

## THE RELIGIOUS POLITICS OF THE BYZANTINE EMPERORS IN THE 4<sup>TH</sup>-9<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES

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**Abstract:** After the official recognition of Christianity in 313, Emperor Constantine the Great became the most important protector of Christian dogma and discipline, always present among the bishops, intervening in all matters of the Church, legislating and judging for it. The Byzantine emperors proclaimed the Christianity as a State religion by multiplying and increasing the immunities, but also the privileges of this new religion, which they defended in all situations through their protection. Within religious politics, the Byzantine emperors will be the ones organizing, directing, convoking, and presiding over all the councils, who wanted to clarify and crystallize the teachings of faith of the Church, dictating the oaths of faith. These new relations created by Emperor Constantine the Great between the Church and the State, were continued and maintained by all his successors, whether they were Orthodox or Aryan. Unfortunately, throughout the history of the Byzantine Empire, there were also some emperors who brutally intervened in the Church's life, trying to subordinate it to them, thus increasing the imperial authority over it. All these abuses led to great unrests and schisms in the life of Christianity and sometimes caused ruptures between emperors, patriarchs, and the papacy.

**Keywords:** Jesus Christ, Christianity, the Edict of Milan, the Henotikon, the Ektesis, the Typos, icons.

### Introduction

One of the most important events in universal history is the cultural and religious crisis that the Roman Empire went through in the fourth century. Thus,

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the ancient pagan culture clashed with Christianity, which during the reign of Emperor Constantine the Great (306-337) received the official recognition in 313, and Emperor Theodosius the Great (379-395) will declare Christianity the dominant religion in the state, in 381. During this period, the Christianity and the pagan Hellenism gradually interfered, forming an Eastern Greek-Christian culture, which would later be known as Byzantine, and its center was Constantinople, the new capital of the Roman Empire.<sup>2</sup>

Emperor Constantine the Great wanted to strengthen his imperial authority as much as possible and, this way, he proclaimed Christianity as a state religion by increasing the immunities and privileges of this new religion, which he defended in all situations. Therefore, he became the most important guardian of the Christian dogma and discipline, being always present among the bishops, interfering in all the issues of the Church, legislating and judging on its behalf. He was also the one who organized, directed, convoked, and presided over all the councils that wanted to clarify and crystallize the teachings of faith of the Church, dictating the oaths of faith. These new relations which Emperor Constantine the Great created between the Church and the state were continued by all his successors, whether they were Orthodox or Aryan. This despotic authority of the emperor over the Church was called the Caesaropapism<sup>3</sup>.

### **The religious politics of Emperor Constantine the Great**

Enlightened by divine grace, Emperor Constantine the Great realized that in order to be able to ensure the unity of Christianity, first he had to help and promote the Church, and from this unity to ensure the element of life and resistance of the Empire. Related to what the emperor Constantine the Great did for the Church, his merits are quite special, because he had to make the Christian Church, which was the most despised and persecuted, the most important institution of the Empire by the freedom it granted it to it, especially through the support and privileges that Christianity enjoyed during this period.

Two personalities of the Western Church, Hosius de Corduba (256-357/358) and Miltiades, Pope of Rome (311-314) joined the entourage of Emperor Constantine the Great. Hosius de Corduba managed to become one of the most

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<sup>2</sup> A. A. VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, Iași, 2010, 89.

<sup>3</sup> C. DIEHL, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, Craiova, 1999, 22-23.

important advisers of Emperor Constantine the Great throughout his entire life. They guided and supported him in all the issues facing the Christian Church. Emperor Constantine sent Hosius de Corduba as his representative with a letter to Cecilian, Bishop of Carthage, to provide aid to the entire African Church.

The kindness of Emperor Constantine the Great was also shown to Pope Miltiades. Thus, during his sojourn in the capital, Constantine had the opportunity to meet the bishop of Rome. The emperor heard that the Pope was considered the successor of St. Peter the Apostle, and the leader of the entire Catholic Church: the emperor thought that the Pope should have a residence according to his rank and thus conceded to him the Lateran Palace, which was in imperial ownership. Concerned about the unity of the Church, it was Emperor Constantine the Great who wrote a letter to Pope Miltiades to call for a council in Rome to resolve the problems emerged within the African Church.

As can be seen from this letter to Pope Miltiades, Emperor Constantine the Great dedicated special importance to the Christian Church, wishing that within it be peace, unity, and harmony, a concern which he had throughout his entire supremacy.

### **The Edict of Mediolanum / Milan / Milano**

Emperor Constantine the Great ought to be appreciated in a very special way for his love for the Christian Church, which was especially evident in the Edict of Milan. Thus, on February 313, he met Licinius in Milan, and reconfirmed the winter agreement of 311-312. They shared the empire and Constantine offered his sister, Constantia, to marry Licinius. On this occasion they also wrote to the governor of Asia a letter - later called the Edict of Milan, and this text achieved exceptional historical prestige because it gives Christians the right to freely practice their worship.<sup>4</sup>

This is the text of the Edict of Milan of March 313, and as we could read, we noticed that two pagans gave full freedom of expression to the Christian Church, and not only: they demanded that all the properties that belonged to it, churches, likewise other goods “*to be returned without any opposition to Christians*”. Moreover, from the text of the Edict we see that the return of the goods was

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<sup>4</sup> T. CHRISTENSEN, *The so-called Edict of Milan*, *Classica et Mediaevalia*, Copenhagen, 35, 1984, 129-175.

not conditioned by the number of Christians; actually, they had to be returned as soon as possible and in full: “*all those places are, by your intervention, to be immediately restored to the Christians*”.

Thus, this Edict voided all previous acts of persecution against Christians. From now on, they will be able to profess their faith in public fearlessly. Nevertheless, all their properties confiscated previously were returned to them, and from that moment Christianity began to become increasingly visible and present in the Empire. The Edict becomes law, posted, and notified to all, therefore enforced. It is very important as the Christian Church receives legal personality, allowing it to receive donations, inheritances, likewise, to achieve assets for the practice of worship: lands and buildings.

Another innovation brought by the Edict of Milan was the freedom of choice of religion, recognizing a plurality of cults. From now on, the individual was the decisive factor in choosing religion and not the group, as it was formerly. The great importance of this Edict lies in the fact that it not only allowed Christianity to exist, but above all, it placed it under the state protection.<sup>5</sup>

Emperor Constantine the Great was the first one to implement the provisions of this Edict, so he began to favor the Church with financial aid, and with other legal privileges. He understood that the help he gave to the Christian Church must be extended to those who served this cult, and the clergy received special attention<sup>6</sup>. In a letter he sent to proconsul Anullinus, he asks him to relieve the clergy of public duties.

The privileges that the emperor Constantine the Great granted to the Christian clergy did not seek to restrict the practice of other confessions, nor did they contribute to the compulsion of pagans or Jews to convert to Christianity<sup>7</sup>. From now on, every citizen could leave his property as a legacy to the Church, and it acquired the right of patrimony. Also, very important privileges were given to the episcopal tribunals, and decisions of the episcopal court had to be sanctioned by civil judges. Unfortunately, these additional duties led to too many worldly interests in the lives of the bishops. During this period the Church became materially enriched by landowning properties, gifts, or donations of money and

<sup>5</sup> VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 97.

<sup>6</sup> C. DUPONT, *Les privileges des clers sous Constantin*, RHE, 62, 1967, 729-752.

<sup>7</sup> P. CHUVIN, *Chronique des derniers paiens: la disparation du paganisme dans l'Empire romain, du regne de Constantin a celui de Justinien*, Paris, 1990, 37-39.

grain, which came from state resources. Moreover, Christians could no longer be compelled to attend pagan holidays.

During his supremacy, Emperor Constantine the Great was also an important founder of churches in all parts of his vast Empire. In Rome, he built in the Roman Forum the so-called Basilica of Maxentius and shortly after the battle of Milvian Bridge, possibly in 313 began the construction of the church of St. John in Lateran, on the slope of Caelian Hill, southeastern Rome. Construction progressed promptly, so the church was inaugurated in 318. The Church of St. John Lateran had a central nave of one hundred meters long, ending with an apse and two naves on each side of the nave, with a total width of over fifty-three meters. From its inauguration in 318 to the present day, the Basilica of St. John Lateran would set the standard, which was followed by most Christian churches in the East and the West<sup>8</sup>. Also in Rome, Emperor Constantine the Great promptly completed the construction of St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, which was the size and shape of the Basilica of St. John Lateran. Until its reconstruction during the Renaissance (1506-1626), St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican was to be one of the most important centers of Christianity<sup>9</sup>.

In Constantinople, the new capital, Emperor Constantine the Great, built several churches, the most important of which are the Church of the Holy Apostles, the Church of St. Irene. He began the construction of the church of St. Sophia in 330, which will be completed in 360, by his son and successor Constantius (337-361). In Jerusalem, on the place where the Savior Jesus Christ was buried, he built the church of the Holy Sepulcher, on the Mount of Olives, the place of the Ascension of the Savior, he built the church of the Ascension, and in Bethlehem, the place of His birth, he built the church of the Nativity. Also, during his supremacy, Emperor Constantine the Great built several churches in other parts of the Empire, as well as in Antioch, Nicomedia, and North Africa<sup>10</sup>.

The attitude of Constantine the Great towards the Church was based on a strong faith, which did not have a decorative role – unfortunately, we see it displayed today by those who lead the world both politically and religiously. In the same way, Emperor Constantine the Great dealt with Christianity. He succeeded in transforming the Christian Church from a minority cult, persecuted for about

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<sup>8</sup> T. E. GREGORY, *O istorie a Bizanțului*, Iași, 2013, 73-75.

<sup>9</sup> GREGORY, *O istorie a Bizanțului*, 77.

<sup>10</sup> VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 98.

three hundred years, into a religion that would become the majority in the Empire. The legal privileges and material benefit that Constantine the Great and his successors bestowed on the bishops of Rome helped them to become popes of the Catholic Church and thereby play an important role as spiritual leaders of Christianity from ancient times to nowadays<sup>11</sup>.

If the Church had not had this support from Emperor Constantine the Great, Christianity would have suffered greatly because of the Christological heresies that arose during its lifetime, and these heresies would have divided the Church, while the paganism that enjoyed State aid and support, would have lasted a long time. Mohammedanism would also have found a Christianity devoid of the protection and help of a large and powerful State. Thus, the Christian Church entered a “golden age”<sup>12</sup>, helped by Emperor Constantine the Great.

### **The *Henotikon***

During the sovereignty of Zeno (476-491) the most important issue, which caused a lot of unrest, was the religious one. Since in Egypt, Syria, and to some extent in Palestine and Asia Minor, the population was predominantly Monophysite and the religious disputes led to numerous conflicts, Acacius, the Patriarch of Constantinople (472-489), who was initially a follower of the decisions of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451, together with Peter Mongus, the patriarch of Alexandria, decided to find a way to reconcile the religious parties. Therefore, they proposed to Emperor Zeno to make their opponents reach a mutual agreement through concessions made by the two sides.

Thus, in 482, at the suggestion of Patriarch Acacius, Emperor Zeno issued an act of union, the *Henotikon*, which was addressed to the Churches under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Alexandria. The *Henotikon* endeavored to avoid any sign of the Orthodox and Monophysite teaching regarding the union of the two natures, divine and human, in the person of the Savior Jesus Christ. The *Henotikon* recognized the decisions of the three Ecumenical Councils,

<sup>11</sup> C. I. DUȘE, *Împăratul Constantin cel Mare-piatră de temelie în promovarea și apărarea creștinismului*, în: vol. *Epoca, personalitatea și contribuția împăratului Constantin cel Mare la libertatea și consolidarea Bisericii creștine*, Simpozionul Internațional Oradea, 23-24 Mai 2014, Oradea 2014, 286-315.

<sup>12</sup> I. RĂMUREANU, M. ȘESAN, T. BODOGAE, *Istoria Bisericească Universală* Vol. I (1-1054), Ediția a III-a revăzută și completată, București 1987, 152-153.

anathematizing Nestorius, Eutychius, and their followers. Additionally, the 12 *Anathematisms* of St. Cyril of Alexandria (370-444) were also accepted, but he stated that Jesus Christ was “*the same nature with the Father, according to Divinity, and of the same nature with us according to humankind*”. The use of the terms “*one nature*” or “*two natures*” was also avoided, and the decision of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon of 451 regarding the union of the two natures in the person of the Savior Jesus Christ was not mentioned.

Although, at the beginning, the *Henotikon* seemed to improve the situation in Alexandria, in the long run it would displease the Orthodox and the Monophysites, and the number of religious parties would become even greater. Pope Felix III (483-492) also protested the *Henotikon*, analyzing the complaints of the Eastern clergy dissatisfied by the decisions of the decree of union, through two councils which he held in Rome on July 28, 484 and October 5, 485 and anathematized Peter Mongus, the patriarch of Alexandria, Peter Fullo, the patriarch of Antioch and Acacius, the patriarch of Constantinople, the cosigners of the document. In response, Patriarch Acacius erased from the diptychs the name of Pope Felix III and sever all ties with Rome, and thus the thirty-five-year Acacian schism was unleashed<sup>13</sup>. The *Henotikon* was a rare example of an emperor’s attempt to impose a religious doctrine by an imperial edict<sup>14</sup>.

Through the religious politics pursued during this period, the emperors endeavored to restore religious unity to the monarchy, even at the risk of a rupture with the papacy. Thus, the *Henotikon* opened a fierce battle between popes and emperors, who fought in religious matters, especially Emperor Anastasius I (491-518) who was a convinced and passionate Monophysite. During these religious movements, the Eastern Church was formed into a separate body<sup>15</sup>.

Consequently, this was the first serious division between the Eastern and Western Churches, which continued until 518, when Justin I (518-527) ascended the throne of the Byzantine Empire<sup>16</sup>. He will communicate to Pope Hormisdas (514-523), on August 1, 518, his ascension to the throne of the Byzantine Empire. Emperor Justin I wanted to reconcile the two Churches, and on September 7, a delegation led by Gratus left for Rome with letters to the Ostrogothic

<sup>13</sup> N. CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului I*, Sibiu, 2007, 199-201.

<sup>14</sup> GREGORY, *O istorie a Bizanțului*, 119.

<sup>15</sup> DIEHL, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 32.

<sup>16</sup> VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 142-144.

king Theodoric and to the Pope Hormisdas. This pope was invited to come to Constantinople or, if he could not come, to send delegates to discuss the Acacian schism. The same delegation had also a letter from Patriarch John II (518-520) and Caesar Justinian, asking Pope Hormisdas to express his position regarding the situation of former Patriarch Acacius. In his response, Pope Hormisdas said that Patriarch Acacius and his successors, up to Patriarch John II, had been removed from the diptychs. Emperor Justin also informed Pope Hormisdas of the steps he had taken to restore the authority of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451.

Pope Hormisdas greatly appreciated the new situation and in this regard, he sent a delegation to Constantinople, which consisted of Bishops Ghermanos and John, the priest Blandus and the deacons Felix and Dioscoros. This delegation was received by Justinian on March 25, 519 with great pomp, and the following day was received by both Emperor Justin I and Patriarch John II. In the reconciliation formula, Pope Hormisdas demanded the anathematization of Nestorius, Eutychius and Dioscorus, as well as the removal from the diptychs of the patriarchs of Alexandria Timothy Elur and Peter Mongus, the patriarch of Antioch Peter Fullo, the patriarchs of Constantinople Acacius (472-489), Fravitas (489- 490), Euphemios (490-496), Macedonius II (496-511) and Timothy I (511-518), who governed during the Acacian schism. Furthermore, Pope Hormisdas called for the acceptance of the *Dogmatic Epistle* of Pope Leo I (440-461) to the Patriarch of Constantinople Flavian (446-449).

On March 28, 519, the reconciliation formula was signed by Patriarch John II, by the bishops present in Constantinople, by the archimandrites of the monasteries and by the senators. The reconciliation of the two Churches was consecrated through a religious service in St. Sophia Cathedral, in the presence of the cosigners and the people. Pope Hormisdas thanked Emperor Justin I and Justinian for their help in reconciling the two Churches<sup>17</sup>.

### **The religious politics of Emperor Justinian**

From 518, a brilliant new era began in the history of the Byzantine Empire, which will bear the name of the great emperor Justinian (527-565). The “Justinian era” was the one that marked the climax of the Byzantine Empire, politically, militarily, economically, and especially culturally. Due to these achievements, the

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<sup>17</sup> CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului* I, 199-202.



reign of Justinian is considered by historians to be the golden age of the early Byzantine period<sup>18</sup>.

When he ascended the throne in 527, Justinian had the ideals of a Roman and Christian emperor. Considering himself the successor of the Roman Caesars, he considered that he had a sacred duty in restoring the unity of the Empire, inside the same borders it had in the 1st-2nd centuries AD. As a Christian emperor, Justinian believed that his mission was to spread the true faith among unbelievers, both among heretics and among the pagans. With this ideology, as a statesman, Justinian dreamed of conquering the whole known world. Now it will be the emperor Justinian who will control the great legislative work, which will later bear his name. His theological culture gave him the opportunity to intervene in the problems that troubled the Church during this period.

From the beginning of his domination, the main purpose of Justinian's church politics was to establish close relations with Rome, and he was therefore the defender of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451, because the decisions of this council were completely rejected by the Eastern provinces. Therefore, Justinian's first concern was to reconcile with Rome and put an end to the schism between the two Churches. In order to seal the alliance with the papal throne and to prove to the pope his zeal as a defender of Christianity, Justinian persecuted brutally the Monophysites of the East for three years<sup>19</sup>.

Thus, during the domination of Justinian, the papal see of Rome enjoyed supreme ecclesiastical authority. In the letters that Justinian sent to the bishop of Rome, he addressed him with the nickname "pope", "pope of Rome", "apostolic father", "pope and patriarch". This title of "pope" was used exclusively for the bishop of Rome. In one of the epistles, Emperor Justinian told the pope that he was: *caput omnium sanctorum ecclesiarum*, "head of all the holy churches"<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, in Novella 131  $\beta$  emperor Justinian clearly stated that "*the most-blessed seat of archbishop of Constantinople, the New Rome, ranks second, after the holy apostolic see of the Ancient Rome*". Through this propinquity to Rome, the new dynasty felt stronger. Consequently, in 525, when the first Roman pontiff visited Constantinople, Pope John I (523-526), Emperor Justinian organized a triumphal reception<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> GREGORY, *O istorie a Bizanțului*, 127.

<sup>19</sup> DIEHL, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 36.

<sup>20</sup> A. KRECHT, *Die Religions-Politik Kaiser Justinians I*, Elibrom Classics, 2005, 62-68.

<sup>21</sup> DIEHL, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 36..

During his domination, Justinian came into conflict with Jews, pagans, and heretics: Manichaeans, Aryans, Nestorians, Monophysites, likewise with representatives of other religious doctrines, which were less important. Repeated laws against pagan sacrifices and the prohibition of pagans in imperial service show us that during this period the Empire was not fully Christianized. This fact is also confirmed by the conversion of a thousand pagans by Bishop John of Ephesus<sup>22</sup> in 540. Emperor Justinian forbade pagans to teach in schools, and in order to eliminate completely the traces of paganism in 529, he suppresses the famous philosophical school in Athens (Platonic Academy), which was founded in 387 BC by Plato (427-347 BC). During the nine hundred years that the Platonic Academy functioned, it trained the best philosophers, who influenced the thinking and the spiritual life of the civilized world, even after it was abolished. After the reorganization of the University of Constantinople by Emperor Theodosius II in 425, the Platonic Academy declined. In his politics of eradicating the paganism, Emperor Justinian failed, as this would secretly continue to exist in remote parts of the Empire<sup>23</sup>.

The art of this period has never been more various, prolific, and freer, meeting all methods of construction and all types of buildings<sup>24</sup>. Henceforward was built the mausoleum of Galle Placidia (about 450), and in the next century - the Neonian and Arian Baptistery, the basilicas of St. Demetrius in Thessalonica, Saints Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople, San Apollinaire Nuovo and San Apollinaire in Classe, followed by the church San Vitale in Ravenna, which were decorated by Byzantine craftsmen with splendid mosaics. Since the period of Justinian, Byzantine art has known its first golden age.

Emperor Heraclius (610-641), son of the exarch of Carthage, overthrew Phocas from dominance, founding a new dynasty, and so, after half a century of tensions, the Byzantine Empire found a leader to take over its destinies. Patriarch Sergius, who had a strong influence on Heraclius' governing politics, made available the church's wealth to Heraclius, and so the emperor was able to rebuild the army<sup>25</sup>. Straightaway, emperor Heraclius defeated the powerful Persian armies between 622 and 628. Following these wars, he managed to recapture several cities, including Ganzak, an important religious center for the Persians,

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<sup>22</sup> GREGORY, *O istorie a Bizanțului*, 131.

<sup>23</sup> VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 165-181.

<sup>24</sup> DIEHL, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 53.

<sup>25</sup> DIEHL, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 57-59.

where he destroyed the Zoroastrian temple of fire, in revenge for the destruction of Jerusalem in 614. In 628, in Persia an uprising broke out in which Chosroes was dethroned and killed. Thus, Heraclius won a total victory, and in 628, after defeating his old rival, he thrived categorically in controlling the East<sup>26</sup>.

### **The *Ektesis-ul* (ἔκθεσις)**

Through these victories, Emperor Heraclius was able to regain the Monophysite provinces of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt for the Byzantine Empire, but also to recover from the Persians the Holy Cross, which will be erected in Jerusalem on Easter day<sup>27</sup> of the year 630.

After achieving these brilliant military victories, Emperor Heraclius endeavored to restore the religious unity of the Byzantine Empire<sup>28</sup>. Therefore, recapturing the Monophysite provinces of Syria and Egypt brought forward the old issue of the state's attitude towards the Monophysites. From the time of his campaigns, Emperor Heraclius began negotiations with the Monophysite bishops to reach a way of church union through certain dogmatic concessions.

This unity would have been possible in the context in which it would have been recognized that in the person of the Savior Jesus Christ would have been two natures, but one work/energy (ἐνέργεια) or one will (θέλημα). From these words will derive Monenergism and Monothelitism, a new heresy. The Monophysite patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch, who were appointed by Emperor Heraclius, showed their willingness to work for an agreement, as should have done Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople (610-638).

Palestinian monk Sophronius, who lived in Alexandria, protested this heresy. After becoming patriarch of Jerusalem in late 633 or early 634, Sophronius sent a synodal letter, known as the *Synodicon*, to Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople (610-638), to Pope Honorius of Rome (625-638), and to other bishops, letter in which he theologially argued the unfoundedness of Monothelitism. Sophronius of Jerusalem (550-638) made a synthesis between the Christology of Pope Leo I the Great (440-461) and that of St. Cyril of Alexandria (370-444) and stated that the work is related to nature and not to the person or the hypostasis.

<sup>26</sup> GREGORY, *O istorie a Bizanțului*, 162-163.

<sup>27</sup> M. KAPLAN, *Bizanț*, București, 2010, 22.

<sup>28</sup> DIEHL, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 60.

Therefore, in the person of the Savior Jesus Christ, there are two natures and two natural works. These are united because one and the same is the worker or the operating subject. Thus, the Logos works the divine as God, and the human as a perfect man, since His humanity does not have its own hypostasis but is hypostasized by the Logos, which is hypostasized. By accepting a divine-human (theandric) work, St. Sophronius of Jerusalem taught that this is not a single work but that it relates to different genres. It is constituted at the same time, and what belongs to divinity and humanity is perfectly manifested in the work of one's own nature or essence in a simultaneous action. St. Sophronius of Jerusalem seems to be the first to introduce the concept of synergism.

Patriarch Sergius was to compose the Christological part of this document, and so he drafted the text of *Ektesis*. He held a council in Constantinople, after which he published a synodal decree in November 638, which provided the deposition of bishops, priests, deacons, and the excommunication of monks and laity in case of non-compliance with this dogmatic document. The *Ektesis* was publicly displayed in the church of St. Sophia, and its doctrine was declared the official imperial position<sup>29</sup>.

Patriarch Cyrus of Alexandria and Emperor Heraclius signed the *Ekthesis*, but Pope Honorius I (625-638), who died on October 12, 638, was unaware of its existence<sup>30</sup>. The new Pope John IV (640-642) did not approve the *Ektesis* and tried to advocate for the teaching of the existence of two wills and works in the person of the Savior Jesus Christ. Since he denounced the Monothelite teaching as heresy, that produced a great enmity between the emperor and the pope.

Seeing this situation, Emperor Heraclius, who anticipated the outbreak of great church disputes, will promulgate this *Ektesis*, that is an exposition of faith, by which two natures and one will ought to be recognized in the person of the Savior Jesus Christ. Although the emperor hoped that this *Ektesis* would lead to the reconciliation of the two sides, his hopes were not fulfilled, for the Arabs conquered<sup>31</sup> Syria in 636, Palestine and Jerusalem in 638, and Egypt in 642. The religious politics of Emperor Heraclius had severe consequences because the Monotheism cause great dissatisfaction in Africa and Italy. Thus, in 646, the exarch of Carthage revolted against the imperial authority, followed by that of

<sup>29</sup> GREGORY, *O istorie a Bizanțului*, 163.

<sup>30</sup> CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului I*, 226-228.

<sup>31</sup> VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 238-239.

Ravenna in 630. Thus followed, progressively, the loss of esteem of the inhabitants of Italy, and correspondingly the opposition of the papacy<sup>32</sup>.

### **The *Typos* (τύπος)**

After Heraclius' death, Emperor Constantius II (641-668) became ruler of the Byzantine Empire. He remained attached to Monotheism, although it lost its political significance because the eastern provinces were conquered by the Arabs, yet especially because Monotheism was an obstacle to the friendship between the emperor and the pope of Rome. Emperor Constantius II made a series of reconciliations with the pope, and in this manner, he offered to make some changes in the Monothelite teaching.

Thus, in 648, he promulgated the *Typos* (τύπος) or the *Rule of Faith*, which void the Heraclius' *Ektesis* of 638. It forbids all Orthodox subjects who are in the spotless Christian faith and belong to the catholic/universal and apostolic Church, to fight or quarrel with one another over a will or a work/energy, or two works/energies and two wills<sup>33</sup>. The *Typos* also forbade the written debates about Heraclius' *Ektesis* of 638, which was displayed in the narthex of St. Sophia Cathedral in Constantinople. The publication of the *Typos* produced an even greater division within the two Churches, and Pope Theodore (642-649) excommunicated Patriarch Paul II of Constantinople (641-653). Therefore, after the representatives of the pope in Constantinople were arrested, beaten and exiled for refusing the *Typos*, Pope Martin I (649-655) convened a council in Rome on October 5-31, 649.

In the presence of representatives of the Greek clergy, Pope Martin I condemned the banned *Ektesis* (*impiisima Ectesis*), and the villainous *Typos* (*scelerosus Typus*). Through its twenty anathemas, the Lateran Council condemned Monenergism and Monothelitism by rejecting the *Ektesis* and *Typos*. Furthermore, bishop Theodore of Faran and the patriarchs Sergius and Pyrrhus of Constantinople were also anathemized, stating that in the person of the Savior Jesus Christ are two natures who are unmistakably united, two natural wills, divine and human, and two natural works, divine and human, which they are in perfect harmony.

<sup>32</sup> DIEHL, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 63.

<sup>33</sup> K. J. von HEFELE, *A History of the Church*, vol. 5, Edinburgh, 1896, 95-96.

Emperor Constantius II became angry with Pope Martin I and ordered the exarch of Ravenna to arrest him and send him to Constantinople. Thus, on June 17, 653, the exarch Calliopa entered Rome with the army and arrested Pope Martin I, and after keeping him in captivity for one year and three months, he sent him to Constantinople; there he was subjected to terrible humiliations and was thrown into prison and sentenced to death. A little later he was sent into exile to the Tauric Kherson where he died on September 16, 655<sup>34</sup>; it was the same place in which St. Clement the Roman received martyrdom in 101<sup>35</sup>.

The great theologian St. Maximus the Confessor (580-662) protested strongly against the *Typos* and the Monothelism doctrine. St. Maximus the Confessor supported Pope Martin and condemned the actions of Emperor Constantius II. Due to this assertiveness, St. Maximus the Confessor was also brought to Constantinople. In 655, he was convicted of breach of betrayal: his tongue and right hand were mutilated so that he could speak and write no more against Monothelism<sup>36</sup>; he was exiled in the beginning in Thrace, and then in Lazika, in the Caucasus, where he died in 662. Finally, Emperor Constantius II managed to impose by force his will on the Church, although Pope Martin and St. Maximus the Confessor were strong voices of the Church's independence opposing what they considered imperial tyrannical behavior<sup>37</sup>.

The emperor and patriarch of Constantinople will continue negotiations with Pope Eugene I (657) and eventually they will be able to make peace with Pope Vitalian (657-672), and thus the schism in the Church has ceased. This reconciliation of the emperor with the Church of Rome was very important for the Byzantine Empire, since it strengthened the emperor's position in Italy<sup>38</sup>.

### **The first period of the iconoclastic dispute (726-780)**

The history of the iconoclastic dispute is divided into two periods. Thus, the first one began in 726 and lasted until 780, officially ending with the Seventh

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<sup>34</sup> CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului I*, 229-230.

<sup>35</sup> C. I. DUȘE, *Imperiul Roman și creștinismul în timpul Sfântului Clement Romanul*, Cluj-Napoca, 2020, 402-405.

<sup>36</sup> C. VOICU, *Patrologie III*, București, 2010, 35-53.

<sup>37</sup> GREGORY, *O istorie a Bizanțului*, 172-173.

<sup>38</sup> VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 239-240.

Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 787. The second period began in 802/813 and ended in 843 through the so-called “restoration of Orthodoxy”<sup>39</sup>.

Emperor Leo III the Isaurian (717-740) ordered in 726 the first measures to remove the icons from churches and public places, therefore began the Byzantine imperial iconoclasm. The faithful, the clergy and the monks of Constantinople protested these measures. These protests resulted in some acts of violence, and the riots in Constantinople and in European themes led Emperor Leo III the Isaurian to seek an official justification for iconoclasm, helped by the Church. Thus, the emperor tried to draw to his side Pope Gregory II (715-731), as well as Patriarch German I of Constantinople (715-730), to whom he asked to convene an ecumenical council.

Due to the refusal of Pope Gregory II and Patriarch German I, Emperor Leo III the Isaurian, considering himself “*emperor and priest*” and having the support of some of the Eastern bishops, he convened in 730 in Constantinople, a “*silentium*”, a theological conference. Therefore, those present at this council signed the decisions which legislated iconoclasm. Since Patriarch German I refused to adhere to iconoclasm, he was deposed and replaced by Anastasius (730-754), who was a follower of iconoclasm.

Pope Gregory II was a loyal supporter of the cult of icons, and in this regard, he sent two letters to Emperor Leo III, in which he indicated that he had no right to interfere in the internal affairs of the Church. Pope Gregory II also wrote him that the use and veneration of icons is in accordance with the teachings of the Church, because through the icons the same teachings of faith are transmitted as through the Holy Gospel<sup>40</sup>.

When the first phase of the iconoclastic dispute began (726-780), and after the emperor Leo III the Isaurian issued the edict against the icons in 726, the patriarch of Jerusalem John V (705-735) invited St. John of Damascus to write against the heresy, and he accepted, composing three treatises against the iconoclastic heresy. St. John of Damascus took an active part in the debates of the anti-iconoclastic council of Eastern bishops, whereas the Emperor Leo III the Isaurian has been anathematized because of his interference. The fight of St. John of Damascus for the icons can be compared to the St. Athanasius the Great (295-373) fight against the Arianism. That is why the iconoclastic council of

<sup>39</sup> VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 263.

<sup>40</sup> CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului I*, 243.

Hieria in 754 anathematized him by calling him a teacher of iniquity. St. John of Damascus will be rehabilitated by the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, which honored him with the formula: “*The Holy Trinity has glorified the three*”<sup>41</sup>.

Unfortunately, this dispute of the imperial iconoclasm produced a great religious crisis within the Byzantine Empire, which will affect the relations between Rome and Constantinople. Pope Gregory II rejected the election of Athanasius as patriarch of Constantinople because the election was not done canonically, condemned Emperor Leo III as heretic, and removed Rome and Italy from imperial authority. Pope Gregory III (731-741) will convene a council in Rome on November 1, 731, which will decide the following: “*If somebody, scorning those who respect holiness the old apostolic tradition of the Church, defies devastating, destroying and blasphemously profaning the holy icons especially of the icons of our God and Lord Jesus Christ and of His Most Pure and Most Blessed Mother, of the ever Virgin Mary of the Holy Apostles and of all the saints, has to be banished from the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus and removed from the harmonious unity of the entire Church*”<sup>42</sup>.

The breakup of relations between Rome and Constantinople was also caused by the forceful action of Emperor Leo III, who sent the papal legates from the capital to prison. Likewise, Emperor Leo III tried to arrest Pope Gregory III and removed from the jurisdiction of Rome the provinces of Sicily, Calabria, Illyrian (old and new Epirus, Illyricum, Macedonia, Thessaly, Achaia, Dacia Ripensis and the Mediterranean, Moesia, Dardania and Prevalis with the metropolis of Scobra) and placed them under the Constantinople’s jurisdiction.

After the death of Leo III, on June 18, 741, the leadership of the Byzantine Empire was taken by his son, Constantine V (741-775). He continued iconoclastic politics and tried to bring it even a greater amplitude through a synodal decision. Therefore, the emperor prepared the council in the smallest details, together with the iconoclastic followers. Constantine V will compose several iconoclastic treatises, of which only two have been preserved, fragmented. Through these treaties, the emperor sought to instruct the clergy and the faithful in the iconoclastic direction, and through political disputes he wished to verify the iconodule bishops, whom will be abusively replaced by the iconoclastic bishops.

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<sup>41</sup> VOICU, *Patrologie III*, 99.

<sup>42</sup> L. DUSCHESNE, *Liber Pontificalis I*, Paris, 1981, 415.



After securing himself with the support of three hundred and thirty-eight iconoclastic bishops, Constantine V convened a council at Hieria between February 10 and August 8, 754. Although this iconoclastic council of Hieria assumed the claim of an ecumenical council, it did not meet the conditions set for this purpose, because it was convoked by the emperor and its dogmatic decision did not have the consent of the pentarchy. Therefore, without the consent of the pope of Rome, the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, who represented bishops and believers outside the borders of the Byzantine Empire, this council could not be ecumenical. The Council of Hieria made the following decision: *“Based on the Holy Scriptures given by God and anchored by the rock of worship of God in Spirit and truth, we all who bear priestly dignity and have gathered in the name of the Holy and Life-giving Trinity, we unanimously decide that any icon, whether made of any material or painted, must henceforth be removed from the Christian churches as something foreign and detestable, and that no one should dare to practice furthermore the pagan craft of icon painting. Whoever dares to paint icons or honor them or place them in churches or keep them in their houses, whether he is a bishop, priest or deacon must be deposed, and whether he is a layman or a monk to be anathematized and held accountable by law imperial, as an enemy of God’s commandments and dogmas given by the Holy Fathers”*<sup>43</sup>.

Fortunately, the vessels and liturgical vestments that had icons painted or sewn on them were not removed. Therefore, after the approval of the iconoclastic teaching by the Hieria council, the icons were removed, and their defenders were persecuted. Due to strong opposition from believers and monks, Emperor Constantine V ordered that the decisions of the council of Hieria be signed by bishops, priests, and monks throughout the Byzantine Empire.

Additionally, many monasteries that opposed iconoclasm were set on fire, destroyed, or turned into barracks and shelters for horses and materials needed for military campaigns. Similarly, in many churches, the paintings and mosaics were destroyed or covered with plaster, and in their place were painted hunting scenes, horseback riding, fishing or acrobatics. Therefore, the iconoclasm, having the support of the imperial court, alike of the bishops, will grow greatly in Byzantium. The Pope of Rome, together with some of the Churches of the East, will defend the cult of icons. In the West, Pentapolis, and the Exarchate of Ra-

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<sup>43</sup> CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului I*, 247.

venna, which were occupied by the Longboards in 754, will be conquered by Frankish King Pepin the Short (741-768) and offered to Pope Stephen IV (768-772) as “The Heritage of St. Peter”.

In April 769, Pope Stephen IV convoked a council, which was held in the Basilica Salvatoris, in the Lateran Palace, condemning the iconoclastic council of Hieria and confirming the worship of icons based on the writings of the Holy Fathers. The iconoclasm will also be condemned in a council by Patriarch Theodore I of Jerusalem (752/754-767). He, together with Patriarch Cosmas I of Alexandria (742-768) and Theodore I of Antioch (750 / 751-773 / 774), will anathematize Bishop Cozma of Epiphany of Syria in 764, in the Holy Spirit Sunday for being a follower of iconoclasm.

After the death of Emperor Constantine V, on September 14, 775, the Byzantine iconoclasm, having no more political support, will enter a phase of decay, since the new emperor Leo IV the Khazar (775-780) ceased the persecution against the iconodules and allowed the release of those imprisoned. The first phase of the Byzantine iconoclasm will end<sup>44</sup> with the death of Emperor Leo IV, the Khazar on September 8, 780.

The iconoclastic politics of the Isaurian emperors caused great disorder in the internal life of the Byzantine Empire, and it was significantly troubled for more than one century. From its earliest stages, the iconoclastic movement led to the alienation of Italy and created very tense relations with the papacy, which was forced to excommunicate the iconoclastic bishops and headed West for help and protection. Thus, the friendship of the papacy with the Frankish kings will open a new and important period in medieval history. Unfortunately, the iconoclastic movement will gradually create in time the premises for the future rupture between the two Churches<sup>45</sup>.

### **The second period of the iconoclastic dispute (802/813-842)**

After winning the first phase of the iconoclastic disputes, the Byzantine Church wanted to gain its freedom and escape state authority. This contradiction was the feature that marked the second phase of the iconoclastic dispute between 802/813-842, which stirred and upset the Byzantine Empire. It was fueled by the

<sup>44</sup> CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului I*, 244-248.

<sup>45</sup> VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 281.

financial ability of Emperor Nikephoros, who, concerned with the recovery of the imperial treasury, struck at the Church's assets.

The sturdiest supporters of the Church's demands, as well as the greatest protesters, were the monks of the Studion monastery in Constantinople, led by St. Theodore the Studite<sup>46</sup> (759-852). The Studion monastery was the main monastic center of Byzantium, with seven hundred monks. On the death of Patriarch Tarasios (784-806) in 806, Emperor Nikephoros asked the opinion of St. Theodore the Studite, the abbot of the monastery of Studion, about who was the most suitable person for this office, and he recommended to the emperor to convene an elective body consisting of monks and clerics. The emperor did not consider the opinion of St. Theodore the Studite and appointed the layman Nikephoros as patriarch of Constantinople (806-815). Obviously, this decision of the emperor led to a conflict between the emperor and St. Theodore the Studite. He reproached the emperor for both the uncanonical appointment of Nikephoros as patriarch of Constantinople, and his favorable attitude toward Joseph, who ten years ago had performed the second marriage of Emperor Constantine VI (780-797).

In this situation, to wage peace to the Church, Patriarch Nikephoros convened a council in Constantinople, by which St. Theodore the Studite was sent into exile. This was the second exile of St. Theodore the Studite, which lasted two years from 809 to 811. After crowning of Michael I Rangabe (811-813), as an Emperor of the Byzantine Empire, St. Theodore the Studite was released from exile, and he tried again to fight for the restoration of the icons. Unfortunately, this attempt to restore the icons was interrupted by Emperor Leo V of Armenia (813-820), who in 814 resumed the iconoclastic politics of Emperor Leo III the Isaurian (717-741). He reinstated the iconoclastic decrees of Hieria in 754 at the Council of Constantinople in 815. The emperor unsuccessfully tried to attract Patriarch Nikephoros and St. Theodore the Studite to his side. In protest, St. Theodore the Studite, jointly with one thousand monks, organized an impressive procession in Constantinople, carrying icons in their arms. Emperor Leo III the Isaurian pronounced in 815 a sentence of exile against the iconophiles and thus, St. Theodore the Studite took the path of exile for the third time. After the assassination of Leo III, the Isaurian, in 820 Emperor Michael II the Amorian

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<sup>46</sup> DIEHL, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 82-82.

(820-829), nicknamed the Stammerer, came to rule the Byzantine Empire: he was more easygoing of iconophiles, freeing from imprisonment those convicted<sup>47</sup>.

On the death of Michael II in 829, the imperial throne was occupied by his son Theophilus (829-842). He was sixteen years old and was one of the most interesting Byzantine emperors. The guide of Theophilus was John the Grammarian, a priest who was known for his erudition and iconoclasm, which he unfortunately passed on to the emperor. Ambitious, refined, and precocious, Emperor Theophilus cultivated his reputation as a righteous and benevolent ruler over his subjects, thus hoping to prove the justice of iconoclasm by the success of his reign. In 833 he resumed the iconoclastic struggle by an edict condemning all those who refused the common faith of the iconoclasts.

In order to intensify this fight against the iconophiles, in 837, the emperor appointed his former tutor, John VII the Grammarian (837-843) as patriarch of Constantinople<sup>48</sup>. The icons that began to be relocated in some churches during the reign of Emperor Michael II, but also in the imperial palace, at the instructions of Empress Theodora, will be discarded again and replaced with paintings depicting animals and birds<sup>49</sup>. All these brutal measures taken by Emperor Theophilus proved to be completely inappropriate, because the iconoclasm did not guarantee the emperor military victories against the Muslims, so he became sick and died of dysentery.

At the death of Theophilus on January 22, 842, his son, Michael III the Drunkard (855-867) was two years old, therefore the authority (842-855), his mother. Empress Theodora, about thirty years of age, was in a stronger position than Irene (797-802) and did not need to use ruthlessness as did Irene when she took over the leadership of the Byzantine Empire, forty-three years ago. Empress Theodora was an energetic and intelligent woman, having as the main advisor the postal services logothete and eunuch Teoktistos<sup>50</sup>

Empress Theodora called out of exile all the iconophile bishops and convoked a council in Constantinople on March 11, 843, which will anathematize all the iconoclasts. Consequently, both iconoclastic councils of Hieria in 754 and Constantinople in 815 were also condemned by the council. Furthermore, the

<sup>47</sup> C. VOICU, L.-D. COLDA, *Patrologie III*, București, 2015, 211-212.

<sup>48</sup> W. TREADGOLD, *O scurtă istorie a Bizanțului*, București, 2003, 153-155.

<sup>49</sup> CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului I*, 255.

<sup>50</sup> TREADGOLD, *O scurtă istorie a Bizanțului*, 154-155.

decisions of the seven Ecumenical Councils were confirmed, approving the worship of icons and anathematizing the iconoclasts. The bishops who disobeyed the council's decisions were deposed and replaced with those iconodules who suffered during the iconoclastic persecution. Thus, the restoration of the cult of icons will be done during a festive Liturgy, which was celebrated in St. Sophia Cathedral on May 11, 843. Since this council of Constantinople was held on the eve of the first Sunday of Lent, and the restoration of the cult of icons, it was considered a new victory for Orthodoxy over heresies, and it was established that this Sunday should be celebrated every year and called Sunday of Orthodoxy<sup>51</sup>.

During the iconoclastic disputes, the Byzantine Empire went for thirty years through a period of maximum unrest, during which the government took severe measures against the iconodules, dispersing and exiling them. Thus, the monks fought against the imperial authority, who did not hesitate to appeal the papacy, being determined to recognize the priority of the Roman Church, if ensured the independence of the Eastern Church relative to the state. The iconoclastic emperors wanted to keep the Church dependent on the state, thus increasing its imperial authority over it. Those who protested and fought the most against this claim were the monks of the Studion monastery, led by St. Theodore the Studite, who stubbornly refused the emperor's right to decide on dogmas. Despite all the suffering they endured, they were not impressed by the imperial authority and claimed the independence of the Church. Unfortunately, in this battle, the monks of the Studion monastery had no chance of success. Therefore, the dispute over the icons will have an indisputable result: subjecting the Church to the authority of the emperor even more<sup>52</sup>.

## Conclusions

The religious politics initiated by Emperor Constantine the Great was continued by the Byzantine emperors, and the relations they created between the Church and the state were continued by all his followers, regardless of whether they were Orthodox or heretics. The Byzantine emperors protected the Church and sought to strengthen Christianity by protecting it from heresies that have occurred throughout history. Unfortunately, some emperors embraced the

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<sup>51</sup> CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului I*, 256.

<sup>52</sup> DIEHL, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 84-85.

heresies arisen within the Byzantine Empire, while those defending authentic traditional Christianity suffered: they were removed from the episcopal see, sent into exile, or even received the crown of martyrdom. Regrettably, some Byzantine emperors tried to show despotic authority over the Church, trying to enslave it to their own interests: they convoked councils, removed and appointed bishops, without respecting the canons and traditional teachings of the Church. Many times, through the brutal intervention in the life of the Church, the Byzantine emperors produced schisms within it.

Although some emperors exercised despotic authority over the Church, most of them tried to protect it both doctrinally and materially. These emperors convoked at their own expense the Ecumenical Councils, which set the Church's teaching. Besides, most Byzantine emperors were the greatest founders of churches and monasteries throughout the Empire and contributed to the spreading, as well as defense Christianity against the Muslim invasion. If the Church would not have benefited from the protection of the Byzantine emperors, it would have suffered seriously from the Muslim attacks.

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