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The Revival of Byzantine Iconoclasm and the Religious Politics of Emperors in the Ninth Century

Abstract

There appeared the idea that ninth century iconoclasm constituted a copy of the earlier one, actually a reiteration of the traditional theses of this heresy. More evident than in the eighth century, the second period of the controversy on icons revealed the political background of the iconoclast movement, the efforts of the imperial power to subject the Church to their interests, but also the obstinate resistance of the Church against these, especially against its intransigent wing.

The disastrous defeat on the Bulgarian front (Versinikia, June 813) of the Orthodox Emperor Michael I



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Rhangabe prepared the way for the revival of iconoclasm, established with the reign of Leo V the Armenian.

The most representative defenders and theologians of icons were, in this period, Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople and Saint Theodore the Studite. Just like all the defenders of icons, they proved that the icon is the expression of the reality of the Incarnation of Christ, and its veneration is founded on the Christological teachings of the Church.

Keywords

iconoclasm, defenders, emperors, Church, worship

1 Introduction

Once icon veneration was restored, after the Ecumenical Council in Nicea (787), peace did not settle in the Byzantine Church. It was not the few representatives of the iconoclast side that were the ones who troubled the peace, but paradoxically, that group of intransigent monks grouped around the Studion monastery in the capital and led by abbot Platon and his nephew Theodore (759-826). They were dissatisfied with the rational attitude and the leniency shown both by Empress Irene (780-790; 797-802) and by patriarch Tarasius (784-806) towards the iconoclast bishops. Those who did not repent were removed from episcopal thrones but did not suffer another punishment. The penitent bishops were not deposed, even if some were temporarily suspended. No other measure was taken against the heretics, except the fact that they were not promoted at the Court. Just like the Donatists, five hundred

years before, they did not want to forgive the apostates and the simoniacs who bought their sees by selling their integrity¹.

Despite this, the deposition of hundreds of bishops could not be in the interest of the Church, as they could at any time go over to the iconoclasts, giving them chances *a priori* to start again. Besides, the danger of falling again in the iconoclast heresy had not been eliminated, as it was quickly noticed. Because patriarch Tarasius stood firm against the demands of the Studite monks, they tried another way, hoping that by an accusation of simony they might free some episcopal thrones in their favor, and the hierarchs who had occupied them should be judged. They knew very well that the punishment for simony was the deposition.

Although the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicea achieved its purpose, it could not end the iconoclast crisis definitively. This started again between 815 and 842. Undoubtedly, an essential role in the revival of iconoclasm was played by the position of the Western Church regarding the resolutions of the Council and also by the political ecclesiastical crisis in the Byzantine Empire and especially the case of the population in Constantinople at the beginning of the ninth century.

As the papal see was not given back, the territories transferred by the first iconoclast emperor, Leon III the Isaurian (717-741) under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, Pope Adrian I (772-795) directed his attention towards the Frankish kingdom². Being informed on the resolutions of the Seventh Ecumenical Council and receiving a defective translation of its documents (the terms *worship* and *veneration* were translated with the same word – *adoration*, which led to the understanding that the participants at the council did not make a distinction between the adoration of God and the veneration of icons), King Charlemagne (800-814) requested

¹ Steven Runciman, *Teocrația bizantină (The Byzantine Theocracy)*, translated from English and introductory study by Vasile Adrian Carabă, (Bucharest: Nemira Publishing House, f. a.), pp. 96-97.

² Nicolae Chifăr, *Istoria creștinismului (The History of Christianity)*, vol. I, (Sibiu: Lucian Blaga University Publishing House, 2007), p. 252.

the Frankish theologians to make a judicious analysis of the issue of icons. Thus, the Council of Nicea was drastically criticized in work entitled *Capitulare de imaginibus* or *Libri Carolini*.

Based on what was presented in this work, the Council in Frankfurt (794), in the presence of the papal delegates, rejected the iconoclast Council of Hieria (754), as well as the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicea (787), as it decided that the icons deserve to be adored like God.

Informed of what had been established in Frankfurt, Pope Adrian I sent a letter to King Charlemagne, in which he defended the Seventh Ecumenical Council and refuted the arguments of the Frankish theologians. He mentioned that he had not officially acknowledged the resolutions of the Council of Nicea, as Empress Irene had not solved the issue of Illyricum. On September 25th, 795, pope Adrian died, and Pope Leo III (795-816) crowned King Charlemagne as Emperor of the Roman-German Empire, according to the Byzantine ceremonial on December 25th, 800. This showed that the Papal See had abandoned the Byzantine sovereign and drew its attention towards another Christian emperor, wishing to have him as the heir of the ancient Roman Empire³.

Shortly after this event, although the papal initiative irritated a great deal the leaders of Constantinople⁴, from that moment on, Emperor Charlemagne became anxious to become legitimate for Byzantine authorities. Thus, he put forward the perspective of a marriage between him and Empress Irene, which seemingly, the Basileissa agreed with. However, in October 802, before this matrimonial alliance between the two empires could be accomplished, Irene was removed, being exiled to the island of Prinkipo, where she died, after only a year.

When Empress Irene was removed, the iconoclast movement in Byzantium got rid of the most powerful enemy. The theological

³ *Ibidem*, p. 253.

⁴ Steven Runciman, *Teocrația bizantină (The Byzantine Theocracy)*, p. 98.

issues played a secondary part. This because Irene, and to a certain extent also her son Constantine VI (790-797), through their actions, revived the memory of the great iconoclast Emperor Constantine V Copronymus (741; 743-775), who had remained in the memory of his contemporaries and successors through his notable military accomplishments as an incontestable political and military leader, who brought glory to the Empire. Then disastrous reigns of the two, Irene and Constantine VI, brought again into discussion the possibility of going back to the iconoclast politics⁵.

To this, one must add the schism⁶, which led to the weakening of the iconophile group, nurturing the nostalgia of many for the great military emperors of the first iconoclast period. The disasters on the battlefields of Nicephorus I (802-811) and

⁵ Hans-Georg Beck, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe din Imperiul Bizantin (The History of the Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire)*, translated from German and introductory study by Vasile Adrian Carabă, (Bucharest: Nemira Publishing House, f. a.), p. 186.

⁶ In 781, Empress Irene managed to betroth her son Constantine with Rotrude, the daughter of King Charlemagne. Because of unelucidated reasons, the marriage did not take place. According to Hans-Georg Beck, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe din Imperiul Bizantin (The History of the Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire)*, p. 184, it appears that the Frankish king refused in 786/787 to send his daughter to Constantinople for the marriage. Then Irene forced her son to get married in 788 to Mary of Amnia, a Paphlagonian, but then he turned against her. In these conditions, Constantine considered it right to repudiate Mary and to force her to become a nun. He wished to marry Theodote, his mistress, a lady at the court. Despite the opposition of patriarch Tarasius, Constantine got married, the service being held by priest Joseph, the abbot of the Khatara monastery. The patriarch did not take any measure against the priest or against Constantine. Moreover, the latter granted his new wife the title of Augusta, which had not been the case of Mary, his first wife. If patriarch Tarasius considered that in this case one could apply dispensation (*oikonomia*), which made the marriage possible, the Studite monks did not accept this argument, considering that the emperor, too, had to obey the ecclesiastic canons. He called the emperor adulterine (in Greek *μοιχός* = adultery) and ever since, the dispute has remained in history as *the Moechian controversy*.

Michael I Rhangabe (811-813), led to the following: when the army in the Anatolic Theme rebelled against the incompetence of Michael I and headed for the capital, no one had any objection to the enthronement of Leo, its leader. He reigned under the name of Leo V the Armenian (813-820)⁷.

2 Leo V the Armenian and Byzantine iconoclasm

In 813, a robust Byzantine army suffered a heavy defeat at Versinikia, near Adrianople, against the hordes of the Bulgarian Khan Krum. It was followed by a personal meeting of emperor Michael I (811-813) with the Bulgarian sovereign, in order to establish the peace conditions. Not reaching an agreement, Khan Krum conquered Adrianople and devastated the surroundings of the Byzantine capital. This defeat shattered the position of Michael I and prepared the revival of iconoclasm, during the time of Michael I's successor, Leo V, the strategist of the Anatolic Theme.

The new sovereign was a representative of the elements in Asia Minor, who stood out through his military genius and his hostility against icons. Just like Leo III, he was from the Orient, and his priorities were to re-establish the military power of the Empire and the resurgence of the iconoclast movement⁸. Undoubtedly, Leo and his soldiers shared the conviction that there was a causal connection between the iconoclast conception and the military successes of Byzantium during the first period of this heresy⁹.

After Emperor Leo V obtained an essential victory over Krum's Bulgarians in the region of Messembria (the autumn of 813), in

⁷ Steven Runciman, *Teocrația bizantină (The Byzantine Theocracy)*, p. 100.

⁸ Maria Georgescu, *Istoria Bizanțului (The History of Byzantium)*, (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun Publishing House, f. a.), pp. 153-154.

⁹ Steven Runciman, *Teocrația bizantină (The Byzantine Theocracy)*, p. 189.

the spring of next year, khan Krum died unexpectedly and hence; the Empire got rid of one of the greatest enemies in its history.

The peace treaty signed by Krum's follower, Omurtag (814-831) ensured the peace of Byzantines for thirty years. The Arabs did not seem to be a danger either. Consequently, Leo V took advantage of these years of peace in order to start accomplishing his iconoclast plans. Using all his means, he started a real campaign of reminding his contemporaries the advantages and benefits during iconoclasm. However, emperor Leo V undertook systematic actions. He wanted very much to have insurance from a theological point of view. Thus, he summoned a committee, formed of clergy and scholars who shared his views and who had to prepare a new council, by providing an anthology of patristic texts in favor of the iconoclast teachings. The most important representatives were John Grammatikos and Theodotos Kassiteras. Patriarch Nicephorus (806-815) took part in the discussions and condemned the iconoclast maneuvers, which determined the emperor to adjourn the conference. Then, the Basileus ordered the icon placed by empress Irene above the Chalke gate¹⁰ to be removed.

In 814, on Christmas Eve, the patriarch read the anthology in front of an assembly of bishops and abbots, most of them agree that what was happening was unacceptable.

On Christmas, the emperor participated at the service at Hagia Sophia, where he was seen venerating an icon of the Saviour. Patriarch Nicephorus then led a procession with icons, in the capital and was summoned to the imperial palace in order to say his opinion on the patristic anthology and the resolution of the imperial committee. As he spoke against the attempts to revise the resolutions of the Council of Nicea, Nicephorus was forced to abdicate, being exiled, just like his former rival, Theodore the Studite. He was replaced by Theodotos

¹⁰ Nicolae Chifăr, *Istoria creștinismului (The History of Christianity)*, p. 253.

Melissenos Kassiteras (815-821). The latter was chosen as he was related to the third wife of Constantine V.

In 815, on Theophany, at the official entrance of the church, the emperor publicly showed his new orientation through his refusal to kiss the icons. It was the signal that the fight against icons had begun again.

In April 815 an iconoclast council was summoned, in Hagia Sophia, in Constantinople, where the resolutions of the Seventh Ecumenical Council were annulled, and icon veneration was prohibited and condemned. The documents of the council, that we know partially from the polemic works of patriarch Nicephorus, contain a list of patristic quotations and the dogmatic synodal definition which condemned icon veneration. Shortly after, the resolutions of the council acquired the power of the law and reprisals followed against iconodules. Icons were gathered and burnt, holy relics were taken from altars and churches, liturgical vessels decorated with icons were destroyed, even holy crosses with the crucifixion icon were thrown, and the iconodules were persecuted, imprisoned, exiled or even killed. The former patriarch Nicephorus, Saint Theodore, the abbot of the Studion monastery, together with other bishops were exiled.

The ones that fought against this situation, unfavorable to the Church, initiated by the emperor, were patriarch Nicephorus, the abbot of the Studion monastery, Theodore and Pope Paschal II (817-824). Patriarch Nicephorus wrote two treatises against iconoclasts, called *Antirrheseis* and he led a procession with icons on December 25th, 814. Theodore the Studite accomplished the complete dogmatic formulation defending the cult of icons and remained in the history of the Church, together with Saint John of Damascus, as one of the greatest defenders of icons in eighth and ninth centuries. Leon V tried to obtain the approval of the Church of Rome, but pope Paschal II declared himself in favor of icons, thus supporting the resolutions of the most recent Ecumenical Council. Byzantine iconoclasm was

condemned, and a council was summoned in Jerusalem, by Oriental patriarchates, in 836¹¹.

3 The religious politics of emperors Michael II and Theophilus

Leo V the Armenian died on Christmas Day in 820, when he was assassinated in front of the altar of the Church Hagia Sophia, during the Holy Liturgy, by the partisans of his former comrade-in-arms, who occupied the throne under the name of Michael II (820-829). He was the founder of the Amorian dynasty, and during its reign, the religious crisis went through a period of peace. Persecutions ceased, the exiles of patriarch Nicephorus and Theodore the Studite were annulled. However, the restoration of icon veneration did not occur, to the disappointment of the iconodules.

The new emperor, from Frigia, a region prevalingly iconoclast, was undoubtedly an enemy of icon veneration. One of his letters to the Roman-German emperor Louis the Pious (814-840), in which he complained of certain exaggerations of the veneration of icons, proved it very clearly. Then, when the new patriarch of Constantinople, Methodius, sent him a letter through which he asked him to re-establish the veneration of icons, the latter was mistreated and imprisoned in a fort. Making a comparison between the iconoclasm of Leo and that of Michael, such expressions were used as: *the fire was put out, but it is still fuming*, and *the winter is over, but spring has not come yet*. Thus, iconoclasm did not have the same power anymore, but there was still tension, terror could still burst out at any time. During the reign of Michael II, the great defender of icons, Theodore the Studite died¹².

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 254.

¹² A. A. Vasiliev, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin (The History of the Byzantine Empire)*, translation and notes by Ionuț-Alexandru Tudorie, Vasile-Adrian Carabă, Sebastian-Laurențiu Nazăru, introductory study by

After the death of Michael II, his successor was Theophilus (829-842), his son. He was the last iconoclast Byzantine emperor, who knew the theological issues of his time thoroughly. Despite all this, he proved to venerate the Theotokos and the saints, although he refused to have them represented in images. The one who supported him and who became the leader of the iconoclast movement was his teacher and counselor, John Grammatikos, who was later the patriarch of Constantinople (837-842). He was accused, like all the dignitaries of those times, of practicing witchcraft or magic. The ones who were more persecuted were monks. They say that the hands of an icon painter monk, Lazarus, were burnt in hot iron, and the two defenders of icon veneration, Theophanes and Theodore, were tortured and they were branded in the forehead with calumnious verses, written apparently by the emperor himself. These two iconodule monks remained in history as *the branded*¹³.

The icons which had slowly been put back in churches in the time of Michael II were removed in the time of Theophilus and replaced with paintings representing animals, birds or nature scenes. Oriental patriarchates did not remain passive to the religious politics of emperor Theophilus, but they summoned a council in Jerusalem in 836, which condemned iconoclasm, revived by the basileus. The patriarchs leading the fight against iconoclasm were Christodulus of Alexandria, Job of Antiochia and Basil of Jerusalem. The emperor was intransigent even when it came to his family. He had a hostile attitude even towards his wife, Theodora, suspecting her of hiding icons in her gynaeceum. He also forbade his daughters to visit their grandmother, Theoktiste, as she educated them in an iconodule spirit. Theophilus died on January 22nd, 842, and, on his

Ionuț-Alexandru Tudorie, (Bucharest: Polirom Publishing House, 2010), p. 295.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

deathbed, he asked his collaborators to acknowledge his minor son, Michael, as a successor, under the regency of his wife¹⁴. Theodora proved to be a sovereign who loved icons, just like Irene, and only a year later she managed to summon a council in order to re-establish icon veneration. However, we will first present briefly the activity of the most crucial icon defenders in this second period of iconoclasm: patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople and Saint Theodore the Studite.

4 Patriarch Nicephorus I of Constantinople – defender of icon veneration

Nicephorus was born in 755 in the capital of the empire, in one of the most distinguished families, his father being the imperial secretary of Emperor Constantine V Copronymus. He was a follower of icon veneration too. Thus he did not escape the persecution started by the fiercest iconoclast emperor. In the time of patriarch Tarasius, he held the position of his father and participated at the Seventh Ecumenical council, but as a layman. In this period, he also built a monastery on the Asian shore of Bosphorus, near Propontida, where he withdrew after his exaltation. In 802, the new emperor, Nicephorus I appointed him administrator of the most celebrated hospice for poor people in the capital, and after the death of patriarch Tarasius he was elected as head of the Church in Constantinople, through the unanimous vote of the council of bishops in the capital, although he did not wish to occupy this position. At the beginning of his pastorate, the Studite monks, led by Platon and Theodore, were against him, as he was chosen from the laymen, but in time, they accepted the idea and together they became the fiercest defenders of icon veneration. He was deposed

¹⁴ Nicolae Chifăr, *Istoria creștinismului (The History of Christianity)*, p. 255.

because of his iconophile attitude by Leo V, in 815 and he retreated to the monastery he founded¹⁵.

Although he was in exile, he did not hesitate to write a few treatises highlighting the importance of icons. He refuted every iconoclast idea promoted by writers of the Church, such as Eusebius of Caesarea, Epiphany of Salamina, Macarius the Great, as well as the writings of emperor Constantine IV and by the resolutions of the council in 815. Eusebius of Caesarea was the one who created the Christological programme of iconoclasm, taken over by all the iconoclasts that came after him. He says that we cannot paint the face of Christ, as human nature was enlightened and divinized in a perfect way. As a good logician, Nicephorus approached the issue differently. He confesses that iconoclasts make a confusion between the words *to paint* and *to draw*. At the same time, the fighters against icons refute the fact that the angels that are invisible cannot be painted, that is “uncircumscribed”. He asserts that “ ... something can be «circumscribed» according to place, time, beginning or understanding...It is «circumscribed» according to time and beginning what began to exist in time. In this sense, they say that the angels and the human soul are «circumscribed» as well (...) What is understood by the mind and knowledge is «circumscribed» through understanding. (...) It is «uncircumscribed» only the one that has nothing in common with these”¹⁶. This clarification of the concept was of great help in the formulation of a dogmatic definition in response to the iconoclast ideology.

At the same time, Nicephorus made the distinction between *the natural* and *the artistic image*, differentiation which had not been mentioned by Saint John of Damascus. He says that the

¹⁵ Constantin Voicu, *Patrologie (Patrology)*, vol. III, (Bucharest: Basilica Publishing House of the Romanian Patriarchate), pp. 184-185.

¹⁶ PG 100, col. 356B-357A, according to Theodore the Studite, PG 99, col. 396A, apud. Christoph von Schönborn, *Icoana lui Hristos. O introducere teologică (The Icon of Christ. A Theological Introduction)*, translation and preface by Vasile Răducă, (Bucharest: Anastasia Publishing House, 1996), pp. 161-163.

icon is an artistic image imitating nature, but it is not the same as the prototype. Here is how this holy father defines the artistic image: “The image is like the model and, through resemblance, it expresses the whole visible image of the one it represents, but it remains different from it through nature because it has a different substance. Alternatively, the artistic image is an imitation of the model and its copy; yet, it is unlike the model through the difference in the natures of the two ... For, if it is not different from the model in any way, it is not the image, but the model itself”¹⁷. This conception shattered the iconoclast dogma established in the previous five centuries.

To a certain extent, in his explanations, Nicephorus may have *demystified* the image, in order to overcome the exaggerated identification between the image and the model, in which the iconoclasts and the iconodules had had great difficulty in an attempt to highlight the difference. Relying on his Aristotelian realism, he defined more accurately what the icon constitutes formally: “The resemblance is a certain relationship which is always between two poles: between what is similar and the reality to which the resemblance corresponds. These two realities are united and connected through the same appearance, even when they are different according to their nature. Moreover, even when both (image and model) are two different realities, according to nature they are not someone and someone else, but the same. For through the representation of the original aspect, we receive the knowledge of the represented, and in this representation, we can watch the person painted”. We can notice that Nicephorus admits a certain identity between the image and the model, but it is not an identity of being, but of the image, resemblance or appearance¹⁸.

These are a few ideas from the iconophile ideology developed by Nicephorus, the patriarch of Constantinople, who represented an essential response to the accusations coming

¹⁷ PG 100, col. 277 A, apud *Ibidem*, p. 164.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 165-166.

from the iconoclast side. One notices that the thinking of Nicephorus is more complex than that of Saint John of Damascus, but it was crystallized and completed by Saint Theodore the Studite.

5 Saint Theodore the Studite – “the icon-theologian”

Saint Theodore was born in 759, in Constantinople, in a family of high, but very pious magistrates. His father’s name was Photinos, and his mother was Theoktiste. In his writings, Saint Theodore calls her “a double mother”, because she gave him bodily life and spiritual life as well. He was entrusted to a teacher who taught him grammar, rhetoric, dialectics, and philosophy. The one that had an essential role in his life was his uncle, Platon, the abbot of the Sakkudion monastery in Bithynia, who took him as a disciple at the monastery, at the beginning of 780. There he got a monastic education, was ordained priest in 787 and 794, for health reasons, Platon entrusted to him the ruling of the monastery¹⁹.

Because he did not have a reconciliatory character, inclined to leniency, he came into conflict with the imperial court, being exiled in Thessaloniki and imprisoned. This dispute is known as *the Moechian controversy*. The conflict started because emperor Constantine VI left his wife, Mary of Amnia, without reason, to get married to one of the ladies in his mother’s entourage, called Theodote. Patriarch Tarasius did not want to dissolve the marriage, but despite this, the religious ceremony was celebrated by the abbot of the Bithynian monastery of Kathara, Joseph. The conflict escalated, and it ended with the closing of the Studion monastery, the exilation of Theodore and the imprisonment of Platon in Constantinople. After Irene became the leader (797), the Studite monks were exonerated, and patriarch Tarasius condemned the second marriage of Constantine, which led to the resolution of the dispute between

¹⁹ Constantin Voicu, *Patrologie (Patrology)*, p. 190.

the patriarch of Constantinople and the abbot of the Sakkudion monastery. Because of the Arab invasion, Tarasius ordered the monastic community in Sakuddion to be moved to the capital, offering them an ancient monastery from the fifth century, called Studion. Due to the strict rules imposed by Theodore, this monastery became the most important monastic center in Byzantium, a place inhabited by more than 700 monks²⁰.

The life of the Studion monastery was not going to be a peaceful one, as its abbot, involved more and more in ecclesiastical and political matters came into conflict with the imperial court, but also with the ecclesiastical administration in Constantinople, thus leading to two exiles. Because of the conflict with patriarch Nicephorus, he was exiled in 809, through the resolution of a council, but he was allowed to return in 811 when Michael I Rhangabe occupied the throne. Not long after this, more precisely in 815, he was exiled for the third time, this time by Emperor Leo V, because he protested against the resolutions of the iconoclast council in Constantinople. Together with Nicephorus, the patriarch of Constantinople, destituted as well in 815, they became fervent defenders of icon veneration²¹.

After we have seen to what extent Saint Theodore the Studite was involved in the life of the Church and of the state, we must say a few words on the icon theology he elaborated as a response to the iconoclast ideology revived by Leo V.

Iconoclasts brought several accusations against icon veneration, saying they are idols, that they cannot comprise divine nature and cannot contain the Body of Christ, because he had an apparent body. Saint Theodore the Studite argued that God ordered a serpent to be raised in the desert²². Relying on the affirmation that divinity cannot be represented, iconoclasts called the icon an idol. Saint Theodore makes the distinction between nature and person, offering an answer to the

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 190-191.

²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 191-192.

²² Rene Broscăreanu, Aspecte dogmatice ale disputei iconoclaste (Dogmatic aspects of the iconoclast dispute), *Studii Teologice*, 2-nd series, XXXIX (1987), no. 6 (November-December), pp. 29-30.

confusion of iconoclasts. He shows that the divine being cannot be contained, but the human being can. In Jesus Christ, divinity and humanity were united in a hypostatic way. Thus Christ has two types of attributes: divine and human. According to divine attributes, Christ the Saviour is immeasurable and incorporeal, but from human attributes, he is measurable, corporeal, having a human shape. Having two natures, he is both contained and uncontained. For if he had been only uncontained, he would not have been subject to death. Divinity remains divinity but is incarnated; it penetrates the human person. All the categories of divinity penetrate His human person. From His humanity, the Saviour Christ can be painted in the icon. The icon includes the body, to the extent to which the incarnated man is like us. Moreover, this real body contained the whole divinity. Even after the resurrection, the Lord lived in the body; He had a real body. Moreover, this body can be painted²³. Iconoclasts argued the wrong idea that after the Resurrection, the Body of Christ changed. Saint Theodore the Studite explains why it is possible to represent Jesus Christ in images.

Saint Theodore makes the distinction between prototype and icon. The prototype and the icon are not one through hypostatic resemblance as being of one essence, but they are one through hypostatic resemblance, but in two natures, two by nature. The nature of the icon, material, artificial is one thing and the nature of the prototype, divine-human in the person of Christ and human in the person of saints. Hence, the prototype and the icon are one through hypostatic resemblance, but two by nature. The prototype is eternally called prototype, and the icon is eternally called an icon, without one changing into the other. The icon is the resemblance of the hypostasis (the person), and it is not like nature, for the two species of the substance (being) are different: the icon is a dead matter which reproduces the person, not its nature because they are different as nature. The prototype is the person of Christ, whereas the icon is the person by copying, by reproduction on the icon. Thus, not the very

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

nature of the prototype, the icon and the prototype are not one because one cannot say that the moment Christ appeared, his painted icon appeared as well. If Christ has the reason of the prototype by nature towards His icon, and the icon is through representation what it is by nature, it is one with what it is through representation²⁴.

As concerns icon veneration, Saint Theodore says that we venerate icons, we do not adore them. We venerate them because the honor given to the icon is addressed to the prototype. We venerate icons only relatively because supreme adoration is addressed only to Christ, Who is the Son of God. Honouring Christ's icon is relative, as those who venerate the icon venerate Christ Who is not separated according to person, but different from the icon according to nature²⁵.

We can notice how complex and clear is the explanation offered by this father of the Church of iconoclasts. He was the one that founded and crystallized the theology of the icon, being the last defender of icon veneration, so persecuted by iconoclast Byzantine emperors. Even if emperor Michael II allowed the exiled to return home, Theodore did not go back to the Sakkudion monastery, as it was occupied by other monks. He died close to Nicomedia, in 826, and the Orthodox Church celebrates him on November, 11th. After the iconoclasts were defeated, his relics were brought in the capital by patriarch Methodius, on December 26th, 844 and buried at the Sakkudion monastery, together with those of his uncle, Platon²⁶.

²⁴ Nicolae Streza, Aspectul dogmatic al cultului icoanei la Teodor Studitul (The dogmatic aspect of icon veneration in the perspective of Theodore the Studite), *Studii Teologice*, 2-nd series, XXIX (1977), no. 3-4 (March-April), p. 303.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 305.

²⁶ Constantin Voicu, *Patrologie (Patrology)*, p. 192.

6 The final restoration of holy icons to the worship of the Church. The Council in Constantinople (843)

After almost six decades of iconoclasm, Empress Irene summoned an ecumenical council, in 787, which condemned the resolutions of the iconoclast council in Hieria and allowed icons to be worshipped. The joy did not last long, as in 815, emperor Leo V the Armenian, summoned a council to revive the iconoclast movement. The tense situation continued for almost three decades, until the death of the last iconoclast emperor, Theophilus, in 842. A woman was the one who restored icon veneration, Theodora, the wife of Theophilus.

After the death of her husband, she became regent of her minor son, Michael III, called “the Drunkard”, because he led a debauched life and because he was drunk almost all the time. It is interesting how Theodora became part of a royal family and how she was chosen by the young prince Theophilus. According to the custom, the basileus sent people into the whole empire with the mission of bringing all the beautiful girls at the Court in Constantinople where his future wife was chosen. At first sight, Theophilus chose six girls as being the most beautiful ones and postponed the decision for the following day. Then, he appeared in the middle of the girls, holding a golden apple in his hand, as a sign of love, that he was supposed to give to the chosen one. He stopped in front of Cassia, a gorgeous girl belonging to a noble family and he told her the following words: “A woman was the source of all our evil”. The young girl, who was also intelligent answered in turn: “Yes, but women are still the source of all our good”. The young prince was frightened by the well-chosen and prompt answer, so he gave the apple to an equally beautiful girl, Theodora²⁷. This is how she became one

²⁷ Charles Diehl, *Figuri bizantine*, vol. I: *Marile probleme ale istoriei bizantine. Figuri bizantine (The Great problems of Byzantine History. Byzantine Figures)*, translation by Ileana Zara, preface and chronological table by Dan Zamfirescu), (Bucharest: Pentru Literatură Publishing House, 1969), pp. 285-286.

of the most critical feminine Byzantine figures in history to ascend to the royal throne.

Theodora was raised with devotion towards holy icons, and she did not give up venerating them, although her husband was a supporter of the iconoclast movement and was ready to punish anyone who tried to allow icons to be venerated. She kept icons secretly and worshipped them without the emperor's knowledge. One day a tragic event occurred, which could have cost the empress her life. The emperor was on the verge of sentencing her to death, but she escaped due to her ingenuity in explaining the event. The jester of the court, a pygmy that amused people with his jeers, entered one day the gynaeceum and saw Theodora admiring her icons. Curious by nature, he asked her what those were, and she answered those were her *dolls*, which she loved very much. After this confession, the jester went to the emperor and told him about the nice *dolls* of the empress. Theophile realized what it was all about, and he hurtled to the apartment of his wife, where he made a violent scene, but she managed to reassure him, telling him that the jester had misunderstood the situation. Theodora said that when the pygmy entered, she was admiring her appearance in the mirror and he indeed referred to the mirror projection when he mentioned the *dolls*²⁸. After the death of Theophilus, the first action of the basilica was to replace patriarch John VII Grammatikos, with Methodius, who was from Syracuse, Sicily, a declared iconodule.

In 843, Empress Theodora summoned a synod to discuss the issue of iconoclasm and to reformulate a doctrine to support icon veneration. Thus, the council in Constantinople in March 11th, 843 condemned the two iconoclast councils, Hieria (754) and Constantinople (815) and confirmed the resolutions of the seven Ecumenical Councils, approving icon veneration and anathematized the iconoclasts. The bishops who did not respect these resolutions were removed and replaced with iconodules who had suffered during the iconoclast persecution.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 288.

Besides this, Theodora wished to lift the anathema of the Church placed on her husband. She found a proper moment for this when the members of the council asked her to sign the resolutions of the council in 843.

The official restoration of icons was done during a festive Liturgy celebrated on March, 11th, 843 in the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. In remembrance of this event, the Church established the celebration of this triumph in the first Sunday of Great Lent, that was called the Sunday of Orthodoxy. This was the end of the iconoclast movement after it had been supported by Byzantine emperors for almost a century. This had altered the relation between the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the other patriarchates that had remained faithful to icon veneration. The relations with the Western Church were also weakened during this period. Besides, the relation State-Church suffered a great deal, because the civil authority used to power and violence in order to impose iconoclast ideology.

The iconoclast period left deep marks in the artistic life of the respective epoch as well. Numerous works of art, mosaic works, frescoes, and engravings were destroyed by the persecutions organized by iconomachs.

7 Conclusions

One can see that emperors played a decisive role in the iconoclast controversy. Unlike the previous heresies, which appeared in ecclesiastic milieus, iconoclasm was a historical process activated and controlled for more than a century by the most powerful Christian monarchs, who exerted practically unlimited power. As these monarchs acted like some lieutenants of God on earth, their hostility towards icons appeared as an act inspired from above. As long as it

predominated in Byzantium, iconoclasm was marked by its imperial origin²⁹.

After empress Irene was dethroned in 802, after a reign of six years, alone, the throne was occupied for eleven years, by two iconodule emperors, Nicephorus I and Michael I Rhangabe, but in 813 imperial power was taken over by Leo V the Armenian, a declared iconoclast. He revived the iconoclast movement and even summoned an iconoclast council in Constantinople in 815. The following emperors, Michael II (820-829) and Theophilus (829-842), supported iconoclasm. All these ended in 843 when Empress Theodora summoned a council that re-established icon veneration definitively. The Church remembered this day of March 11th, 843 and it is celebrated in the first Sunday of Great Lent, is called *the Sunday of Orthodoxy*.

Undoubtedly, in this second phase of iconoclasm, the Christian dogma was defended primarily by Nicephorus, the patriarch of Constantinople and by Theodore, the abbot of the Studion monastery. The latter formulated the most thorough Orthodox answer to the iconoclast doctrine and had remained until today the greatest theologian of the icon.

Thus, Byzantine iconoclasm was one of the events that have remained deeply rooted in the history of the Christian Church. The Church has experienced a hard and stormy period because the opposition was supported by the imperial power, but the victories in 787 and 843, coming from two empresses who loved icons, offered it a well-deserved triumph. Hence, icon veneration has continued to this day.

²⁹ Stephen Gero, *The Byzantine Iconoclastic Movement: A Survey*, in: *L'icône dans la théologie de l'art*, Chambésy-Geneva, 1990, p. 99, apud. Sebastian Nazâru, *Sfântul Teodor Studitul sau despre datorie de a mărturisi (Saint Theodore The Studite or on the the Duty to Confess)*, (Bucharest: Omonia Publishing House, 2008), p. 18.

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