwealth,[89] the patriarch's soteriology emphasizes one's participation in the divine nature. Social and political endeavours thus are downplayed in the perspective of salvation and, consequently, become secularized.

We can conclude, then, that Nicephorus's political theology assumes a separation of functions between the empire and the church. The body politic is the institution responsible for secular matters such as the security and well-being of Christians, taxes and the like. The church, on the other hand, is the only institution that is responsible for Christians' salvation and safeguarding orthodox doctrine. The exclusion of the body politic from the work of salvation is more clearly underlined in the patriarch's ecclesiology. According to him, Christ works Christians' salvation through the church. Significantly, he does not state that Christ has commissioned his church for the task, but emphasizes that Christ and his church are actually one.[90]

As opposed to the Iconoclasts who believed the Christian commonwealth—the church and the empire—to be a reflection of heavenly Jerusalem, Nicephorus singles out the church to be the reflection of the heavenly Jerusalem. According to him, the church reveals the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, so that and through the church, Christians can participate in the kingdom of heaven.[91] The patriarch compares the church to a city fortified by a strong wall. Christ is the cornerstone of the city. Sermons of the prophets, apostolic teachings, and the dogmas of the fathers are compared to fortified

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[89] This notion is implicit in the general outlook of the *Ecloga,* which assumes that salvation of the Christian society as a whole depended on the maintenance of correct belief and practice on the religious level, and on the principles of justice and righteousness on the political and administrative levels. For a detailed elaboration of the Iconoclastic soteriology consult, chapter IV above.

[90] Travis, *In Defense of the Faith,* 95. In the context of our overall argument, our interest in the patriarch's ecclesiology is rather limited. For a comprehensive treatment of his ecclesiology see O'Connell, *The Ecclesiology of St. Nicephorus;* for the salvific role of the church see especially, pp. 79-90.

[91] Travis, *In Defense of the Faith,* 96.

towers build to keep the kingdom secure.[92] The church is the 'City of God' and her

primary function is to promote deification:

It is the City of God, where the dough of our weak humanity is leavened by the Word of God come down
from heaven so that we become the Bread of God, transformed to the splendour of His divinity.[93]

The above passage is particularly striking as it describes deification as the ultimate

salvific function of the church. As elaborated before in relation to John of Damascus's

soteriology,[94] this kind of salvation has no reference to the social and political realms of

Christian life but rather appropriates the monastic ideals of salvation from the church.

Nicephorus's ecclesiology thus contrasts with that of the Iconoclasts; who engaged the

church and the empire as twin institutions of the Christian commonwealth that are

equally responsible for the salvation of Christians.[95] We have explained that the

Iconoclastic ecclesiology goes back to Eusebius's notion of the Christian society.[96] To

conclude, Nicephorus' soteriology and ecclesiology have both explicit overtones that

exclude not only the *imperium*, but also the political and social realms of Christian life

from the perspective of Christian salvation.

Theodore the Studite also emphasizes the place of the incarnation at the center of

Christian salvation. He argues that the incarnation is a continuous salvific reality of post-

resurrection history and that Christians achieve salvation through their participation in

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[92] Travis, *In Defense of the Faith,* 96.

[93] O'Connell, *Ecclesiology of St. Nicephorus,* 82.

[94] For John's soteriology see chapter V, heading, "Idolatry versus the Incarnation."

[95] The emperor Justinian I (527-65) defines the ideal of the Christian commonwealth, see chapter III,

[96] For Eusebius's notion of Christian society, see chapter II, heading, "The Problem of Eusebius's
Ecclesiology and Modern Interpretations."

this "novel mystery of the dispensation." [97] Images, accordingly, refer to and derive from this continuing reality of the incarnation. They represent the reality of the divine *oikonomia* and facilitate Christians' participation in the mysterious unity of the divine and human. Christians offer veneration to images and, as a result, their minds ascend from material images to their prototypes.

Theodore argues that the church is the only legitimate authority to administer the work of salvation and to decide on matters of faith and dogma. He was brave enough to challenge the emperor Leo V (813-20) at the Christmas Day meeting in 814 in his palace on the issue of Iconoclasm. The monk Michael reports him as saying:

Pay attention, O Emperor [said Theodore], to what St. Paul says to you through us on the subject of ecclesiastical order. Be informed that an Emperor is not permitted to obtrude himself as judge and decider in matters such as these...If you admit to being devout, then you must follow the apostolic canons. Now this is what is said: 'God has appointed in the Church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers (I Cor. 12:28).' See, it is these, not the Emperor who set forth matters having to do with faith...and who search out the things that are pleasing to God. The holy Apostles nowhere wrote that an Emperor manages ecclesiastical affairs....If you are willing to be a son of the Church...simply follow in all respects your spiritual Father [the Patriarch].[98]

In contrast to the Iconoclasts, who generally recognized imperial authority on matters of faith, Theodore denies such authority to the emperors. As we have previously seen in John of Damascus, Theodore limits the imperial authority to secular matters:

Ecclesiastical affairs...pertain to priests and to teachers; the administration of external concerns...is proper to the Emperor. For the Apostle says, "God has appointed in the Church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers"; he nowhere mentions Emperors. It is the former who legislate on matters to do with dogmas and the faith...You are to follow them and in no way usurp their office'...[99]

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[97] Theodore, *On the Holy Icons,* I, 4.

[98] Cholij, *Theodore the Stoudite,* 144-5.

[99] Cholij, *Theodore the Stoudite,* 145, footnote 100.

To conclude, in the same line with other Iconodule theologians, Theodore believed that matters of faith and dogma have to be taken care of by the church authorities. He refuses any imperial interference in matters of faith. On the other hand, he believed in the divine origin of the political order and acknowledged their essential role to provide Christians with material benefits and security. As opposed to the Iconoclasts, who bestowed on the body politic an essential role in Christian salvation, Theodore assumed more clear-cut role definitions between the church and empire.

Summary

Starting from the Chalcedonian notion of "the unconfused union" of the divine and human natures in one hypostasis, the Iconoclasts denied any claim of circumscribing this unity in an image, for the divine nature could not be circumscribed even during the incarnation. The council of Nicea observed that the Christological problem raised by their rivals lay in the delicate relation between the divine nature and the property of "circumscription." They claimed that it was Christ's perfect humanity—not his divinity—that was depicted in an image. However, the council was not entirely successful in fully addressing the Christological problem.

Patriarch Nicephorus argued that the two natures share their properties because of their unity in the hypostatic union. He claimed that sharing natural properties makes it possible for them to share one name in the union. Since the divine and human natures of the Incarnate Christ share their properties, Christ is both capable of being depicted and incapable of being depicted. It is therefore necessary, argued the patriarch, to acknowledge that after the union, when the Word became flesh and dwelt among people,

the uncircumscribed divinity was circumscribed together with the flesh. Icons thus derive their legitimacy from Christ's complete circumscription.

Theodore the Studite similarly argues that the divine and human natures met in one hypostasis and share their properties including circumscription. Theodore maintained that the divine nature was circumscribed during the incarnation and that state continued after the resurrection. That is to say, the incarnation continues until the end of the world and continues to generate salvation for Christians. Images, accordingly, represent, communicate, and mediate this reality. It is thus imperative, argues Theodore, to acknowledge all human properties—including circumscription—in the person of the Incarnate Christ.

On the issues of image and veneration theories, the second council of Nicea argued that an icon shared only the name of its prototype, not necessarily its essence, and criticized the Iconoclasts for arguing that an icon shared the same essence with its prototype. According to the council, to signify an icon by the name of its prototype was enough to transfer the honour to the prototype; and in this way an icon becomes a mediator between the worshipper and the prototype. That an icon shares the name of its prototype, argued the council, justifies offering it a relative veneration.

Nicephorus rejects the iconoclastic application of the term "circumscription" to the act of a painter. He explains that a being can be circumscribed either by place, or by time and beginning, or by apprehension. Christ's humanity was circumscribed in three ways during the incarnation. Nicephorus argues that what a painter does in relation to a certain archetype cannot be called circumscription, as he does none of the above-mentioned three actions. He only brings about a visible and bodily form of its archetype.

An image is related to its archetype only by resemblance. It is a separate being from its model. The relation of resemblance makes it possible for an icon to share the name of its prototype and to be worthy of receiving a relative veneration. Theodore asserts that an image is identical with its prototype only in likeness and not in essence. The relation of likeness gives an image a relative participation in the grace and honour of the prototype. This relative participation, in turn, justifies a relative veneration to be offered to the image.

All the Iconodule theologians reject the Iconoclastic designation of the Eucharist as the only true image of Christ, and argue that, through the prayer of consecration, the Eucharistic elements become the very body and blood of Christ. They contend that the Scriptures only support an essentialist notion of the Eucharist while a symbolic understanding of the sacrament is supported neither by the Scriptures nor by the patristic tradition.

As for the issue of church-empire relations, the council of Nicea, Patriarch Nicephorus, and Theodore the Studite all emphasized the continuing validity of the incarnation, which provides Christians with the redemptive benefits of the mysterious unity of the divine and human. In this structure images had an essential role in facilitating Christians' participation in the mysterious unity, while the *ecclesia* is defined as the sole institution of salvation to the exclusion of the *imperium*. The iconodule soteriology, which focused on the reality of the incarnation and images, represented a worldview that had mostly been shaped by monastic ideals. Monastic soteriology, which is described by seclusion, individualism, and, to a certain extent, contempt for political involvement,

underlined the notions of deification and unity of the divine and human as the highest ideals of a Christian's life.

According to the Iconodules, Christ's experience of the incarnation is the only key to salvation. After the ascension, Christ, maintaining his incarnate position, continues to guide his church, while the church promotes and communicates the redemptive implications of his redemptive dispensation. Icons, accordingly, are providential media that help Christians remember and cherish the redemptive benefits of the mysterious unity of the divine and human.

According to Iconodule ecclesiology, the church is the only agent of salvation. Through it, Christ himself works Christian salvation and fights against the enemies of the truth. The council thus assumes a separation of functions between the church, as the agent of spiritual salvation and teaching, and the empire, whose function is that of providing material salvation. If emperors assume salvific roles, they should be blamed by piracy, for it is Christ alone who works Christian salvation, in cooperation with his church.

CONCLUSION

This study was an attempt to clarify the relationship between the political and theological discourses during the Iconoclastic controversy and, in this way, to reconstruct the debate over images in a unifying approach that accounts for both its political and theological dimensions. In actual fact, for any coherent reconstruction of the Byzantine Iconoclasm, it is imperative to establish an organic link between its political and theological aspects. With hindsight, it is now clear that the question of images was a politico-theological problem and the prospects of 'theological propriety' and 'political expediency' were correlated in the minds of the Iconoclastic reformers and their Iconodule rivals. Indeed, this correlation was established through the larger soteriological paradigms represented by the Iconoclastic and the Iconodule parties. Their respective attitudes towards the religious and political aspects of the debate were similarly shaped by those different soteriologies.

The Iconodules held a soteriology, which focused on images and the continuing reality of the incarnation. They defined salvation as a Christian's participation in that continuing reality of the incarnation, the mysterious saving unity of the divine and human. As such, the Iconodule definition of salvation was a process of *theosis*, where images played an indispensable role, as they were believed to mediate the redemptive benefits of the incarnation to Christians. Being mostly shaped by monastic ideals, the Iconodule soteriology is identified with seclusion, individualism, and, to a certain extent,

contempt for worldly political involvement. It underlined the notions of deification and the unity of the divine and human as the highest ideals of a Christian's life. The main reference of the Iconodule soteriology was the Chalcedonian Christological definition, according to which, the establishing of the incarnation as the sole saving reality of post-resurrection history was considered a Christological and theological necessity. The Iconodules assumed a separation of functions between the church, as the agent of spiritual salvation and teaching, and the empire, whose function was that of providing for material well-being. If emperors assumed salvific roles, they were blamed by piracy, for it was Christ alone who accomplished Christian salvation in cooperation with his church.

By contrast, the Iconoclastic movement represents a reaction against such a worldview that effectively denied the essential role of the Byzantine commonwealth in the economy of salvation. In this context, the Iconoclasts reasserted the soteriology represented by the traditional Eusebian religio-political ideology of the Byzantine Empire. To them, salvation was realized through a Christian's active participation in the social, political, and religious life of the Byzantine Commonwealth, as well as establishing the principles of Christianity in all strata of the Byzantine commonwealth, which was designated as being the 'mimesis' of the kingdom of heaven.

Iconoclasts reclaimed the salvific roles of the emperor and the body politic on the basis of the principles of Christian society previously established by the Eusebian "Imperial Theology" in the fourth century. As a positive solution to the problem of Christian society in the face of the Christianization of the Roman Empire and the engagement of the church and empire in the Constantinian era, Eusebius's "Imperial Theology" established the foundations of a Christian commonwealth, in which the

Roman Empire was given an important salvific role in tandem with the church. The implied soteriology of the Eusebian paradigm was such that the Christian commonwealth—Church and Empire combined—was the main institutional vessel of salvation. Individual Christians' positive contribution to the maintenance of this realm through their participation in its political, social, or religious life was considered to be a sacred duty and an act of worship on their part. The communal salvation of the Christian commonwealth was secured through the diffusion of the Christian principles among all strata of Byzantine life. The Iconoclastic reformers adhered resolutely to this traditional salvific role of the Byzantine Commonwealth. Eusebian political theology thus became the main reference point for the Iconoclastic reformers in their attempt to reassert the traditional religio-political ideology of Byzantine Empire and to reclaim the essential roles of the emperors and the body politic in Christian salvation.

The main contribution of our thesis to modern scholarship of the Byzantine Iconoclastic controversy is to reconstruct the debate in the light of the contending theological paradigms of the Iconoclastic and the Iconodule parties, which shaped not only their attitudes towards images, but also their political stands in relation to the Byzantine Empire's involvement in ecclesiastical politics. By clarifying the correlation between the political and theological discourses during the Iconoclastic controversy, we propose a new unified reading of the debate, which seeks to balance some of the shortcomings of the more polarized modern accounts. The latter interpret Iconoclasm either on purely political and economical terms, where the doctrinal aspects are treated as 'an outer sign or a hieroglyph' of a given political stand, or alternatively as a merely

theological debate, where the views of the Iconoclastic or Iconodule theologians are divorced from the social and political problems of their times.

Viewed from our perspective, the Iconoclastic debate is explained as a soteriological dispute where the worldview represented by the traditional religio-political ideology of the Byzantine Empire and the worldview represented by proponents of images were set against each other. This new synthetic reading also appeals to two essential theological cornerstones of the Byzantine tradition—the Eusebian "Imperial Theology" and the Christological definition of the council of Chalcedon—as key reference points, against which the political and doctrinal stands of both parties were constructed and interpreted.

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