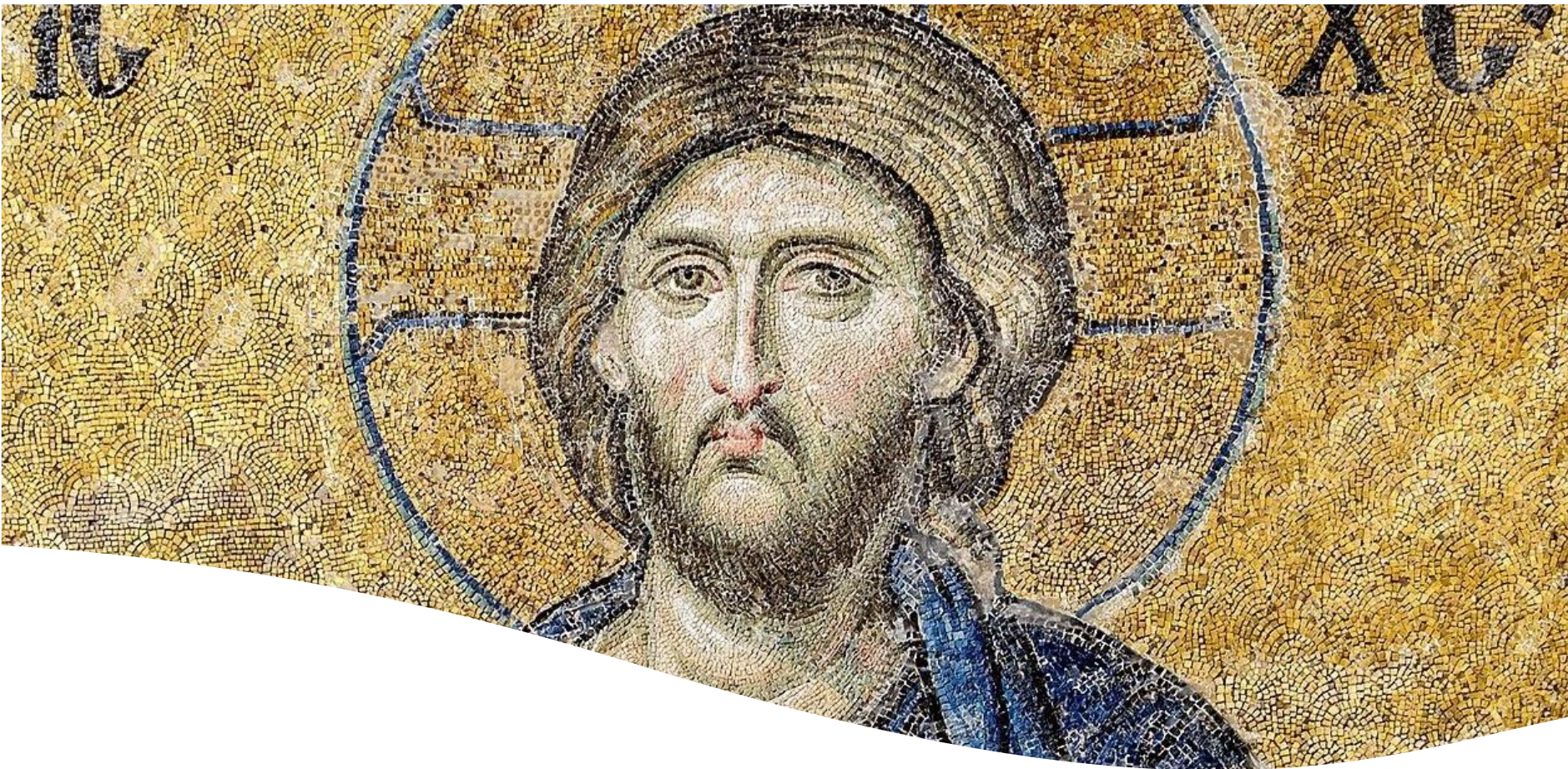




Byzantine Christianity (330-1054)

HPAH5073 Athens and Attica

The Beginnings of Byzantine Christianity

- Constantine I (306-37)
- The Edict of Milan (313) – secured religious tolerance of Christians throughout the Empire.
- The Council of Nicaea (325) – the first ‘ecumenical’ council. Rejected Arianism.
- *Arianism* = the view that the Father and the Son are not consubstantial (i.e. of the same substance or essence).



The Beginnings of Byzantine Christianity

- By the end of 4th century, Constantinople a city with many churches and monasteries.
- The Bishop, or 'Patriarch', of Constantinople second only to the Pope.
- Byzantine bishops now members of the elite and powerful players in theological/doctrinal disputes.
- Monasteries a major feature of Byzantine Christianity from an early stage. Fostered a rich tradition of spirituality that continues to influence eastern Christianity today.
- Tension between Church and state/the Patriarch and the Emperor.

The 'Three Hierarchs'



- Gregory of Nazianzus (329-90)
- Basil the Great (330-79)
- John Chrysostom (c. 347-407)
- Prolific authors – their works continually cited and used by later generations.
- See also the 'Desert Fathers'.

Ecumenical Councils and Christological Debate

- Seven ecumenical councils: Nicaea I (325); Constantinople I (381); Ephesus (431); Chalcedon (451); Constantinople II (553); Constantinople III (680-81); Nicaea II (787).
- Constantinople I (381) – amended and ratified Nicene Creed.

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, Begotten of the Father before all ages, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father; by whom all things were made: Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man; And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried; And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; And ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father; And He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, Whose kingdom shall have no end. And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke by the Prophets; And we believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins. We look for the Resurrection of the dead, And the Life of the age to come. Amen.

Ecumenical Councils and Christological Debate

- Ephesus (431) – endorsed the title *Theotokos* ('Bearer of God') for Mary and condemned Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople, for opposing it.
- *Nestorianism* = divine and human natures in Christ remained separate and were essentially two persons (or two distinct *hypostases*).
- Chalcedon (451) – affirmed the doctrine of two natures (human and divine) united in Christ (i.e. in a single *hypostasis* or 'hypostatic union')

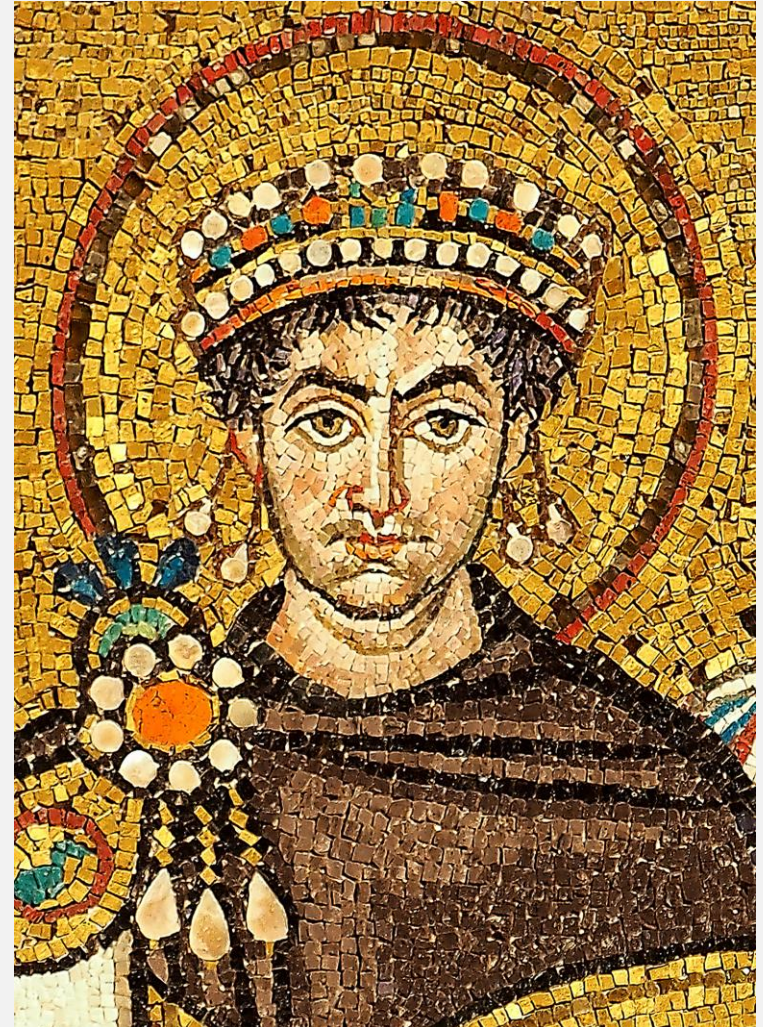
*We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach people to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; **one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten God, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ;** as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.*

Ecumenical Councils and Christological Debate

- Dyophysitism vs. Monophysitism
- *Monophysitism* = Christ had only one, divine nature (Jesus' human nature absorbed into his divine nature).
- Dyophysitism rejected by monophysites as a return to Nestorianism.
- Far from settling Christological debate, Chalcedon only served to intensify it.

Justinian and the Fifth Ecumenical Council

- Justinian I (527-65)
- A keen theologian keen to reconcile opposing factions within the Church.
- Constantinople II (553) – aimed to appease the monophysites by making plain the Church's opposition to Nestorianism.



Justinian and the Fifth Ecumenical Council

- Despite Justinian's efforts, the monophysites not won over.
- Monophysitism (also known as *miaphysitism*) strong among Syriac speakers.
- During the next decades, monophysitism gained a particular foothold in Syria and Palestine.
- The so-called Oriental Orthodox communion (Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Malankara Churches) continues to adhere to miaphysite Christology, rejecting the Chalcedonian formulation.

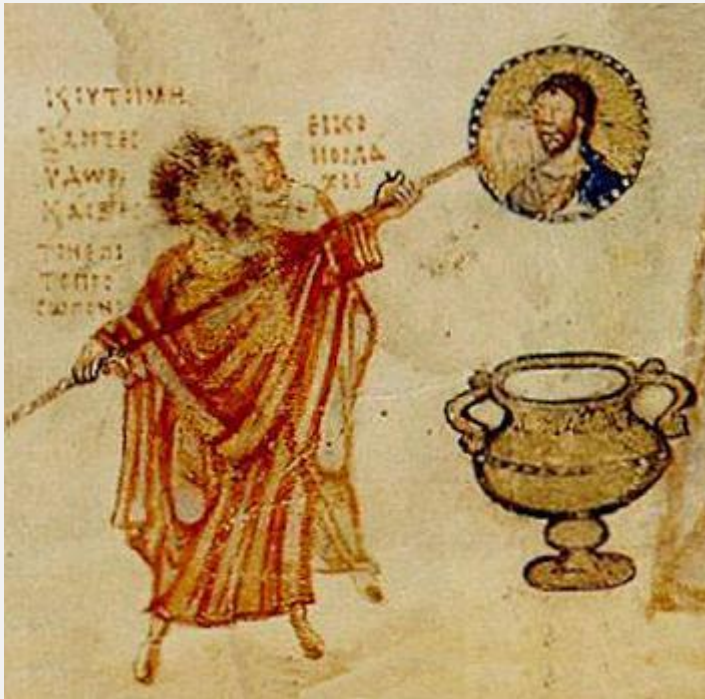
The Theological Controversies of the 7th Century

- Heraclius (610-41)
- Monoenergism proposed as a way of reconciling Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians.
- *Monoenergism* = Christ has two natures but one 'energy' (*energeia*).
- Attracted some support but abandoned in 638.
- Monoenergism replaced with *monotheletism* (*thelema* = 'will').
- Monotheletism opposed by the Lateran Synod of 649 and later condemned by Constantinople III (680-81).

The Iconoclastic Crisis

- 8th and 9th centuries a period of intense controversy.
- *Iconoclasm* = state-sponsored opposition to religious images (*eikon*, 'likeness').
- Two phases: 730-87 & 787-843
- Reconstructing the events of this period involves relying on iconophile sources – we should take care, therefore!

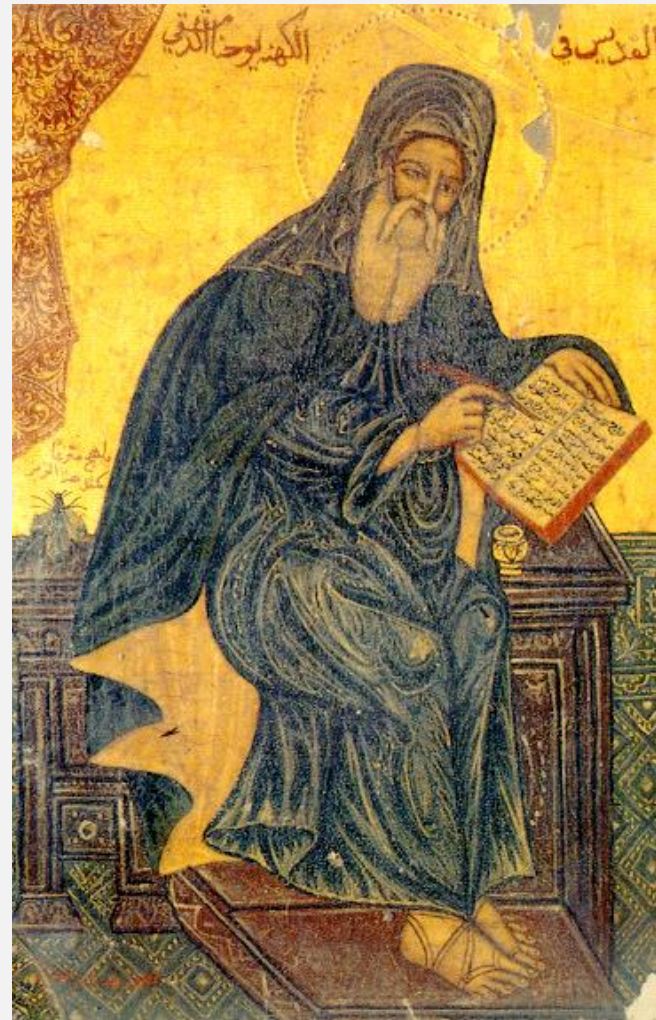
The Iconoclastic Crisis: The First Phase



- Leo III (717-41) regarded as the first iconoclastic Emperor.
- 730: the first formal edict against icons and the deposition of the Patriarch Germanus.
- Icons broken up and burned, altar furniture and cloths destroyed or removed, relics stripped of their reliquaries.
- At this time, objection to icons appears to have centred on charges of idolatry.

The Iconoclastic Crisis: The First Phase

- The classic defence of icons offered by John of Damascus (d. 749).
- Addresses the charge of idolatry and sets out the difference between worship and veneration.
- Genuflecting before icons a show of veneration NOT worship. Veneration goes to the person depicted and not the image itself (thus, cannot be considered idolatry).
- Appeal to tradition.



The Iconoclastic Crisis: The First Phase



- Iconoclasm intensified under Constantine V (741-75).
- The Council of Hieria (754)
- Anathematized specifically were the iconophiles Germanus, John of Damascus and George of Cyprus.
- Iconophilia condemned as idolatry but also opposed on Christological grounds.
- The Eucharist the only true image of Christ.

The Iconoclastic Crisis: The First Phase

- Measures against icons and iconophiles stepped up in the wake of the iconoclast Council of Hieria.
- Iconoclasm died out following Constantine's death in 775.
- Policy of iconoclasm reversed by Nicaea II (787) and icons restored.
- Not the end of the controversy!

The Iconoclastic Crisis: The Second Phase

- Leo V (813-20) – reverted to the iconoclasm of the North Syrian emperors in an effort to evoke their memory.
- Leo unsuccessful in his attempts to win the support of the iconophile patriarch Nicephorus (who was subsequently exiled).
- A new patriarch installed on Easter day 815 and a synod held soon after.
- The iconoclast council of Hieria reaffirmed. The act of Nicaea II annulled.
- On the evidence of Nicephorus' Refutation, Christology still a big part of the debate (the argument from idolatry less so).
- Iconoclasm gradually relaxed under Michael II (820-29) and Theophilus (829-42).

'The Triumph of Orthodoxy'

- Religious images officially restored under the Empress Theodora and her young son Michael III (842-67).
- Celebrated as 'the Triumph of Orthodoxy' and marked by a new liturgical Feast of Orthodoxy (still celebrated to this day).
- Restoration of images gave Byzantine Christianity a new freedom and energy. Art now inseparable from theology.
- Icons the most obvious markers of Orthodox worship today.

Icon with the Triumph of Orthodoxy (c. 1400) and the Virgin and Child (dedicated 867)



The 'Photian Schism'

- Photius appointed patriarch in 858.
- Photius' elevation regarded as uncanonical by Pope Nicholas I – an early stage in the long process leading to schism between Rome and Constantinople.
- Pope Nicholas excommunicated in 867 by a council presided over by Photius.
- Western 'errors' also condemned, e.g. the *Filioque* ('And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father **and the Son**').
- Photius deposed later in 867 and replaced by his predecessor, Ignatius.
- Together with the idea of Rome's primacy, the *Filioque* became a huge sticking point between Latin and Greek churches. Remains a major point of contention between eastern and western Christianity to this day!

The 'Great Schism' of 1054

- Western practices such as the use of unleavened bread in the Eucharist condemned by the Leo of Ochrid. Latin churches in Constantinople forced to close.
- Cardinal Humbert vs. Michael I Cerularius.
- The clash often referred to as the 'Great Schism'. The reality far more complex!
- The quarrel may not have represented a formal break but threw differences into even sharper relief (the Filioque, question of Roman primacy, clerical celibacy etc.).
- Dispute between eastern and western churches exacerbated by the Crusades.

Further Reading

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*Meyendorff, J., *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979)

*available online through UWTSD Library