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The iconoclastic edict of the Emperor Leo Iii, 726 A.D.

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THE ICONOCLASTIC EDICT OF
THE EMPEROR LEO III
726 A. D.

A Thesis Presented
by
Robert J. Shedlock

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts
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September, 1968

THE ICONOCLASTIC EDICT OF

THE EMPEROR LEO III

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September, 1968

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

Until J. B. Bury published his A History of the Later Roman Empire from Arcadius to Irene in 1889,* Byzantine history had been almost an adjunct of western European history. Only the period of the Fourth Crusade of 1204 and the fall of Constantinople to the Turks had been given independent consideration, but this, too, was linked almost purely to the development of Europe. Gibbon, in his The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, had written of the Byzantine Empire in the most unflattering terms, and George Finlay's treatment of nearly one-thousand years of Byzantium is summed up in the title of his great study, A History of Greece, in which the Byzantines are given almost peripheral treatment.

With Bury's book, Byzantine history as a study in itself came into being. Almost immediately, a number of journals devoted to it began to appear. The most important of these today are Byzantinische Zeitschrift, Byzantion and the more recent and irregularly issued Dumbarton Oaks Papers.

If Bury is in large part responsible for our interest in this too-long neglected aspect of history, he is also responsible for many of our misconceptions about it, as we will see in the body of this paper. He has been enormously influential and extremely sug-

* Complete publishing information for all titles mentioned in this Introduction is in the bibliography.

gestive, but his interpretations have been subjected to intensive study and re-evaluation in recent years. It is for these reasons that however valuable Bury has been (and continues to be), his work no longer can be taken as the last word. Perhaps he deserves the tribute once accorded to Gibbon: "He has been superseded but never surpassed."

Additionally, much of the literature on Byzantine history is available only in the periodical literature. Few syntheses have been produced. Two very valuable ones are Georg Ostrogorsky's Geschichte des byzantinischen Staates, now in its third edition, and A. A. Vasiliev's History of the Byzantine Empire 324-1453, which appeared in its second edition shortly before the author's death. These are the only two works that can be said to take full advantage of the latest studies in this period. They are particularly valuable because they utilize research done in languages foreign to most Americans, particularly Russian and Bulgarian.

The recent revision of Volume IV. of The Cambridge Medieval History has only partially filled the gap in the general literature on Byzantium. As Ihor Ševčenko^V points out in his review article in the Slavic Review, this work suffers from the faults common to this type in that its organization--independent studies by various scholars--tends to cause an overlapping of material and to introduce widely divergent and contradictory theses. For these reasons, this paper has relied heavily on the material in the journals. Because of this,

I hope I do not appear to be unnecessarily harsh on the students of this epoch.

Finally, I do not read Greek and have had to rely on a Latin translation of the Chronicle of Nicephorus. Theophanes, the other great chronicler for this period, appears only in Greek so I have had to use the citations to his work that appear in the estimable five-volume English translation of Bishop C. J. Hefele's History of the Councils of the Church, from the Original Documents, as well as E. W. Brooks' "The Chronicle of Theophanes" that appeared in Byzantinische Zeitschrift in 1899.

CHAPTER I

When Leo III (717-41), a native of Commagene, was declared emperor by his troops at Amorium in October 716, the continued existence of Byzantium was in doubt.¹ The seventh and eighth centuries were "perhaps the darkest age of Europe in historical times,"² yet the problems that beset the new emperor extended as far back as the reign of Justinian I (527-65), whose dreams of a restoration of the hegemony of the great Roman Empire of antiquity became temporary, expensive and exhausting realities. Allured by the grandeur of the past and the obligations of an orthodox, Christian

1. If the Chronicle of Nicephorus is used, Leo's reign dates from the time of his usurpation: "Leo Isaurus annis 25. m. 3. d. 14." Nicephori Chronologia, 80, vol. XIV of M. de la Bigne, ed., Maxima bibliotheca ueterum patrum, et antiquorum scriptorum ecclesiasticorum (27 vols.; London: Anissonios, 1677). Theophanes, on the other hand, ascribes a reign of 24 years, 2 months and 25 days. See E. W. Brooks, "The Chronicle of Theophanes," Byzantinische Zeitschrift, VIII, 1899, 83.

A complete discussion of this dating problem is in C. J. Hefele, A History of the Councils of the Church, from the Original Documents (5 vols.; 2nd ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1894-96), V, 3, note 2; 263-64, note 4; 301. He chooses 716, while more recent authorities prefer 717. Considering the state of the empire at this time, to be declared emperor was meaningless. The coronation ceremony would be the only proof of legality, no matter what means had been used to obtain the throne. For the problem involved in dating Leo's death, cf., infra, 10, note 22.

2. J. B. Bury, A History of the Later Roman Empire from Arcadius to Irene, 395 A.D. to 802 A.D. (2 vols.; London: Macmillan and Co., 1889), I, 337. This work will be referred to hereafter as History to differentiate it from his History of the Later Roman Empire from the Death of Theodosius I to the Death of Justinian (A.D. 395 to A.D. 565) (2 vols.; London: Macmillan and Co., 1923). The latter work was Bury's revision of the 1889 edition, but he died in 1925, having completed only the first two volumes. Future references to this work will be as History 1923 ed.

emperor, Justinian waged a series of wars between 533 and 554 that defeated the Vandals in Africa, the Ostrogoths in Dalmatia, Italy and Sicily, the Visigoths in Spain. Southern France had always remained under at least titular control. Once again, except for portions of North Africa near what are now the Straits of Gibraltar, an emperor could speak of the Mediterranean Sea as mare nostrum.

All this was ephemeral. Justinian's campaigns had weakened his state's military and economic structure to the point where he began a series of economies, the least defensible being a reduction of the armed forces and a frequent delay in the payment of the troops. His unwise actions left the borders unprotected and open to barbarian and Persian incursions.³ These were not long delayed because before his death the Slavs and Avars began to penetrate the northern parts of the empire. Furthermore, Justinian's parsimony, coupled with his exertions in the west, had left the eastern portions of the empire unprotected from the Persians who in 561 humiliated the Byzantines by imposing a peace that called for an annual tribute. At great expense than the state could afford, Justinian bore the hollow titles "Alamannicus, Gothicus, Francicus, Germanicus, Anticus, Alanicus, Vandalicus, Africanus."⁴

3. A. A. Vasiliev, History of the Byzantine Empire 324-1453 (2 vols.; 2nd ed.; Madison and Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), I, 161.

4. Ibid., I, 133.

Within the body politic, Justinian undertook to purify religion. Although monophysitism had been condemned at the Council of Chalcedon (the Fourth Ecumenical Council) in 451, it was a potent force within the eastern portion of the empire. Its greatest champion during Justinian's reign was the Empress Theodora (d. 548). In 553, Justinian called the Second Council of Constantinople (the Fifth Ecumenical Council), which was primarily a disciplinary gathering that dealt with the so-called "Three Chapters" controversy.⁵ But because Pope Vigilius (537-55) came into open conflict with the wishes of the emperor, he was exiled and ultimately permitted to return to Rome only after he had recanted from his refusal to obey imperial orders.⁶ Speaking of

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5. This controversy bears no relationship to this paper. Its acts are preserved in vol. XI, 157-590, of J. D. Mansi, ed., Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio (53 vols. in 58; Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlag-Anstalt, 1960-61). This is a reprint of the work begun by Mansi in 1759 and continued for many years thereafter. Further citations to it will be as Mansi.

English translations of value in studying this and all the other councils of the undivided church (to Second Nicaea in 787) are Hefele, Councils, and Henry Percival, ed., The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church, 303-22. This work is vol. XIV Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Second Series (XIV vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing Co., n.d.). This is a reprint of the work originally published between 1890-1900. Of the two, Hefele is the more descriptive, while Percival limits himself to the presentation of the canons of the various councils with an excursus by various writers when he feels such is called for. Furthermore, Percival covers only the ecumenical councils and such local synods whose decrees later were incorporated into church dogma. Hefele covers all the synods, including the rejected ones. For Hefele's discussion of Second Constantinople, see his Councils, III, 289-326.

6. For a discussion of Vigilius, see Hefele, Councils, V, 346-51. Vasiliev relates the story in his History, I, 148-54.

this period, Ostrogorsky says that

Justinian was the last Roman emperor on the Byzantine throne. At the same time he was a Christian ruler convinced of the divine source of his kingly power.⁷

It is true that the emperor looked upon himself as the protector of the church and the guardian of its dogma, but to whatever heights Justinian may have risen in this and in other activities, he began the period of deterioration that was to last for nearly two hundred years. As Bury says, at Justinian's death,

the winds were loosed from prison; the disintegrating elements began to operate with full force; the artificial system collapsed; and the metamorphosis in the character of the empire, which had been surely progressing for a long time past, though one is apt to overlook it amid the striking events of Justinian's busy reign, now began to work rapidly and perceptibly.⁸

The winds that were loosed struck almost immediately. The Persians renewed their wars, but Maurice (582-602) brought them to an end in 591, retrieving the territory of Armenia and ending the annual tribute.⁹ But the Slavs and Avars continued their attacks, occupying and destroying the provinces of Pannonia and Illyricum.¹⁰ They even threatened Constantinople on a number of

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7. Georg Ostrogorsky, Geschichte des byzantinischen Staates (dritte Auflage; Munich: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1963), 65. (My translation here and in subsequent citations.)
 8. Bury, History, II, 67.
 9. Vasiliev, History, I, 161.
 10. Francis Dvornik, The Slavs in European History and Civilization (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962), 2.

occasions. The able Maurice was put to the sword by a cruel usurper, Phocas (602-10), who added to the people's woes by instituting a reign of terror.

At this time the Persians again attacked and the unsuccessful policy of Phocas against them and the Avars brought a new revolution and a new dynasty to the throne. In 610, Heraclius, the son of the exarch of Africa, seized power. His heritage was an internally debilitated and financially destitute government and dual threats from the North and East. So great was the danger that Heraclius at one point considered moving his capital to Carthage in order to give himself breathing space to organize a counter offensive.¹¹

The danger was indeed great. Three patriarchal sees fell to the Persians in rapid succession: Antioch in 611, Jerusalem after a siege of only twenty days in 614 and Alexandria in 619. With Syria and Egypt lost, the food supply of the empire was seriously impaired. More was to come because the Slavs and Avars threatened the capital and by 624 the Visigoths had taken all of Spain, with the exception of the Balearic Islands.¹²

It took Heraclius nearly eleven years before he mounted his offensive. Beginning in 622, he reconquered all the territories that had been lost. In 629 he returned the Cross to Jerusalem,

11. Ostrogorsky, Geschichte, 77.

12. Vasiliev, History, I, 196.

taken by the Persians when they had conquered the city fifteen years before. But according to Ostrogorsky, this year deserves attention for another reason.

The epoch of Heraclius signifies not only a political but a cultural turning point for the eastern empire. It closed the Roman and began the Byzantine period in every sense. In place of the Roman imperial title, Emperor, Caesar, Augustus, he took the old Greek title [basileus] which had previously been only unofficially bestowed.... Heraclius gave this same title to his son, who was also co-emperor.¹³

Whether the mere acquisition of a new title is indicative of a "turning point" in Byzantine history is a moot question. Perhaps Ostrogorsky places too much emphasis on the new cultural configuration of the empire. There may have been the beginning of a new epoch at this time, but the real point of departure for such a discussion should be sometime after 650 when the Moslems had considerably reduced the size of the empire by their invasions.¹⁴

Whatever celebrations there may have been in Constantinople, Heraclius' victories were pyrrhic even as were those of Justinian I.

13. Ostrogorsky, Geschichte, 90-91.

14. Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 13, 1959, was devoted to a study of the Byzantine Empire in the seventh century. Peter Charanis, "Ethnic Changes in the Byzantine Empire in the Seventh Century," 44, sees a multi-racial mixture resulting from the settling of the Slavs and Avars in the Balkans but contends that Orthodoxy and the Greek tongue gave unity to the diverse elements. Georg Ostrogorsky, "The Byzantine Empire in the World of the Seventh Century," 21, sees the world of Byzantium turning eastward after the Moslem conquests. Robert S. Lopez, "The Role of Trade in the Economic Adjustment of Byzantium in the Seventh Century," 73-4, agrees with Ostrogorsky that there was a shift after 650, but he emphasizes the fact that the empire now became land-oriented instead of depending on the sea. Ostrogorsky contradicts himself on this point of when the Roman element died out and the Byzantine era began. Cf., supra, 4.

The defeat of the Persians had weakened both contenders and, at the very moment of victory, an unnoticed event occurred, a prelude to the most trying period the empire was to face.

The loss of two hundred thousand soldiers who had fallen by the sword was of less fatal importance than the decay of arts, agriculture, and population, in this long and destructive war; and, although a victorious army had been formed under the standard of Heraclius, the unnatural effort appears to have exhausted rather than exercised their strength. While the emperor triumphed at Constantinople or Jerusalem, an obscure town on the confines of Syria was pillaged by Saracens, and they cut in pieces some troops who advanced to its relief: an ordinary and trifling occurrence, had it not been the prelude of a mighty revolution. These robbers were the apostles of Mahomet; their fanatic valour had emerged from the desert; and in the last eight years of his reign Heraclius lost to the Arabs the same provinces he had rescued from the Persians.¹⁵

How quickly these provinces were lost can be seen by the chronology. Within three years of the prophet's death in 632, the Moslems took Damascus and all of Syria. Then Jerusalem fell in 637-38, after a two-year siege. In late 642, after the death of Heraclius, Alexandria fell and, by 650, Tripoli, meaning a large portion of North Africa, was also lost to the empire. Then Rhodes and Cyprus were lost in 654. Having reached the sea, the Moslems "shook Byzantine hegemony" in that vital area.¹⁶

Gibbon's figures on the number of men lost may very well be

15. Edward Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, ed. by J. B. Bury (7 vols.; 2nd ed.; London: Methuen & Co., 1901), V, 95.

16. Ostrogorsky, Geschichte, 97.

exaggerated, but it is clear that even though Heraclius may have conquered territories equal in extent to those taken by Alexander the Great, the cost was too high for him to maintain what he had won. Furthermore, Heraclius was involved in religious controversy with the monophysites and attempted a very imperfect and unsatisfactory compromise, his Ecthesis of 638. Perhaps he wished to reconcile the important monophysitic elements in Egypt and the eastern provinces, but his decree came too late. Only Alexandria was in imperial hands at the time of the edict and it was soon to be torn away. Another factor in the loss of these provinces may have been the emperor's attempt to convert the Jews to Christianity, sometimes through the use of extremely repressive measures.¹⁷

During the reign of Constans II (641-68) the pressures were so great that he too considered removing the capital to Rome and, in fact, spent the last five years of his life in Italy, where he was murdered in a Syracusan bathhouse.¹⁸ His son, Constantine IV (668-85), despite the continued annual attacks on Constantinople, remained in the capital. Ultimately, the heavens accomplished what force of arms could not. In 677 the Arab fleet was destroyed in a storm and the Moslems sued for peace. The terms were advantageous to Constans because Byzantium was granted an annual tribute.¹⁹

17. A further discussion of the religious controversies within the empire is in Chapter II.

18. Vasiliev, History, I, 220-22.

19. Ostrogorsky, Geschichte, 104, says this treaty included an annual payment of 3000 gold pieces. Constans also received 50 prisoners and a like number of horses.

This victory was offset by the complete failure of Constans against the newly established Bulgar kingdom. He began his campaign in 659 and the war continued until Constantine IV was disastrously defeated in the field in 679. Now the Byzantines were forced to pay an annual tribute and to cede the lands between the Danube and the Balkans.²⁰

The accession of Justinian II resulted in further attempts to dislodge the Bulgars and Slavs. Between 687-89, unsuccessful campaigns, coupled with his cruelty, led to his deposition and the slitting of his nose. Where once there had been only external conflict, a new stage—internal anarchy—began. A series of emperors followed in rapid succession, totaling six within twenty-two years.²¹ It is with this background in mind that we approach the reign of Leo III and the founding of the Isaurian dynasty (717-802).

20. Vasiliev, History, I, 219.

21. Justinian II, the last of the line of Heraclius, ruled twice, from 685 to his first deposition in 695. He reigned again from 705 to 711. The other emperors at this time, men who Vasiliev calls "the accidental rulers," were Leontius (695-97), Tiberius III (697-705), Philippicus (711-13), Anastasius II (713-15) and Theodosius III (715-17); Vasiliev, History, I, 229.

CHAPTER II

The era of Leo III is truly a turning point in Byzantium's baleful history of degradation, debilitation and defeat.²² By usurpation, Leo ended a period of usurpation and nursed into being a period of internal peace, financial stability and excellent administration. Yet, first he had to stem the tide of the Moslem advance.

Almost immediately after his accession, Leo was put to the test of a year-long Moslem siege of Constantinople (September 717-August 718). So great was his victory that for hundreds of years Islam never renewed its threats, except for repeated border raids. Probably this victory was an even greater feat than that of Charles Martel at Tours/Poitiers.

In the midst of this warfare, Leo crushed a Sicilian pretender in 718 and shortly afterwards crushed an uprising undertaken by the blinded and deposed Anastasius II, who acted with Bulgar aid. This time Leo was not so kind to the former emperor; he had him executed.²³

22. There is a question concerning Leo's terminal date, a result of our lack of sources for this period. Ostrogorsky, *Geschichte*, uses 741, as does Vasiliev in his *History*. Bury uses 740. The matter should be settled as a result of the very thorough study by Philip Grierson, "The Tombs and Obits of the Byzantine Emperors (337-1042)," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 16, 1962, 1-63. Grierson tells us that Leo died in June 741 and was buried with his wife, Maria, in the mausoleum of Justinian I. The pertinent pages for this argument are 18, 33, and 53. Brooks, "The Chronicle of Theophanes," 83, arrives at the same date as a result of his study of Theophanes' dating system.

Concerning the commencement of Leo's reign, see *supra*, I, note 1.

23. A good presentation of this period is in George Finlay, *A History of Greece from Its Conquest by the Romans to the Present Time, B.C. 146 to A.D. 1864*, ed. by H. F. Tozer (7 vols.; 2nd ed.; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1876), II, 13-24.

Leo was equally fortunate in his dynastic ambitions. Having no son at the time of his elevation, he married his daughter Anna to one of his chief supporters, the Strategos Artavasdus. But in December 718 a son was born to him, who, on March 25, 720, the third anniversary of his own coronation, was solemnly crowned by the Patriarch Germanus and named co-emperor with the title Constantine V.²⁴

We know nothing of any consequence of this period in the history of the empire. In the first place, nearly everything that the winning iconodulæ could find concerning the iconoclasts was destroyed after the restoration of Orthodoxy in 843. Even Leo's son Constantine V (741-75), was not allowed to rest in peace. His body was removed from his tomb in the mausoleum of Justinian, burned, and the ashes cast into the sea.²⁵ In the second place, aside from this and the normal vicissitudes of time, the entire period from 650 to 850 was "unfruitful."²⁶ Perhaps the distractions of the invasions and the general deterioration in culture was an important factor. Aside from the works of St. John of Damascus

24. Charles Diehl, "Leo III and the Isaurian Dynasty," The Cambridge Medieval History, ed. by H. M. Gwatkin, et al. (8 vols.; Cambridge: The University Press, 1911-36), IV, 3-4.

25. Grierson, "Tombs and Obits," 53, quotes the Necrologium imperatorum, which says that the Empress Theodora ordered such action on the advice of the Patriarch Methodius (842-47) "since he [Constantine] had burnt the relics and images of many saints...."

26. Karl Krumbacher, Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur (2 vols.; New York: Burt Franklin, n.d.), I, 12. This was originally published in 1897. According to Krumbacher, the ninth century brought a feeble revival in the form of chroniclers.

The difficulties that beset this period extend into the field of art. See D. Talbot Rice, The Beginnings of Christian Art (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 99-104.

(c. 645-c. 750), specifically his On Holy Images, and the Chronicle of Nicephorus (c. 752-c. 818), who was also patriarch of Constantinople (806-15), we have only the Chronicle of Theophanes (c. 758-828). We cannot build a solid study on these flimsy underpinnings.²⁷

To add to the problem of sources, we have the fact that neither of the two chroniclers was an eye-witness to the events. John of Damascus, who was a contemporary of Leo III and the earlier years of Constantine V's reign, has almost as great a handicap. He lived and wrote from the security of a monastery in Moslem Damascus. It is difficult, therefore, to comprehend Bury's statement that "For the ecclesiastical history of the seventh and eighth centuries we are better furnished than for the political, as we have the writings on the great controversies of the times by persons who took part in the struggles."²⁸

If sources are the warp and woof of which the fabric of history is woven, here is a period that refuses to permit the historian to be a spectator to the events of the times. Circumstances force him to become a speculator. All too frequently, however, we learn more about the speculators than we do about the Emperor Leo. In fact, Leo's entire reign has been a major historiographic problem in itself. For our purposes, it is sufficient to know that his image as

27. An excellent survey of the sources is available, if the comments concerning the dating of this period are overlooked, in J. B. Bury's Appendix to Gibbon's Decline and Fall, V, 498-501.

28. Bury, loc. cit. He admits that the councils in 787, 843 and 867 ordered the destruction of all iconoclastic literature.

a great enlightened ruler, far in advance of his times, has undergone extensive revision.²⁹

If the passage of time has dimmed the luster of Leo's secular accomplishments, his notoriety as a religious innovator remains intact. He stands in the position of a defendant without evidence, while our "authorities" for his decree banning the images of Christ, the Virgin and the saints from the churches in the empire (and it is important to remember that Europe was part of the empire) are the prosecutors.

Leo is not without advocates, however. Bury has called 718, the year in which Leo raised the siege of Constantinople, "an ecumenical date;" but surely 726, the year in which the iconoclastic edict was issued, deserves the accolade even more.³⁰ When Leo undertook to extirpate a practice that had been traditional in the church for hundreds of years, he set in motion a series of events, particularly in Italy, that were to have profound effects on the course of history. Western Europe was already drawing away from the control of the empire and we can trace the beginnings of the final breach to the effects of iconoclasm in Italian affairs.

29. For the once-standard views of Leo III and his supposed reorganization of the military, for the promulgation of a sea code and the extension of the themes (provinces), see Bury, *History*, II, 411-24. More recent interpretations are in Ostrogorsky, *Geschichte*, 123-37; Vasiliev, *History*, I, 234-51 and Milton V. Anastos, "Iconoclasm and Imperial Rule 717-842," *The Cambridge Medieval History*, ed. by J. M. Hussey (2nd ed.; Cambridge: The University Press, 1966), IV, pt. I, 61-103. Anastos relies heavily on Ostrogorsky for this period.

30. Bury, *History*, II, 405.

Actually, we know very little concerning

a moral and spiritual reform attempted, not by poor zealots from the depths of the popular conscience, but by absolute sovereigns and unflinching governments, which united something of the creed of the Waldenses to the cruel passions of Simon de Montfort." The movement showed how ready was the Asiatic portion of the Empire to accept some form of Islam; and we can well conceive how it came that Leo III was called '...imbued with the temperament of an Arab.' The whole story has been shamelessly perverted by religious bigotry, and we know little of Iconoclasm, except in the satires of their enemies the Iconodules.³¹

Our knowledge has advanced very little since those words were spoken in 1900, and the thesis about Islamic influences is as old as the late eighth century. The conception of eastern influences upon the emperor long dominated our views of the origins of iconoclasm and is only now being revised.

We need go back no further than Edward Gibbon, who sees the influence of Islam as well as Leo acting from purely personal motives "to impose upon his subjects the dictates of his own conscience."³² George Finlay, whose book first appeared in 1864, makes no mention of external influences, but says that Leo wished to reduce the role of the church in public affairs.³³ It was J. B. Bury who added a new element, insisting that

Leo III and Constantine V were animated by a spirit of rationalism, in the same sense that Luther was animated by a spirit of rationalism. They were

31. Frederic Harrison, the Rede Lecture, Cambridge, June 12, 1900, reprinted in J. F. Scott, et al., *Readings in Medieval History* (New York: F. S. Crofts and Co., 1946), 112.

32. Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, V, 251.

33. Finlay, *History of Greece*, II, 35.

opponents not only of iconolatry, but also of Mariolatry.³⁴

In a similar vein, C.W.C. Oman not only accepted eastern influences on Leo, but contended that he attacked "the ascription of divine honours to saints--more especially in the form of Mariolatry."³⁵

From all this we learn that Gibbon was persuaded by the tyrant's conception of "what is good enough for me is good enough for my subjects," while Bury and Oman reflect Anglican dismay at the promulgation of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception by Pope Pius IX in 1854, viewed by the Church of England as a new heresy.

Roman Catholic writers tend to be less charitable towards Leo's decree, but are careful not to ascribe any heretical tendencies to him. There is still the effect of Leo's eastern background, although Bishop Hefele considerably qualifies its importance. Yet, he accuses Leo of denying "liberty of conscience" to his subjects. Hefele further contends that,

Absolutely without education, rough in manner, a military upstart, he found in himself no understanding of art, and no aesthetic feeling that could have restrained him from vandalism.³⁶

34. Bury, *History*, II, 428.

35. C.W.C. Oman, *The Byzantine Empire* (3rd ed.; London: T. Unwin, 1892), 192.

36. Hefele, *Councils*, V, 264. Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, V, 251, in a friendlier manner, says Leo "was ignorant of sacred and profane letters."

Horace K. Mann is more vehement. Leo is subjected to criticism that transcends reason and becomes emotional. Neatly using Leo's admirer, Bury, Mann even denigrates the emperor's greatest achievement—his victory at Constantinople in 718, saying:

he was helped not only by 'an unusually severe winter,' but, as Bury informs us more than once, by the preparations for a siege that had been made by his prudent predecessor, Anastasius II. Despite, however, the fearful losses the Saracens endured under the wall of Constantinople, Leo was unable to make any real headway against them.³⁷

Hefele and Mann also introduce a new element into the problem of causation: the influence of eastern bishops, particularly Constantine of Nacolia (Phrygia).³⁸ Interestingly, Ostrogorsky and Anastos also use this theme as part of their discussions,³⁹ as does Father Dvornik, who tells us that images were forbidden "on the advice of some Asiatic bishops--mostly from Asia Minor...."⁴⁰ Among the Catholics, there is also H. Daniel-Rops' adherence to the Jewish-Moslem influence with overtones of Nestorianism, the latter point, unfortunately, not pursued.⁴¹

37. Horace K. Mann, The Lives of the Popes in the Early Middle Ages (2nd ed.; 19 vols. in 20; St. Louis, Mo.: B. Herder, 1902), I, pt. II, 174.

38. Ibid., 176; Hefele, Councils, V, 268-70.

39. Ostrogorsky, Geschichte, 135; Anastos, "Iconoclasm and Imperial Rule," 66.

40. Francis Dvornik, "Emperors, Popes and General Councils," Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 6, 1951, 21

41. H. Daniel-Rops, The Church in the Dark Ages, tr. by Audrey Butler. Vol. II of History of the Church of Christ (9 vols.; London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1959-65), 356-57.

Other scholars revert to the pre-Bury arguments. Ostrogorsky and Anastos fall into this category because, while they accept the influence of the eastern bishops, they reject Moslem influences. Vasiliev, recognizing that an historiographic problem exists, merely reminds us of Leo's eastern origins.⁴² Charles Diehl opts for Leo as "a man of his time."

His course was decided by an incident which shews how thoroughly he was a man of his time. In 726 a dangerous volcanic eruption took place between Thera and Therasia, in which phenomenon the Emperor discerned a token of the wrath of God falling heavily on the monarchy. He concluded that the only means of propitiation would be to cleanse religion finally from practices which dishonoured it. He resolved upon the promulgation of the edict against images (726).⁴³

Diehl states as fact what he surmises and, worse, makes Leo guilty of the same kind of pagan superstition he was trying to abolish.

In 1954, Ernst Kitzinger, an art historian, made an unsupported observation concerning the reasons for Leo's action.

Modern scholarship tends to see the iconoclasts as motivated from within the church, rather than from outside.⁴⁴

Kitzinger's comment is suggestive; but it remains for Anastos to come closer to the modern view of Leo's motivations, one I do not accept:

42. Vasiliev, History, I, 254

43. Diehl, "Leo III and the Isaurian Dynasty," 9. Compare this with his History of the Byzantine Empire, tr. by George B. Ives (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1925), 58, where he limits himself to listing the basis of Leo's support and makes no assumptions.

44. Ernst Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images Before Iconoclasm," Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 8, 1954, 85.

It is significant...that the monophysites and Paulicians, both of whom were opposed to the use of images, were especially strong in Asia Minor and Syria, the regions in which Leo had spent his youth as well as part of his military career. He had already been exposed to non-Muslim iconoclasm; and his own hostility to images, to the doctrine of the intercession of saints, and to the veneration of relics of saints, coincided with the views of certain Paulicians, who, however, also objected to the use of the Cross.⁴⁵

An important addition to the list of speculators is George Florovsky, who sees clearly the influence of Origen in the new religious policy of Leo.⁴⁶ This view is beginning to take hold in the general accounts of the conflict over images. If we have been led on a circular path, it needs to be repeated that we cannot know what was in Leo's mind when he issued his decree. We have, it seems, come no further than Theophanes' all-inclusive view that Leo was influenced by Bishop Constantine of Nacolia,⁴⁷ as well as an aide, Beser, who had been captured by the Moslems, forcibly converted, escaped and returned to Constantinople to impress upon Leo the views of Islam.⁴⁸ Theophanes also adds the Jews to

45. Anastos, "Iconoclasm and Imperial Rule," 66-7. He accepts the Diehl argument about the volcanic eruption as a "not at all improbable" influence. See ibid.; 68, for this argument.

46. George Florovsky, "Origen, Eusebius and Iconoclasm," Church History, XIX, 1950, 3-22.

47. Hefele, Councils, V, 266-7.

48. Loc. cit. This story has been carefully analyzed by J. Starr, "An Iconodulic Legend and Its Historical Basis," Speculum, VIII, 1933, 500-03, with the conclusion that it has no basis in fact.

the list of forces operating upon the emperor.⁴⁹

This listing could go on and on, but as E. J. Martin has observed:

It becomes thus a nice historical riddle to define Leo's motive and aim. In any movement in which men try to translate ideas into a practical policy, it is unlikely that an exact plan of advance is prepared at the start. The historian of Iconoclasm is in danger of attributing to Leo definite aims, which only revealed themselves as the controversy developed That Leo's motives were partly religious seems indisputable.... At the same time Leo's motive cannot have been purely religious. A religious fanatic on the throne is the rarest of phenomena. The mild rationalism can be compared with Philip the Fair of France, the destroyer of the Templars, and Henry VIII of England. Not one of the three was devoid of religion, but not even Henry... followed the impulse of religious motives alone.⁵⁰

Of all the views expressed, only two seem to have any validity or value: those of Kitzinger and Martin. All other historians since the time of Leo III himself go beyond the evidence. All we know is that Leo, in 726 A.D., issued an edict banning the images of Christ, the Virgin and the saints from the churches of the empire.⁵¹ We know further that Leo ordered an image of Christ that hung over the Chalkê gate of the royal palace to be removed, causing a riot and the death of

49. Hefele, Councils, V, 269-70. The story of the Jews an an influence on Leo only developed during the period of the Second Council of Nicaea in 787. On this, see K. Schenck, "Kaiser Leons III Walten im Innern," Byzantinische Zeitschrift, V, 1896, 272-89.

50. Edward James Martin, A History of the Iconoclastic Controversy (London: S.P.C.K., 1935), 27-8.

51. J. B. Bury insists that the decree was issued in 725 and executed in 726. On this, see Appendix 15 of Gibbon, Decline and Fall, V, 535.

one of the soldiers engaged in carrying out the imperial will.⁵²

Beyond this we cannot go with any degree of certainty.

In each instance in which monophysitism, Paulicianism, Origenism or Nestorianism is advanced as a root cause, the writer takes for granted what he has no right to assume: the Christological problem that centers on the representation of Christ as the basis for the imperial edict. Furthermore, the continual hurling about of biblical injunctions concerning images (and here I am thinking of the most obvious, the Second Commandment), calls to mind Cardinal Newman's caveat: "Incidents are not arguments."⁵³ It is true that at the Council of Constantinople called in 754 by Constantine V there was a canonical decree that defined the representation of Christ as being the host and nothing more because He had ordered that bread and wine be brought to Him.⁵⁴ What we know or can surmise with regard to Leo's son cannot be stated as fact for Leo.⁵⁵

52. Bury, loc. cit., uses this as an argument for discounting the letters of Pope Gregory II (715-31) to Leo III as being genuine. For Gregory's letters, see Appendix I.

53. John Henry Cardinal Newman, An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine (2nd ed.; New York: Longmans Green, 1949), 105.

54. Mansi, XII, 577.

55. Georg Ostrogorsky, Studien zur Geschichte des byzantinischen Bilderstreits (Breslau: Historische Untersuchungen, 5: 1929), 24-5, says that Constantine's views were close to monophysitism. A perusal of his council of 754 may well bear out this view. For example, canon 8 says: "If anyone ventures to represent the divine image of the Word, after the Incarnation, with material colours, let him be anathema! Yet, in canon 12, we can see a denunciation of Nestorianism: "If anyone separates the one Christ into two persons, and endeavours to represent Him who was born of the Virgin separately, and thus accepts only a relative union of the natures, let him be anathema!" Quoted in Percival, Seven Councils, 545.

The great problem that agitated the church during its formative centuries was the dual nature of Christ, the conceptualization of Him as a being both human and divine. In their concern to arrive at an understanding and an explication of this dual nature, many theologians speculated and lost. Cardinal Newman commented on this problem, saying:

When it is declared that 'the Word became flesh,' three wide questions open upon us on the very announcement. What is meant by 'the Word', what by 'flesh,' what by 'became'? The answers to these involve a process of investigation, and are developments. Moreover, when they have been made, they will suggest a series of secondary questions; and thus at length a multitude of propositions is the result, which gather round the inspired sentence of which they come, giving it externally the form of a doctrine, and creating or deepening the idea of it in the mind.⁵⁶

Further, Newman argues that,

A revelation, in itself divine, and guaranteed as such may from first to last be received, doubted, argued against, perverted, rejected, by individuals according to the state of mind of each.⁵⁷

And so it was with Christology. The Arian conception of Christ as a created being coming after the Father and therefore subsidiary to Him, was resolved at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. But this by no means ended the problem because during the reign of Theodosius the Great (379-95) the First Council of Constantinople (the Second Ecumenical

56. Newman, Essay on Doctrine, 55.

57. Ibid., 76.

Council) in 381 was forced to renew the dogma laid down fifty-six years previously.⁵⁸

But while the church fathers were thus speaking the mind of Christ, a new, more potent, force had arisen and was gaining credence: Origenism.

Origen (c. 185-254) was a student of the great reconciler of Hellenistic thought to Christianity, Clement of Alexandria (fl. 200). Origen knew well the pre-Socratic and post-Socratic thinkers, particularly Plato.⁵⁹ He discarded much of the Old Testament because the Incarnation of Christ had made many of the older principles obsolete, but he maintained that as the Word of God it was true, in both the literal and allegorical sense. While never denying that Christ always was with the Father, He is the Word coming after

58. The acts of First Nicaea do not exist. What we know of it can be found in Mansi, I, 685-1082, but this is primarily a series of commentaries and a list of supposed canons. An easily accessible series of documents showing the developments that took place in the Nicene Creed is in Henry Bettenson, ed., Documents of the Christian Church (2nd ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 33-37. For the pertinent canons of First Constantinople, see Mansi, III, 566, specifically canon I, which rather vaguely does little more than reaffirm the decisions of Nicaea in 325. "Fidem non violandam patrum trecentorum decem & acto, qui apud Niceam Bithyniae convenerunt; sed manere eam firmam & stabilem. Anathematizandam omnem haeresim...." For all that it accomplished, this council was merely an addendum to First Nicaea.

59. For the more intimate details of Origen's life, see Eusebius, Church History, tr. by Arthur Cushman McGiffert, vol. I of Schaff and Wace, eds., Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, esp. Book VI, chaps. II-IV, VIII, XVI, XIX, XXIII-XXV and XXXVI. For much of my discussion I rely on Etienne Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages (New York: Random House, 1955), 35-43.

the Father. Succinctly, Origen seems to be saying that Christ (the Word) is divine but not God.⁶⁰

Florovsky sees Origen's emphasis on the material elements—water, earth, air and fire, plus the "fifth essence" of which celestial bodies are composed as an argument for stating that the humanity of Christ is but the lowest stage in the spiritual comprehension to which we must ascend.⁶¹ He says that "even on earth Christ was an altogether miraculous body."⁶² From this he derives the view that even the Crucifixion and the Incarnation were dissolved in the spiritual and transcendent act of the Ascension. Could we have an image, either of Christ, who had only momentarily been an historical figure, or of the saints now that they have obtained eternal spirituality?⁶³ Eusebius' letter to Constantia, sister of Constantine the Great, denying to her the picture of Christ that she had requested, becomes clear if we accept this argument. How could we expect to have a painting of Christ now that He resides in divine splendor which supersedes His humanity?⁶⁴

What Florovsky is arguing is that there is no historicity or possibility of a relic of any of the predecessors of man on earth because the termination of human life also terminates the possibility of anything

60. Gilson, *Christian Philosophy*, 39-40.

61. *Ibid.*, 36-37.

62. Florovsky, "Origen, Eusebius and Iconoclasm," 91.

63. *Ibid.*, 92-93.

64. Portions of the letter are printed in *ibid.*, 83-86, and the complete text is in *Mansi*, III, 314.

other than remembrance. What neither Eusebius nor Florovsky point out is that this development of the various stages of material and immaterial forces bears a very close resemblance to Heraclitus' theory that "everything flows."⁶⁵

Interestingly, Nicephorus calls Eusebius, who was bishop of Caesarea (c. 311/18-339/40), an Arian.⁶⁶

The Florovsky argument has its points, but perhaps he, as well as the others who read too much into Leo's decree should read what Florovsky himself has written.

We have to admit quite frankly that our knowledge of the epoch is still very inadequate and incomplete. There is still much to be done before we could attempt an inclusive historical synthesis.⁶⁷

The views of Origen were denounced at the Second Council of Constantinople (the Fifth Ecumenical Council) in 553.⁶⁷

Other great Christological disputes wracked the church. One of the most important and long-lived was monophysitism, which still numbers several hundreds of thousands of adherents in the Near East.

65. On this, see Milton C. Nahm, ed., Selections from Early Greek Philosophy (4th ed.; New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), 62-77, esp. 76-77.

66. Nicephorus, Chronologia, 85. "Eusebius, Arrianus declaratus...."

67. Florovsky, "Origen, Eusebius and Iconoclasm," 79-80.

68. Mansi, IX, Canon XI, 383. The canon reads: "Si quis non anathematizat Arium...Nestorium...Origenem cum impiis eorum conscriptis, & alios omnes haereticos qui condemnati & anathematizati sunt a sancta catholica & apostolica ecclesia, & a preadictis sanctis quatuor conciliis, & eos qui similia preadictis haereticis sapuerant vel sapuint, & usque ad mortem in sua impietate permanserunt vel permanent, talis anathema sit."

From the time of First Nicaea, it has been dogma that orthodox Christians must believe that Christ has two energies and two wills within one hypostasis. The monophysites, on the other hand, said that Christ, in the act of the Incarnation, had not soiled Himself with humanity, only its appearance. Negatively, He was not of the same substance (homousion) as humans and lacked a human soul, operating from divine will only. Positively, He was of the same substance as God and could not possibly be human. Carried to an extreme, Christ in human form was a brute. These views were condemned at the Council of Chalcedon (the Fourth Ecumenical Council) in 451.⁶⁹

To declare a belief to be heresy is one thing: to extirpate it, another. Monophysitism remained so potent a force that Heraclius attempted to reconcile the opposing views of Christ by declaring that He had two substances or energies and one operation or will. This Ecthesis of 638 was only partially satisfactory and Constans II was forced to call all discussions between monophysites and the followers of the Ecthesis, now termed monothelites, and the orthodox to a halt with the issuance of his Typus (Type of Faith) in 648.⁷⁰

Pope Martin I (649-55), however, called a synod at the Lateran to

69. Canon I rather vaguely merely requires that all canons enacted by previous councils be observed; Mansi, VII, 358. "Qui a sanctis patribus in unaquaque synodo hucusque expositi sunt, observari canones aequum censuimus."

70. Supra, 8, for the probable reasons why Heraclius issued his Ecthesis.

which 105 western bishops came and not only upheld dyothelitism, but condemned both monothelitism and the Heraclian compromise.⁷¹

This was too much for Constans, who probably nursed a grudge against Martin for not awaiting imperial approval before he ascended the papal throne. Martin was arrested, removed to Constantinople, deposed and exiled to the Crimea, where he died in 655.⁷²

This story of the poor deposed and maltreated pope should move us to pity, and the story of his lack of care, his poor lodgings and insufficient food is certainly a sad one. Even though Martin had the authority to call a synod at Rome to deal with purely local or regional matters, he was guilty of treason and so found at his trial. Not only had he flagrantly disobeyed his overlord's commands, anathematized him openly and publicly, but he sent the acts of his synod to all Christian nations, including a Greek copy to the emperor, in which it could plainly be seen that a mere patriarch, one

71. The canons of this synod number twenty. The most important is the eighteenth, in which all heresies from time immemorial are anathematized. Above all, "...& super haec impiissimam Ecthesim quae persuasione ejusdem Sergii facta est ab Heraclio quondam imperatore adversus orthodoxam fidem, unam Christi voluntatem, et unam ex concinnatione definientem operationem venerari; sed & omnia, quae pro ea impie ab eis scripta vel acta sunt, & illos qui eam suscipiunt, vel aliquid de his, quae pro ea scripta vel acta sunt; & cum illis denuo sclerosum Typum, qui ex suasionem praedicti Pauli nuper factus est a serenissimo principe Constantino imperatore contra catholicam ecclesiam, utpote duas naturales voluntates & operationes, divinam & humanam, Deo vero & salvatore nostro pie praediquae a sanctis patribus in ipso Christo Deo vero & salvatore nostro pie praedicantur, cum una voluntate & operatione quae ab haereticis impie in eo veneratur, pariter denegare & taciturnitate constringi promulgantem, & propterea cum sanctis patribus & sclerosos haereticos ab omni reprehensione & condemnatione injuste liberari definientem, in amputationem catholicae ecclesiae definitionum seu regulam...." Mansi, X, 1157-59.

72. Ostrogorsky, Geschichte, 99-100; Vasiliev, History, 223-24.

of five, was assuming undue authority.⁷³

It was Constantine IV who attempted to bring religious peace where there had been discord between east and west. In 680 he convoked the Third Council of Constantinople (the Sixth Ecumenical Council) to deal with this religious problem. It was now that the doctrine of two natural wills and operations was again upheld.⁷⁴

A simplistic solution to the Christological problem had been that of Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople (428-31). He was much concerned by the fact that the faithful but unknowledgeable tended to confuse the two natures of Christ, oftentimes attributing to His divine nature His human qualities and vice versa. In effect, Nestorius had split Christ into two distinct and separate beings.

In Constantinople, the very city in which the Mother of God is the patron saint, the patriarch also taught that Mary was

73. These materials are found in Mansi, X, 1170-83.

74. "Assecuti quoque sancta quinque universalia concilia, & sanctos atque probabiles patres, consonanterque confisteri definientes dominum nostrum Jesum Christum verum Deum nostrum, unam de sancta & consubstantiali & vitae originem praebente Trinitate; perfectum in deitate, & perfectum eundem in humanitate, Deum vere & hominem vere, eundem ex anima rationali & corpore, consubstantialem Patri secundum deitatem, & consubstantialem nobis secundum humanitatem, per omnia similem nobis absque peccato, ante saecula quidem ex Patre genitum secundum deitatem ...in duabus naturis inconfuse, inconvertibiliter, inseparabiliter, indivise, cognoscendum nusquam extincta harum naturarum differentia propter unionem, salvataque magis proprietate utriusque naturae, & in unam personam, & in unam subsistentiam concurrente, non in duas personas partitum vel divisum, sed unum eundemque unigenitum Filium Deum verbum dominum Jesum Christum...." Mansi, XI, 635-38.

Christótokos, the mother of the man Christ, not Theótokos, the mother of Christ, the Son of God. In 431, the Council of Ephesus (the Third Ecumenical Council) denounced these conceptions, anathematized Nestorius, deposed and exiled him.⁷⁵

We have now come full circle on the various bases attributed to Leo III in his iconoclastic edict. Paulicianism has not been discussed because it denied the symbol of the Cross, by no means an objective of the emperor.

75. The operative canon is number four: "Si quis duabus personis sive hypostasibus eas voces attribuit, quae in evangelicis & apostolicis scripturis passim occurrant; quae a sanctis de Christo, vel ab ipso quoque Christo de seipso dictae sunt; & alias quidem homini veluti seorsum a Dei Verbo considerato adscribit; alias vero, tamquam Deo convenientis, soli Dei Patris Verbo adaptat; anathema sit." Mansi, V, 10.

CHAPTER III

What each historian who has advanced a thesis concerning the outbreak of iconoclasm would have us believe is that Leo III was interested only in the Christological aspects of religion. Only Florovsky introduces the possibility that the conceptions of Origen could be applied, by extension, to the Virgin and the saints. I am not prepared to accept any of these "instances" as proofs. There were other factors involved, but before a discussion of them can be undertaken, it is necessary to clear away some of what Carlyle calls "lumber" that has accumulated around Leo's decree. These pieces of intellectual dead-wood are the authority of the emperor in ecclesiastical affairs and the entire matter of images.

Among Catholic historians in particular, it has become de rigueur to uphold the primacy of the pope in ecclesiastical matters, particularly in the calling of ecumenical councils. They have pushed history backwards to include this period in their contentions that the pope had supreme authority in the calling of ecumenical councils. Still, embedded in their arguments is the truth of the matter: that ecumenical councils were called by the emperor and the decrees that emanated from them were not legal unless and until they had imperial approval.

While not denying the right of the emperor to convoke councils, Father Mann unjustly claims that

When the Eastern emperors had arrogated to themselves the right of confirming papal elections, it was clearly

of moment, in order to avoid disagreements, that men should be chosen as popes who would not be wholly unacceptable to the emperors.⁷⁶

Monsignor Hughes is even less direct. His book on the councils of the church makes no mention of the authority of the emperor, saying,

it is a safe statement that from the moment when history first shows us the Church of Christ as an institution, the exclusive right of the Church to state with finality what should be believed as Christ's teaching is manifestly taken for granted.⁷⁷

But fifteen years earlier, Hughes had taken a position very close to Father Mann's, despite the fallaciousness of his views on imperial authority:

The semi-divine emperor of the pagan empire had never so abdicated his prerogative as to be no more than one of the faithful in the body of the Church. Gradually, in all that concerned its administration, he had come to be its head.⁷⁸

Father Francis Dvornik chooses to ignore 800 years of history when he writes that the Byzantine Church accepted that

the Christian Emperor not only had the right but also the duty to watch over the Church, to defend the Orthodox faith, and to lead his subjects to God. It

76. Mann, The Lives of the Popes, I, pt. I, 21.

77. Philip Hughes, The Church in Crisis: A History of the General Councils, 325-1870 (New York: Hanover House, 1961), 12.

78. Philip Hughes, A History of the Church (3 vols.; New York: Sheed and Ward, 1946), II, 122.

is from this point of view that we must judge the development of Eastern Christianity and its ideas on the relation of the Church on earth to the civil power.

This ideology was accepted throughout all of Christendom but the Roman Church had been able to escape its untoward consequences and the abuse of imperial power.⁷⁹

But more than a decade earlier, Father Dvornik could write that the popes accepted the authority of the emperor, including the convoking of councils, but that

only the bishops--the ecclesiastical senators--possessed the right to express their opinion at the meetings and to vote.⁸⁰

Only Bishop Hefele, writing in the mid-nineteenth century, states calmly and openly that the emperor had complete power over the church, especially in the matter of councils.⁸¹

The authority of the emperor to convoke ecumenical councils was not his only power. Despite what many believe, it was the emperor who reserved the right (as Father Mann points out) to approve, even to elevate and, when necessary, to depose patriarchs. It was not an arrogation of authority for Justinian I to depose Pope

79. Francis Dvornik, Byzantium and the Roman Primacy (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966), 18.

80. Francis Dvornik, "Emperors, Popes and General Councils," Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 6, 1951, 22-3.

81. Hefele, Councils, I, 6-15, states this explicitly in his review of the authority for calling a council ecumenical. It was not until Pope Calixtus II (1119-24) called the First Lateran Council in 1123 that we talk of the Eighth Ecumenical Council in the western church. Naturally, this usurpation of power, the result of the schism of 1054, was not accepted by the Orthodox Church, which to this day remains the Church of the Seven Councils, the last being Second Nicaea in 787.

Vigilius or Constans II to repeat the act with Pope Martin I. Also, the deposition of the patriarch Germanus by Leo III in 730 and his unsuccessful attempt to depose Gregory III (731-41) for his refusal to obey imperial commands was within the rights of the emperor.

The emperor saw himself as much a pontifex maximus as did any of the Roman rulers of antiquity. The title may have fallen into disuse, but he acted legally when

The true dogma had to be defined, heresies suppressed, and the jurisdictions of the various bishops delimited if there was to be peace and unity in the church--objectives that were universally desired and that had become the cornerstone of the imperial ecclesiastical policy. The state thus became an interested party in everything that concerned the church and was often called upon to use its machinery for the maintenance of ecclesiastical peace and unity.⁸²

In a word, the empire was an "absolutism"⁸³ ruled by the will of a single individual who, if he were strong enough, gave lip service to the whims of public opinion. We are asked to believe that when Constantine accepted Christianity and legalized the church--to make it, in fact, a state church--that this was some sort of an accommodation between equals, a concordat, if you will. But who

82. Peter Charanis, Church and State in the Later Roman Empire (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1939), 3.

83. Wilhelm Ensslin, "The Emperor and the Imperial Administration," in Byzantium, An Introduction to East Roman Civilization, ed by Norman H. Baynes and H. St. L.B. Moss (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1948), 268.

defined the terms and laid the ground rules? The emperor! And the church accepted willingly and humbly, grateful for this crumb from the table of the great. And it is incomprehensible that Monsignor Hughes and Father Mann could suggest that the power held by the emperor was an arrogation. Within the church, and most particularly the western church, with a structure that can be called a monolithic absolutism, by some magnificent casuistry the order of history is reversed and the authority that had never abandoned its right to accuse or to rule is accused of usurpation. The patriarchs (including the patriarch of Rome) were mere servants of the state. The maintenance of the pax Deorum lay firmly and securely in the hands of the ruler of the state.

How grateful the church was to receive the protection of the emperor is clearly shown in Eusebius' Life of Constantine. At Constantine's death, paintings were executed that "embodied a representation of heaven itself, and depicted the emperor reposing in an ethereal mansion above the celestial vault."⁸⁴ Constantine's sons were acclaimed by the populace as hereditary successors to the throne,⁸⁵ and the church added an unprecedented accolade. He "was permitted to share the monument of the apostles [viz., burial in the Church of the Holy Apostles]; was associated with the honor of their name and with that of the people of God; and enjoyed a participation in the prayers of the saints."⁸⁶ In short, Constantine

84. Eusebius, The Life of Constantine, tr. by Ernest Cushing Richardson, vol. 1 of Schaff and Wace, eds., A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 558.

85. Ibid., 557-58.

86. Ibid., 558.

became the thirteenth apostle.

A coinage was also struck which bore the following device. On one side appeared the figure of our blessed prince, with the head closely veiled: the reverse exhibited him sitting as a charioteer, drawn by four horses, with a hand stretched downward from above to receive him up to heaven.⁸⁷

If this reminds us of Augustus ascending into heaven from the Field of Mars, it shows both the continuity of culture and rule, but, above all, it indicates that in all things, the emperor held the state (and that included the church) in manu. If there was an arrogation of power, it was by the church, but perhaps accretion is the better word.

Another aspect of Byzantine history that is very much open to debate is the coronation ceremony. What the role of the church was in this act of solemn, public and ritualistic acceptance of power is unclear. Norman Baynes poses the question that has no final answer as yet:

There has been much controversy concerning the constitutional significance of the coronation of the Byzantine Emperor: did the Patriarch at the coronation represent the Church or, as is generally held, did he act as the delegate of the Roman State?⁸⁸

J. B. Bury is a perfect reflection of the problem. In 1909,

87. Ibid., 559.

88. Norman H. Baynes, Byzantine Studies and Other Essays (University of London: The Athlone Press, 1960), 34.

he could not accept the presence of the patriarch at the imperial coronation as an ecclesiastical force.⁸⁹ By 1912, however, in his History of the Eastern Roman Empire, Bury shifted his position drastically because he then believed that coronation by the patriarch

definitely introduced the new constitutional principle that the profession of Christianity was a necessary qualification for holding the Imperial office and implied that the new Emperor had not only been elected by the Senate and the people, but was accepted by the church.⁹⁰

Not content with this reversal, Bury compounded the problem in the 1923 revision of his magnum opus of 1889 by reverting to the position he held in 1909, a view shared by Sickel, the great German student of coronations.⁹¹

F. E. Brightman attempted to clarify the issue by dividing the coronation ceremony into five periods: from the Principate to Diocletian; the period of the fourth and fifth centuries; from the end of the fifth through the sixth century; from the seventh century through the twelfth century; and, finally, from the twelfth century to the end of the empire. Our concern is with periods three and four. According to Brightman, the third period, extending from the

89. J.B. Bury, The Constitution of the Late Roman Empire, Creighton Memorial Lecture Delivered at University College, London, 12 November, 1909 (Cambridge: The University Press, 1910), 103-05.

90. J. B. Bury, A History of the Eastern Roman Empire from the Fall of Irene to the Accession of Basil I, A.D. 867 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), 39.

91. Bury, History 1923 ed., I, 11. W. Sickel, "Das byzantinische Krönungsrecht bis zum 10. Jahrhundert," Byzantinische Zeitschrift, VII, 1898, 512.

end of the fifth century through the sixth century was "marked by the addition of a religious sanction and the beginnings of an ecclesiastical rite."⁹² From the seventh through the twelfth centuries was a period "in which the investiture was performed in a church and a definite rite emerges."⁹³

Despite Brightman's periodizations, in the eighth century there was still no hard and fast rule. The imperial coronation ceremony had usually taken place in the Hippodrome and it was Phocas (602-10) who was the first emperor crowned in a church (St. John in the Hebdomon, November 23, 602).⁹⁴ The first emperor crowned in Hagia Sophia was Constantine III (641).⁹⁵ As we have seen, Leo III was crowned in the latter church in 717, as was his son Constantine V in 720.⁹⁶ Yet, Constantine VI (780-97) grandson of Constantine V, was crowned in the Hippodrome.⁹⁷

Whether the patriarch was present at all times is unclear. We do know that from the time of Leo II (473-4) through Maurice

92. Reverend F. E. Brightman, "Byzantine Imperial Coronations," The Journal of Theological Studies, II, October 1900-July 1901, 360.

93. Loc. cit.

94. Brightman, "Imperial Coronations," 377. Peter Charanis, "Coronation and Its Constitutional Significance in the Later Roman Empire," Byzantium, XV, 1940-41, 52.

95. Brightman, "Imperial Coronations," 377.

96. Loc. cit., says Constantine V was crowned in Triclinum of the XIX Accubili.

97. Loc. cit.

(582-602) the ceremony was usually conducted in the Hippodrome with the patriarch officiating, unless the predecessor was alive and performed the act himself.⁹⁸ Peter Charanis and Brightman are at odds on this point. Charanis says the patriarch was first introduced into the coronation ceremony about 450 and acted not as the representative of the people and the senate, but as Christ's living representative on earth.⁹⁹

Marcian (450-57) is the first emperor of whom we have record who named God, the senate and the army as the three active elements in raising him to the throne. Charanis tells us that Marcian had neglected to obtain the approval of his western colleague, Valentinian III (425-54), and sought to legitimize the act by having the patriarch sanctify his accession. If this is so, it may be at this time that the oath was first introduced requiring no alterations in religion by the emperor. In this regard, Charanis says that while the senate and army were concrete elements, God could only be represented by the church in the person of the patriarch.¹⁰⁰

We do know that there were sporadic demands that the emperor sign such an oath.

On April 10, 491, the emperor Zeno died. In the evening of the same day the silentary Anastasius was chosen by Ariadne, widow of the deceased emperor, to become her husband and emperor of the Roman Empire. The Senate and the ministers approved Ariadne's choice, and the elderly Anastasius (he was sixty-one years old) accepted the

98. Ibid., 369.

99. Charanis, "Coronation and Its Significance," 52. Yet, he is really talking of the tenth century when these rites were much more formalized.

100. Ibid., 53-4.

offer. But strenuous objections came from an unexpected quarter--from Euphemius, patriarch of Constantinople. Not until he received from Anastasius a document written by him and bearing his signature did Euphemius withdraw his objections. In this document Anastasius accepted the doctrines of the Council of Chalcedon and gave his promise, sanctioned by fearful oaths, that he would maintain the faith inviolate and introduce no innovations into the holy church of God when he became emperor. The document was placed in the archives of the Great Church under the care of Macedonius, keeper of the sacred treasures. On April 11 the patriarch crowned Anastasius emperor of the Roman Empire.¹⁰¹

However solemn the oath and however many witnesses it may have had, Anastasius was a monophysite and continued to be one until his death. It seems that it was the personality of the emperor that determined the attitude he would take towards religion. Father Dvornik may argue that the emperor proposed and the bishops disposed, but the emperor called the councils and presided over them. Since he maintained complete authority over the state and set forth the issues the councils were to debate, it seems more than likely that he got what he wanted. As for Leo III, his position is quite clear, irrespective of the fact that the patriarch crowned him:

God...having delivered to us the Sovereignty of the Empire, as it was His good pleasure, He added to 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, to feed His most faithful flock.

101. Charanis, Church and State, 10.

We can conceive of nothing more acceptable by way of thanksgiving to Him than the righteous and just government of those entrusted to us by Him....¹⁰²

Nothing that can be said can add to that conception of the imperial prerogative, beyond reminding the reader of the history of made and unmade patriarchs, deposed popes and a series of imperial edicts defining religion.

102. Leo III, *The Ecloga*, tr. by Edwin H. Freshfield, in *Roman Law in the Later Roman Empire, the Isaurian Period, Eighth Century, the Ecloga* (Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes, 1932), 67. On the coronation oath, see Appendix II.

CHAPTER IV

A dictionary definition of an image is "An artificial imitation or representation of the external form of any object, es. of a person. A statue, effigy, sculptured figure. A likeness, portrait, picture, carving or the like."¹⁰³

The operative word here is "artificial" because an image cannot, by definition, be the same as that which it represents. Furthermore, we cannot have an image of what has never been physically delimited. The iconodule will argue that we can represent Christ, the Virgin and the saints because they had human, therefore, representable, qualities.

Within the Christian church it is uncertain as to when images began to be widely used. Certainly, by the time of Constantine iconography had "come above ground," and by the mid-fourth century Christ was represented in mosaics and other works, such as pictures and tapestries.¹⁰⁴

Almost immediately after the foundation of the church, the use of icons and relics (what the church now calls "sacramentals" or aids to faith) as a means of attaining the grace of God came into

103. The Oxford Universal Dictionary on Historical Principles, 3rd rev. ed.; 1955.

104. Rice, *Beginnings of Christian Art*, 62-5. There are innumerable works on early Christian art. Rice, 19-72, has a clear discussion of the matter, as has Gerhart B. Ladner, "The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers and the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 7, 1953, 3-34. A succinct and scholarly discussion is in Ernst Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images Before Iconoclasm," 85-100.

use. During the persecution of the Christians instituted by Diocletian (284-305), Eusebius tells us that the persecutors were compelled to dig up the bodies of the victims

who had been committed to the earth with suitable burial, and cast them into the sea, lest any, as they thought, regarding them as gods, might worship them lying in their sepulchers.¹⁰⁵

At the very time the persecution was undertaken "in the nineteenth year of the reign" of Diocletian, the bishops of Spain gathered at Elvira. From this synod a decree was promulgated banning the images in use in the church. The date of the gathering is uncertain, ranging from 300 to 306 A.D., and the circumstances under which its 36th canon was issued can be linked to these persecutions. Its meaning is quite clear, however:

Placuit, picturas in ecclesia esse non debere; ne quod colitur, et adoratur in parietibus depingatur.¹⁰⁶

105. Eusebius, *Church History*, VIII, 7. The translator, McGiffert, in note, p. 328, observes "That in the present case the suspicion that the Christians would worship the remains of these so-called martyrs was not founded merely upon knowledge of the conduct of Christians in general in relation to the relics of their martyrs, but upon actual experience is shown by the fact that the emperor first buried them, and afterward had them dug up. Evidently Christians showed them such honor, and collected in such numbers about their tombs, that he believed it was necessary to take some such step in order to prevent the growth of a spirit of rebellion, which was constantly fostered by such demonstrations."

106. Mansi, II, 11. Father Mann improves the punctuation as follows: "Placuit picturas in Ecclesia esse non debere, ne, quod colitur et adoratur, in parietibus depingatur." Cf., Mann, *Lives of the Popes*, I, pt. II, 180.

Too much stress has been placed on this canon. I quite agree with Hefele, who discounts it because "held at the entrance of the time of Constantine, the Synod of Elvira stands at the boundary of two periods."¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, even had the prohibition been of a universal character, it is doubtful that it would have been observed.

Dogma, in the Roman and Orthodox churches, draws a very fine line between the acts of worshipping or adoring and reverencing or venerating. We worship the Trinity, we reverence Mary and the saints. The use of statues and other holy images and relics are aids to faith and communion with God. To the vulgar mind, however, such a conception is very difficult. Two supplicants kneeling before an image may have the same outward appearances, but it would require oracular confession to determine which was reverencing and, therefore, orthodox, and which was adoring, therefore, heretical.

Furthermore, dogma maintains that the reverence we show to an image passes over to the prototype, a neo-Platonic conception. Additionally, to pray to this or that saint, from a dogmatic viewpoint, is to ask that he or she intercede with God to grant our requests because the saint has no power other than that granted by God. This distinction is not clear to many of the faithful even in these days of advanced education; who could (or can) expect the ignorant to separate the two ideas?

From the Christological point of view, Christ is one person in two natures. These natures can neither be sundered nor confused.

To represent the ineffable Godhead of Christ in the form of an image, an iconoclast would argue, would be to sever what cannot be severed and to create two distinct beings, one human and the other divine, in precisely the same manner as the Nestorian heresy. The iconodule, on the other hand, would argue that Christ can be portrayed in His humanity because He had a human nature. To preclude a representation of this aspect of the divinity would be the equivalent of monophysitism, another heresy.

Simply stated, each party agreed that a representation is possible, but while they understood this much, they could not accept the terms under which the opposing view operated. For the iconodule, neo-Platonic views sufficed. For the iconoclast, the attitude was more linked to the Aristotelian view that form and matter are inseparable. It is relevant to note that these distinctions were perfectly clear to the pagans. Julian the Apostate (361-63), assuming a perfect neo-Platonic position, presented this clearly when he wrote that

when we look at the images of the gods, let us not indeed think that they are stones or wood, but neither let us think they are the gods themselves; and indeed we do not say that the statues of the emperors are mere wood and stone and bronze, but still less do we say that they are the emperors themselves. He therefore who loves the emperor delights to see the emperor's statue, and he who loves his son delights to see his son's statue.... It follows that he who loves the gods delights to gaze on the images of the gods, and their likenesses, and he feels reverence and shudders with awe of the gods who look at him from the unseen world.

108

108. Julian the Apostate, *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, tr. by Niall Rudd (3 vols.; Cambridge: The Harvard University Press, 1959), II, 311. This is also quoted in Baynes, *Byzantine Studies*, 130.

An amusing proto-Aristotelian argument is that of the god Priapus as quoted by Horace:

Once I was a trunk of a fig-tree, a useless lump of wood. Then the carpenter, in two minds whether to make me into a stool or a Priapus, decided I should be a god, and so a god I am.¹⁰⁹

The church did place some limitations on images, however. The Virgin and the saints were once human and could be represented. Christ, having assumed human form, could also be imaged. But God the Father never appeared in human form. St. John of Damascus tells us:

No man hath seen God at any time: the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him That He is without body is obvious, for how could a body contain that which is limitless, boundless, formless, impalpable, invisible, simple, and uncompounded? How could it be immutable, if it were subject to change?¹¹⁰

One might ask the same question about the immutability of Jesus Christ, but that is a problem for the theologian. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit assumed the form of a dove, we are told, and that is the means whereby He is represented. Yet the only appearance of a dove is in Genesis, and that dove was sent forth by Noah himself.¹¹¹

109. Horace, The Satires of Horace, tr. by William Cave Wright (Cambridge: The University Press, 1966), 67. A different translation appears in Edwyn Bevan, "Idolatry," The Edinburgh Review, vol. 243, no. 496, April 1926, 258.

110. St. John of Damascus, An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, tr. by Frederic Chase, Jr.; vol. 37 of The Fathers of the Church, ed. by Roy Joseph Defferari, et al. (58 vols.; New York: The Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1949-67), Bk. I, Chap. I.

111. "...and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; And the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf pluckt off.... Genesis, 8, 8-9.

John further adjures us that "If we made an image of the invisible God, we should in truth do wrong. For it is impossible to make a statue of one who is without body...¹¹² It is a small matter, but if we cannot picture God the Father, then it seems we cannot picture the Holy Spirit or the angels. We have it on John's authority that the angels are "an incorporeal race":

They are not hemmed in by walls and doors, and bars and seals, for they are quite unlimited. For they have not a bodily form by nature, nor are they extended in three dimensions.¹¹³

We learn much the same from Nicephorus: Eorum quae corpore vacant, non necesse est imagines esse, sicut nec impossibile esse....¹¹⁴

Yet, Gregory the Great, certainly one of the most simple-minded and credulous of men, testifies to the appearance of angels, one particularly startling example having occurred before the eyes of St. Benedict of Nursia (d. 543), who entered his cell and, while standing at his window, saw that

the whole world was gathered before his eyes in what appeared to be a single ray of light. As he gazed at all this dazzling display, he saw the soul of Germanus, the Bishop of Capua, being carried by angels up to heaven in a ball of fire.¹¹⁵

112. St. John of Damascus, On Holy Images, tr. by Mary H. Allies (London: Thomas Baker, 1898), 58.

113. St. John of Damascus, Exposition of the Faith, Book 2, Chap. 3.

114. Nicephorus, De Cherubinis à Moyse factis, I, C, in La Bigne, Maxima Bibliotheca, XIV, 92.

115. St. Gregory the Great, Dialogues, tr. by Odo John Zimmerman, vol. 39 of The Fathers of the Church, Dialogue II, 35.

Despite John and Nicephorus, the Second Council of Nicaea accepted Gregory's view and ruled that angels could be represented along with Christ and the saints because they had appeared to some people.¹¹⁶

These teachings are still dogma within the Roman Catholic Church. But there appears to be a dichotomy between teaching and practice. Michelangelo has represented God the Father on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel as a vigorous, elderly gentleman extending his life-giving finger to grant mortal life to Adam. And where do these teachings arise?

According to the Church, the bases for belief are:

- 1) The Old Testament. Here is the word of God as it was revealed to the prophets of Israel. This is a divine book in that God Himself speaks to the prophets in much the same manner as Mohammed tells us he was merely God's amanuensis in bringing forth the Koran.
- 2) The New Testament. Unlike the Old Testament, this is merely divinely inspired because it contains the words and deeds of Christ Incarnate as revealed through the apostolic writings.

116. At the fourth session the bishops decreed: "Porro has preciosas & venerabilis iconas, ut praedictum est, honoramus & salutamus, ac honoranter adoramus; hoc est, magni Dei & Salvatoris nostri Jesu Christi humanationis imaginem, & intemeratae dominae nostri sanctissime Dei genitricis, ex qua ipse voluit incarnari, & salvare atque liberare nos ab omni impia idolorum vesania: sanctorum etiam & incorporalium angelorum; ut homines iustis apparuerunt." Mansi, XIII, 131.

John of Damascus anticipated this canon, even calling forth the Biblical injunction to Moses to fashion cherubim for the tabernacle of the Lord. See his On Holy Images, 65. To complicate the issue further, there are nine choirs of angels divided into three triads, each having its own representational forms and attributes, e.g., "seraphim are shown with six red wings covered with eyes...." See LeRoy H. Appleton and Stephen Bridges, Symbolism in Liturgical Art (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), 3-5. The quotation is from page 4.

- 3) The fathers of the church. These men, doctores defensoresque ecclesiae, or, as Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) styled them, egregii doctores ecclesiae, have added to the corpus of revealed religion through their explications of the books of the Bible.¹¹⁷
- 4) The decisions of church councils. These are the further unfolding of religion as revealed by God to the finite minds of the bishops of the church sitting in conclave. The decisions of these men are, in theory at least, based on the three previously named sources.
- 5) Tradition. This is the crux of the iconoclastic problem and is, by definition, self-explanatory.

117. The western church recognizes saints Ambrose, Jerome, Gregory the Great and Augustine, as well as the eastern fathers, saints Basil, Gregory of Nazianus, John Chrysostom and Athanasius, who were added in 1568 by Pope Pius V (1566-72). Others, such as saints Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure and Albertus Magnus, hold the simpler and lesser title of doctores ecclesiae. On this, see Berthold Altaner, Patrology, tr. by Hilda C. Graef (2nd ed.; New York: Herder and Herder, 1961), 4-5.

CHAPTER V

We know little or nothing about Leo III's edict of 726, so complete has been the censorship. And, as we have seen, students of this era of Byzantine history are divided as to the motives that underlay Leo's attempt to ban images from the church. While there is disagreement as to the reasons for Leo's actions, there is near unanimity on two points: that Leo was, at least by implication, a heretic because he championed ideas that were denounced by the church; and that the emperor was concerned with the purely Christological argument which, by extension, was applied to other images. Neither of these contentions is sufficient, nor is Gibbon's view that

in the outset of an unsettled reign, during ten years of toil and danger, Leo submitted to the meanness of hypocrisy, bowed before the idols which he despised, and satisfied the Roman pontiff with the annual professions of his orthodoxy and zeal.¹¹⁸

Based on what little evidence concerning Leo's character is available to us, hypocrisy was the last of the vices from which he suffered. He appears to have had a direct, forceful and authoritarian character, and to have been an activist to whom hypocrisy was both foreign and unnecessary.

It is equally difficult to accept the arguments that we must lay the blame for iconoclasm at the doors of the synagogue and mosque. Leo, only four years earlier, had attempted to prove both his Catholicity and his orthodoxy by forcibly (and unsuccessfully) attempting to convert the

118. Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, V, 251.

Jews to Christianity and the Montanists to orthodoxy.¹¹⁹ Leo had leaped at the throat of evil and the students of this most important period in western history barely credit him with hanging on the tip of its tail.

As for the Moslem influence, not only had the Islamic forces been resoundingly defeated in the field nearly ten years earlier, but at this time they were importers rather than exporters of culture. It hardly seems likely that Leo would be so easily persuaded to accept their religious views; indeed, at this point in their culture, the Moslems were dependent upon Byzantine modes of thought and expression. Not until the fall of the Umayyad dynasty (661-750) and the removal of the capital from Damascus to Baghdad by the incoming Abassids (750-1258) did the cultural configuration of the Islamic world begin to turn to the east.¹²⁰

119. St. John of Damascus, On Heresies, tr. by Frederic H. Chase, Jr., vol. 37 of The Fathers of the Church, lists 103 heresies. Number 48 is "The Cataphrygians, or Montanists, or Ascodrugites, who accept the Old and New Testaments but they also introduce other prophets of whom they make much--a certain Montanus and a Priscilla." Cf., 123.

The Montanists appeared about the middle of the second century and derive their name from their leader, Montanus, who preached that the second coming of Christ was upon us, in much the same manner as the Seventh Day Adventists or mid-19th century Millerites. His first two converts were women, Maximilla and Priscilla. The sect spread because its ascetic teachings and its appeal for an end to the worldliness of the church and the denial of material possessions was attractive. Tertullian, from whose writings we derive much of our knowledge, was a convert. A complete discussion is in Arthur Cushman McGiffert, A History of Christian Thought (2 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932-1933), I, 166-74.

120. On this, see Hamilton A. R. Gibb, "Arab-Byzantine Relations Under the Umayyad Caliphate," Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 12, 1958, 219-33.

We still have traces of this emphasis on Moslem religious influences in current writing. Vasiliev professes to see some connection between a decree issued by the Caliph Yazid II (720-24) in 721 banning images from Christian churches and Leo's decree, but he seems to be pursuing a false trail.¹²¹

We have more than a hint of Leo's orthodoxy prior to 726. A major piece of evidence is the correspondence that passed between him and the Caliph Omar II (717-720) concerning images in the churches. For many years the authenticity of this correspondence was in doubt. In 1944, Arthur Jeffery carefully analyzed the material, which first appeared in the works of Ghevond, a late 9th- to late 10th-century Armenian historian, and concluded it was genuine. It is now accepted.¹²²

Apparently Omar was following an Islamic custom of writing to Christian rulers upon accession to the caliphate, attempting to convert them to Islam. Because of the brevity of Omar's reign, the letters can be dated easily. He asked the emperor:

Why do you adore the bones of Apostles and Prophets, and also pictures and the cross, which anciently served, according to the law, as an instrument of torture?... The Qur'an claims Jesus was merely a messenger.¹²³

121. A. A. Vasiliev, "The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A.D. 721," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 9-10, 1956, 25.

122. Arthur Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III," *Harvard Theological Review*, XXXVII, 1944, 269-332. Portions of the letter of Leo III to Omar can be found in John Meyendorff, "Byzantine Views of Islam," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 18, 1964, 125-26.

123. Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text," 278. This section is a digest, according to Jeffery.

Leo replied:

He who believes in Me, believes not merely in Me, but in Him who sent Me (John XII, 44). The meaning of this is that it is not His human and visible character that one believes, but in His divine character, inasmuch as He is the Word of God.¹²⁴

Concerning the Cross and images, Leo wrote further:

We know the Cross because of the sufferings of that Word of God incarnate.... As for pictures, we do not give them a like respect, not having received in Holy Scripture any commandment whatsoever in this regard. Nevertheless, finding in the Old Testament that divine command which authorized Moses to have executed in the Tabernacle the figures of the Cherubim, and, animated by a sincere attachment for the disciples of the Lord who burned with love for the Saviour Himself, we have always felt a desire to conserve their images which have come down to us from their times as their living representations. Their presence charms us, and we glorify God who has saved us by the intermediary of His Only-Begotten Son, who appeared in the world in a similar figure, and we glorify the saints. But as for the wood and the colors, we do not give them any reverence.¹²⁵

Having said this much, Leo then went on to accuse the Moslems of idolatry because of their retention of the pagan Ka'ba. He concludes by saying:

the word of God tasted death in His human nature, while remaining in His divine nature always immortal, though inseparable from His humanity, and as true God engendered from true God.¹²⁶

124. Ibid., 312

125. Ibid., 322.

126. Ibid., 326.

The correspondence deserves to be quoted in extenso because it gives us a clear picture of an orthodox emperor fulfilling his charge of defending the Christian Oecumene. We also have a minor piece of evidence, a seal, that falls outside the narrow limits of Omar's three-year reign.

On one side is represented a young, clean-shaven emperor crowned with a diadem bearing a cross; on the other side, the Virgin, holding on her left arm the Infant Jesus. Since the seal bears the legend 'Leo and Constantine, the Faithful Emperors of the Romans,' it is to be attributed to a year after 720, when Constantine V was associated to the throne.¹²⁷

If these accidental pieces of evidence can be accepted as proof of Leo's orthodoxy, and I am bearing in mind that seals do not always prove exact chronology, what happened after 720?¹²⁸ What was it that made Leo III "faithful emperor of the Romans," an orthodox, practicing and devoted son and protector of the church, decide to attack one of its most important traditions?

The answer lies in the state of the empire and the church. Kitzinger is quite correct, it appears, when he says that the impetus for iconoclasm arose from within the church itself.¹²⁹ As we have seen, the empire suffered under repeated pressures for nearly two hundred years. Invasions and incursions were facts of existence. The empire was at a low point and, as we are well aware, as education wanes, superstition

127. Vasiliev, "The Edict of Yazid," 25. E. J. Martin, in his History of Iconoclastic Controversy, 26, note 3, says that Leo never used the image of Christ on his coinage. As we have seen, recent discoveries have disproved this statement.

128. The coinage of the reign of Constantine V that I have seen bears only the representation of the Cross, but, again, this may not be significant.

129. Kitzinger, supra, 17.

waxes. Education must have suffered greatly, particularly in those eastern provinces where iconoclasm seems to have been strongest. As we know from our own era with its propaganda pictures of Christ rising above the trenches and the modern "God is on our side philosophy," periods of stress produce an increase in primitive religion. Among a more simple people, this can take the form of greater emphasis on the miraculous powers of God, the Virgin and the saints, as represented in the talismanic powers of images and relics. Who can forget the pictures of Russian soldiers during World War I being led into battle improperly trained, incompetently led and woefully deficient in arms, but preceded by priests bearing icons of the Virgin? Furthermore, in Byzantium, during the sieges of Constantinople in 674-78 and 717-18, credit for the victories gained was granted to the icon of the Virgin that was paraded around the walls of the city by the patriarch, rather than to the exertions of men. One of Leo's great triumphs was his victory in the latter siege. Would it not seem strange if he resented the popular conception that the Virgin and not he had gained the day?

Martin tells us that "Leo's political ideal seems to have been simply to make use of his religious point of view to support his general scheme of purifying and raising the low tone of society."¹³⁰ Lord Bryce, whose field is not Byzantine history, says that Leo's birthplace was Isauria, "where a purer faith may yet have lingered," and that he set out to purify religion.¹³¹

130. Martin, *History of the Iconoclastic Controversy*, 28.

131. James Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire* (8th ed.; London: Macmillan and Co., 1889), 35.

What was the influence of bishops Constantine of Nacolia and Thomas of Claudiopolis and Archbishop Theodosius of Ephesus, the son of Tiberius II? If we could prove they were monophysites, we might be able to build a case on the Anastos thesis that this was the basis for Leo's edict.¹³² But I believe that the principal influence, Bishop Constantine, was merely a catalyst who brought to Leo's attention the low estate of religion. Father Mann calls him "thoroughly impure and ignorant...an immoral bishop!", but that is typical of his almost hysterical partisanship.¹³³ Bishop Hefele tells us the story of Constantine going to see the Patriarch Germanus in order to register his opposition to images. Constantine appealed to the Old Testament prohibitions on images but was supposedly persuaded by Germanus to accept the church's position. Germanus then asked Constantine to deliver a letter to his metropolitan concerning the issue, which Constantine failed to do. For his failure to obey, Constantine was excommunicated until such time as he complied with his commission.¹³⁴ Apparently Bishop Constantine appealed to Leo himself. Did he persuade the emperor of the low state of the practice of faith in his province? Was he a fulcrum in the alteration of the imperial position on images? We shall probably never know, but the guess might be hazarded that the three churchmen, having attempted through all channels open to

132. Supra, 18.

133. Mann, The Lives of the Popes, I, Pt. II, 182.

134. Hefele, Councils, V, 266-8. For the letter written by Germanus, see Mansi, XIII, 99-108.

them within the church, finding the hierarchy on the side of images despite the idolatrous use to which they were put, turned to the ultimate and final authority and received a favorable response. Could it be that Leo, seeing the true nature of the church, decided to purify it and cleanse it of unhealthy and unorthodox practices?

If Leo's purpose was to purify religion and elevate society, he was undertaking an herculean task. Images in the church had been traditional for hundreds of years. Although they were designed to instruct the faithful, the abasement of them into idolatrous figures had proceeded unhindered by the church, indeed, with its assistance. Gregory the Great, upon hearing that Serenus, Bishop of Marseilles, had acted rather precipitously and forcefully against images in his diocese, wrote

that it has come to our ears that your Fraternity, seeing certain adorers of images, broke and threw down these same images in Churches. And we commend you indeed for your zeal against anything made with hands being an object of adoration; but we signify to you that you ought not to have broken these images. For the pictorial representation is made use of in Churches for this reason; that such as are ignorant of letters may at least read by looking at the walls what they cannot read in books. Your Fraternity therefore should have both preserved the images and prohibited the people from adoration of them, to the end that both those who are ignorant of letters might have wherewith to gather a knowledge of the history, and that the people might by no means sin by adoration of a pictorial representation.¹³⁵

Apparently this epistle had little effect on Serenus because

135. Gregory the Great, Selected Epistles, tr. by Rev. James Barmby, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, XIII, Book IX, Ep. CV, 23.

Gregory was later forced to reprimand him for not heeding "the admonition which in brotherly love we gave thee...." He now drove the point home more clearly:

For what writing presents to the readers, this a picture presents to the unlearned who behold, since in it even the ignorant see what they ought to follow; in it the illiterate read.¹³⁶

John of Damascus uses almost the same formula in his defense of images:

The image is a memorial, just what words are to a listening ear. What a book is to the literate, that an image is to the illiterate. The image speaks to the sight as words to the ear; it brings us to understanding.¹³⁷

Such was (and is) the theory. But the practice, even among the literate, was pagan idolatry, what Adolf von Harnack calls

a kind of subsidiary religion, one of the second rank, as it were, subterranean, different among different peoples, but everywhere alike in its crass superstition, naive doкетism, dualism, and polytheism.¹³⁸

Instead of being articles of devotion to edify the masses, images and relics became in and of themselves miraculous, or worse, articles of decoration:

136. Ibid., Book XI, Ep. XIII, 53.

137. St. John of Damascus, On Holy Images, 19.

138. Adolf von Harnack, History of Dogma, tr. by E. B. Speiers and J. Millar (7 vols.; 3rd ed.; New York, 1958), IV, 304.

women decorated their dresses with personal images and pictures, such as the marriage feast of Cana, the sick man who walked, the blind man who saw, Magdalene at the feet of Jesus, and the resurrection of Lazarus.¹³⁹

Oman tells us that image worship had developed into "mere Fetishism."

Every ancient picture or statue was now announced as both miraculously produced and imbued with miraculous powers. These wonderworking pictures and statues were now adored as things in themselves divine: the possession of one or more of them made the fortune of a church or monastery....¹⁴⁰

Such credibility was not confined to the vulgar and ignorant. Pope Gregory the Great, elevated to the highest positions in both the church militant and spiritual, denied to the wife of the Emperor Maurice, Constantina Augusta, in 593-94, "the head of Saint Paul, or some other part of his body, for the church which is being built in honour of the same Saint Paul in the palace." He wrote that he could not comply with her request because:

...the bodies of the apostles...glitter with so great miracles and terrors in their churches that one cannot even go to pray there without great fear. In short, when my predecessor, of blessed memory, was desirous of changing the silver which was over the most sacred body of the blessed apostle Peter, though at a distance of almost fifteen feet from the same body, a sign of no small dreadfulness appeared to him. Nay, I too wished in like manner to amend something not far from the most sacred body of Saint Paul the apostle; and, it being necessary to dig to some depth near his sepulchre, the superintendent of that place found some bones ...but, inasmuch as he presumed to lift them and

139. Arthur Clarence Flick, The Rise of the Mediaeval Church (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1909), 272.

140. Oman, Byzantine Empire, 190-91.

transfer them to another place, certain awful signs appeared, and he died suddenly.¹⁴¹

Perhaps Gregory did not want to part with the relic and dissimulated, but his writings are so full of the miraculous and marvelous that we must accept that he believed in all these signs and portents.¹⁴²

At the Sixth Ecumenical Council in 680-81, a monothelite, wishing to prove that the monothelitic profession of faith was capable of raising the dead, asked permission of the bishops to prove his argument by allowing him to place the document on the breast of a dead man, who would then rise. "The Fathers of the Council accepted the test."¹⁴³ The church had reached a low point indeed when the bishops, in a body, could act so immaturely.

Gregory the Great was a member of a patrician family and well educated for his time. Presumably the bishops of the church were also well educated. If the argument is raised that these instances were temporary lapses and that the church purified itself after iconoclasm, perhaps another example, taken from the ninth century and involving the great St. Theodore of Studium (d. 826), might quash the objection:

At Constantinople, in the ninth century, according

141. Gregory the Great, Epistles, XXX, 154-55.

142. Cf., supra, 45.

143. Harnack, History of Dogma, V, 310. The italics are his. The same story is told with a pro-orthodox bias by Hughes, The Church in Crisis, 152. Charity demands that we credit the fathers with an attempt to discredit monothelitism because the test took place in a public arena before a huge crowd.

to a letter of the Emperor Michael [I, 811-45], not only were prayers and incense habitually offered to images of the saints, but the images were dressed up in linen clothes, they were carried as sponsors to the baptism of infants; men taking monastic vows laid their hair they cut in the lap of an image; priests scratched fragments of paint off the ikons and mixed it in the sacred elements in the mass, or put the host in the hands of an image so that the communicant might receive it directly from the saint. Theodore of Studium, a great champion of image-worship, wrote to congratulate a friend who had taken the image of a martyr as a sponsor for his child. The martyr, he assured his friend had been actually and personally present at the ceremony in his image, and had held in his own arms the child placed on the arm of the image. 'This,' he says, 'may be incomprehensible, even incredible, to unholy ears and unbelieving hearts.'¹⁴⁴

So much for images as instructional devices for the illiterate and uneducated!

I have stated previously that Leo was not a heretic and have emphasized repeatedly that he was attacking a traditional usage. My reasons for hewing to this line, in opposition to the views expressed by others, rests on the fact that no one who was a contemporary of the emperor called him a heretic. We have two authorities, Pope Gregory II (715-31) and John of Damascus, each of whom was well removed from the direct arm of Leo's power. Italy was almost independent of the imperial will and John of Damascus was safely ensconced in a monastery in Moslem Syria. Yet neither of these men, the former in his letters to Leo, the latter in his On Holy Images, do more than argue that images were traditional in the church. Even Nicephorus, writing well after the event, uses no stronger term

144. Bevan, "Idolatry," 269-70.

than "impious."¹⁴⁵ Certainly, both John and Gregory II would have been among the first to accuse Leo of heterodoxy. Gregory wrote to Leo in early 727, "It would have been better for you to have been a heretic than a destroyer of images."¹⁴⁶

John of Damascus does not even go that far. He contents himself with a defense of images on traditional grounds, while denying the authority of the emperor in church affairs:

I am not to be persuaded that the Church is set in order by imperial edicts, but by patristic traditions, written and unwritten.¹⁴⁷

Both writers agree that "Councils do not belong to kings...."¹⁴⁸ and "Doctrines are not matters for the Emperor, but for the bishops, because they have the mind of Christ...."¹⁴⁹

These things were written despite the fact that a dogmatic canon had been issued that was certainly known to both theologians. At the Council in Trullo in 692, the bishops decided in canon 82 that no longer was the lamb to be used to portray Christ but "that

145. Nicephorus, Chronologia, E, in Maxima bibliotheca, XIV, 86.

146. I am relying on Hefele, Councils, V, 288-301, for the letters of Gregory II because Hefele has not only translated them but has italicized those sections that he believes represent the pope's replies to the lost letters of Leo to him. For the letters of Gregory II to Leo, see Appendix I. Quoted on 291.

147. John of Damascus, On Holy Images, 76.

148. Ibid., 52.

149. Quoted in Hefele, Councils, V, 296.

figure in human form of the Lamb who taketh away the sin of the world, Christ our God, be exhibited in images...."¹⁵⁰

Although the Second Council of Nicaea (the Seventh Ecumenical Council) in 787 ascribed these canons incorrectly to the Sixth Council, the reason that no ascription of heresy was made to Leo is that the canons had never been accepted at the time of their issuance by the western church.¹⁵¹ Only the Byzantines attached any importance to them, and that sixty years later. For this reason, because the western branch of Christendom never accepted the decision

150. The canon reads as follows: "In nonnullis venerabilium imaginum picturis, agnus qui digito praecursoris monstratur, depingitur, qui ad gratiae figuram assumptus est, verum nobis agnum per legem Christum Deum nostrum praemonstrans. Antiquas ergo figuras & umbras, ut veritatis signa & characteres ecclesiae traditos, amplectentes, gratiam & veritatem praeponimus, eam ut legis implementum suscipientes. Ut ergo quod perfectum est, vel colorum expressionibus omnium oculis subjiciatur, eius qui tollit peccata mundi, Christi Dei nostri humana forma characterem etiam in imaginibus deinceps pro veteri agno erigi ac depingi iubemus: ut per ipsum Dei verbi humiliationis celsitudinem mente comprehendentes, ad memoriam quoque eius in carne conversationis, eiusque passionis & salutaris mortis deducamur, eiusque quae ex eo facta est mundi redemptionis." Mansi, XI, 978-79.

For the incorrect placement of this canon, see Hefele, Councils, V, 241; 346-47. Another source for this discussion is Percival, Seven Councils, 356-58.

151. On the ecumenical character of the Council in Trullo: "Ut ea inaniter constituerant auctoritate apostolica sulcirentur, suo illegitimo conventui sexti oecumenici concilii titulum falso et injuste adscripserunt. Nam universale concilium fuisse non potuit, quod auctoritate Gallinici metropolitanae ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae indictum est, cuique Romanus pontifex neque per se, neque per suos legatos interfuit aut praesedit." Mansi, XII, 47-48.

Gregory could hardly use them against Leo. John of Damascus poses a more difficult problem, and it is interesting to note that modern authorities who are well aware of this canon tend to shy away from probing too deeply into it. Anastos contents himself with the remark that Leo probably issued his decree in "reaction" to this canon, whatever that may mean.¹⁵² Father Dvornik merely sees the Council in Trullo and its one hundred and two canons as an attack upon the western church.¹⁵³ This is meaningless. I opt for the view that John of Damascus did not mention the canon because he knew that the council was not ecumenical and, therefore, its decisions were not binding on the emperor. As we already know, a strong emperor could disregard the decrees of the fathers as he pleased; but in this instance, considering the safety from which he wrote, had John of Damascus any basis for an attack on Leo, he would have done so. Furthermore, when Leo wrote "I am Emperor and priest at the same time," Gregory II did not deny it, but replied:

Yes; your predecessors were so in fact. Constantine the Great, Theodosius the Great, Valentinian the Great and Constantine [Progonatus]. They reigned as Emperors religiously, and held Synods in union with the bishops They showed by their works that they were Emperors and priests at the same time....¹⁵⁴

Clearly, this was an admission to the imperial claims to sacerdotal authority. That images were traditional rather than dogmatic

152. Anastos, "Iconoclasm and Imperial Rule," 67.

153. Dvornik, Byzantium and the Roman Primacy, 93.

154. Hefele, Councils, V, 296.

in the church again rests on the authority of Gregory II and John of Damascus. In response to Leo's query, "How comes it that in the six councils nothing is said of images?" Gregory responded:

But there is nothing said there, O Emperor, of bread and water, whether it shall be eaten and drunk, or not, because here the custom stood fast. So also with the custom of the pictures. We exhort you to be at once bishop and Emperor, as you wrote.¹⁵⁵

John of Damascus, who was as free of imperial retaliation as could be hoped for, tells us:

How do we know the Holy place of Calvary, or the Holy Sepulchre? Does it not rest on a tradition handed down from father to son? It is written that our Lord was crucified on Calvary; and buried in a tomb, which Joseph hewed out of the rock; but it is unwritten tradition which identifies these spots, and does more things of the same kind. Whence came the three immersions at baptism, praying with the face turned towards the east, and the tradition of the mysteries? Hence St. Paul says, Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have learned either by word, or by our epistle. As, then, so much has been handed down in the Church, and is observed down to the present day, why disparage images?¹⁵⁶

If we bear in mind Cardinal Newman's dictum, "No doctrine is defined until it is violated," it is apparent that Leo was acting well within the confines of dogmatic revelation at the time he banned images and we can do little more than lament that his zeal was misplaced.¹⁵⁷ Until such time as there is a definition of dogma,

155. Ibid., 297.

156. John of Damascus, On Holy Images, 28.

157. Newman, Essay on Doctrine, 140.

the subjective imperative, akin to the force of natural religion, operates. Once the dogma has been formulated and published, the subjective is replaced by the objective authority of the church--revealed religion--the triumph of authority over conscience. The difficulty with both Leo's friends and his critics has been that they have fallen into the post hoc ergo propter hoc trap and fail to recognize these all-important distinctions.

C H A P T E R V I

There is no evidence to indicate that aside from ordering the destruction of images and carrying out his orders by force in those areas of the empire over which he had more than nominal control, that Leo did more. The true iconoclast was his son, Constantine V. Whereas Leo appears to have abolished icons because he felt them dangerous to religion, Constantine, after 760, not only attacked images but the monasteries as well, possibly because he felt them dangerous to the state. Furthermore, Leo had used persuasion and had been moderate in his actions, generally leaving his enemies in peace. Constantine used whips and harried his enemies with death and mutilation.

Leo's moderation is exemplified by his treatment of the Patriarch Germanus (715-30). Apparently, at the time of the issuance of his edict, the emperor acted without the advance knowledge or approval of Germanus. In 730, Leo called a silentium (a gathering of bishops and lay magnates) to obtain approval for his religious course. Nearly 300 bishops and others attended and approved unanimously what had been undertaken by their overlord. Germanus, however, opposed the action and was deposed and replaced by his secretary, Anastasius (730-51).

The imputation of brutality towards Germanus began with John of Damascus, who claimed that "holy Germanus, shining by word and example, has been punished and become an exile...."¹⁵⁸ But Nicephorus,

158. St. John of Damascus, On Holy Images, 70.

himself a patriarch, tells us only that Germanus was deposed: "Germanus Episcopus Cyzici & confessor, an. 15, eiicitur ab impio Leonte Isauro."¹⁵⁹ Theophanes goes one step beyond Nicephorus when he tells us that after his deposition Germanus retired to a monastery and spent his remaining days in peace. He died in 733, well past ninety years of age.¹⁶⁰ We still have a modern, Catholic authority who writes that Leo had Germanus executed, which is certainly untrue.¹⁶¹ Leo forbore his enemies.

There is little more to add. To write the full history of the iconoclastic struggle is not the purpose of this paper. But in the final analysis, thanks to the unclouded vision of hindsight, we can see that the effort was doomed to fail. The clergy, particularly the monks, used every means to convince the vulgar faithful that salvation depended on the continued use of images. There was an element of dissimulation in their enthusiasm because the fortune of many a monastery depended in large part on the number of images and relics it possessed. Also, their coffers were swelled by the bequests of the faithful.

Doctrinally, iconoclasm ended when Irene, regent for the seventeen-year-old Constantine VI (780-97), called upon the bishops for advice. The result was the Second Council of Nicaea (the Seventh Ecumenical Council) in 787. Images were restored at that time, but the controversy erupted again about 815 and iconoclasm was anathematized anew at

159. Nicephorus, Chronologia, Catalogus Episcoporum Byzantis post Christum & Apostolos, D, 71, page 86.

160. Hefele, Councils, V, 291.

161. Hughes, History of the Church, II, 128.

a council in Constantinople in 843. The eastern church was now frozen artistically, theologically and intellectually. To this day, figures in the round are prohibited because there is no authority for them in the seven councils.

Above all, Leo's decree was the last direct intervention by an emperor into ecclesiastical affairs. There was no need for further intrusion, however. Iconoclasm had accelerated the centrifugal forces in the west, making that area independent of the emperor's authority, an independence that was capped by the coronation of Charlemagne in 800. Eastern Christendom, despite its hold over men's minds, became an arm of the state and a hindrance to change. As Harnack says, "Images remain the property of the Church, but the Church remains the property of the State."¹⁶²

162. Harnack, History of Dogma, IV, xi.

Appendix I

The Letters of Gregory II to the Emperor Leo III

Since these letters were first discovered in the sixteenth century, controversy as to their authenticity has raged about them. J. B. Bury sums up the history of the problem in Appendix 14 of his edition of Gibbon's The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, saying:

It is incorrect to say that 'the two epistles of Gregory II have been preserved in the Acts of the Nicene Council [787].' In modern collections of the Acts of the Ecclesiastical Councils, they have been printed at the end of the Acts of the Second Nicene Council. But they first came to light at the end of the 16th century and were printed for the first time in the Annales Ecclesiastici of Baronius, who obtained them from Fronton le Duc. This scholar had copied the text from a Greek Ms. at Rheims. Since then other Mss. have been found, the earliest belonging to the 11th, if not the 10th century.¹

He goes on to say that we know of no reason to suspect their genuineness because of their late date. Furthermore, we know from Theophanes that letters from Gregory II were read at Second Nicaea. Bury claims, however, that a false date and a false boundary of the Ducatus Romae (three miles from Rome), as well as their "insolent tone," is enough to condemn them as forgeries. Bury's strongest argument is that the "forger" mistook the Chalkoprateria (bronzesmiths' quarter) for the Chalkê gate of the imperial palace, the place at which Leo had the image of Christ removed. He concludes:

1. Gibbon, Decline and Fall, V, Appendix 14, 535.

Rejecting the letters on these grounds—which are supported by a number of smaller points—we get rid of the difficulty about a Lombard siege of Ravenna before A.D. 727: a siege which is not mentioned elsewhere and was doubtless created by the confused knowledge of the fabricator.²

Thomas Hodgkin follows this line as he rejects the letters. An admirer of Gregory II, whom he calls "a sweet-tempered man," Hodgkin says the letters are "coarse and insolent productions" quite out of character with what we know of Gregory.³

Bishop Hefele accepts the letters on the basis of their internal evidence, particularly their replies to the missing letters of Leo III to Gregory. Further, he contends that the problem of the twenty-four stadia was "some error of transcription in the number."⁴ Father Mann follows and further develops the Hefele argument.⁵

The letters are accepted or rejected according to one's predilection. I see no reason to reject them. If they are forgeries, given the history of false documents emanating from the papal chancery or the monasteries, one would expect some assertion of a temporal claim or prerogative. In the letters as they have come down to us, there are no such claims put forth. Gregory accepts the suzerainty of his overlord in temporal matters and his ultimate authority in

2. Loc. cit.

3. Thomas Hodgkin, The Lombard Kingdom, vol. VI of Italy and Her Invaders (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1896), 452 and Note E 501-05.

4. Hefele, Councils, V, 288-89. The quotation is from Note 2, 294.

5. Mann, The Lives of the Popes, I, pt. II, 498-502.

religious affairs, a fact that a forger of a later period, benefiting from his knowledge of Second Nicaea and the development of papal authority, might have used in favor of the pope. This type of forgery is apparent in the Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals and the Donation of Constantine.

As a rule of thumb, the letters are generally accepted by Catholic writers. They are also accepted by Ostrogorsky.⁶

6. Ostrogorsky, Geschichte, 126; 136-37.

Appendix II

The Imperial Coronation Oath

In the 1889 edition of his History, J. B. Bury reprints the following coronation oath, which began with the recitation of the Nicene Creed and continued,

Moreover I accept and confess and confirm the apostolic and divine traditions and the ordinances and formulae of the six ecumenical synods and the occasional local synods; also the privileges and usages of the most Holy Great Church of God. Moreover I confirm and accept all the dogmas that were laid down and sanctified by our most Holy Fathers in various places, rightly and canonically and blamelessly. In the same manner I promise to abide and continually to prove myself a faithful and true servant and son of the Holy Church; moreover to be her defender and champion, and to be kind and humane to my subjects, as is meet and right, and to abstain from bloodshed and mutilations and such like, as far as may be, and to countenance all truth and justice. And whatsoever things the Holy Fathers rejected and anathematized, I do myself also reject and anathematize, and I believe with all my mind and soul and heart in the aforesaid symbolum of faith. And all these things I promise to keep before the face of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of God. Dated.... month,.... o'clock,.... indiction,.... year....₁

Bury admits he changed the number of ecumenical councils from seven to six² and that the formula "to abstain from bloodshed and mutilations" found its way into the oath because of either Phocas or Justinian II.³

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1. Bury, History, II, 390.
 2. Loc. cit., notes 1 and 2.
 3. Loc. cit., note 3.

All this is absolutely without foundation. As I have attempted to show in the body of this paper, we have no knowledge as to the precise nature of the oath taken before the tenth century.⁴ For Bury to substitute seven councils for six (a difference of 107 years) and ask us to accept a far later version of a coronation formula is dangerous and unhistorical. We simply do not know what formula (if any) was recited by Leo III. On this basis, it is impossible for us to do more than guess what transpired at Leo's coronation.

4. Supra, 34-39.

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