"Liturgification" and Dissent in the Crisis of the East Roman Empire (6th-8th Centuries)

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Introduction

In 1979 Averil Cameron published in *Past and Present* a brilliant and seminal article under the title 'Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Byzantium'. Cameron argued that during and, in particular, after the reign of the emperor Justinian (527-565), and in a context of growing economic and geopolitical crisis within the eastern Roman empire, the political culture of Constantinople underwent a profound, but vital, transformation. In this transformation, the traditional classical trappings of imperial power were de-emphasised, and emperors instead shrouded themselves in the veil of holiness, Christianising imperial rituals and rhetoric, and lending their active patronage to a range of religious phenomena then occurring across the eastern empire: in particular, the expansion of church building, of Marian devotion, and of the cult of icons. For Cameron, these phenomena then served as a focus for the emergence of new civic identities, to a process of 'cultural integration' to which emperors made a decisive contribution. Although this process was in itself unable to prevent the subsequent Islamic conquest of the Roman Near East, it nevertheless lent the subsequent state centred on Constantinople the 'strength and will' to weather the storm of subsequent centuries.[1]

Although Cameron herself would now, almost four decades later, temper this picture from various directions, the general lines of her vision have been fundamental to a range of more recent publications, of which I shall here highlight two of the most important. In 2003 Mischa Meier published his magisterial *Das andere Zeitalter Justinians* (2003), a monograph devoted to the complex relation of eschatological expectation, natural and geopolitical disaster, and cultural change

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[1] *Averil Cameron,* Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Byzantium, in: Past and Present 84, 1979, 3-35.

in the age of Justinian.[2] In this, and in a wide range of subsequent publications on the same themes, he accepted and expanded Cameron's argument, but modified it in two important aspects. Like Cameron, Meier sees the heightened sacralisation of imperial culture in this period, the abandonment of classical themes in literature, and the concomitant increase in Marian and iconophile devotion — which he includes under the broader label of 'Liturgisierung' — , as a response to contemporaneous crisis, as the product of a universal need to invest in new, more secure forms of divine protection and intercession. In contrast to Cameron, however, Meier both extends this process earlier and places it in a more complex context, associating its full realisation with the series of disasters which beset Justinian's reign from 541/2, in particular the plague. For Meier, therefore, Justinian and his successors presided over, and encouraged, a profound shift in *mentalité* which left behind the vestiges of late Roman classicism, but which also, as for Cameron, secured the survival of the east Roman state against the onslaught soon to follow.[3]

A similar perspective has been cultivated in Peter Bell's impressive *Social Conflict in the Age of Justinian* (2013). Here Bell models the Justinianic elite in terms of two competing socio-cultural groups: the reformist, Christian, *novi homines* of the imperial court; and the conservative, 'Pagan', optimates of the landed aristocracy. These groups, in turn, sustained two polarised ideologies — the first totalising and Christian; the second pluralistic and classical — and the Justinianic period is marked, for Bell, in the gradual triumph of the former, as the parvenu emperor and his entourage attempted to legitimise their (faltering, much-criticised) regime through a process of sacralisation. The result of this process was, in Bell's vision, nothing short of a triumphant, 'totalising Christian discourse' or 'a single hegemonic Christian ideology.'[4] In all these publications, therefore, the reign

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[2] *Mischa Meier*, Das andere Zeitalter Justinians: Kontingenzerfahrung und Kontingenzbewältigung im 6. Jahrhundert n.Chr.*, Göttingen 2003.

[3] For further refinements of the argument of the monograph see esp. *Mischa Meier*, Sind wir nicht alle heilig? Zum Konzept des 'Heiligen' (sacrum) in spätjustinianischer Zeit, in: Millennium 1, 2004, 133-164; id., Ostrom-Byzanz, Spätantike-Mittelalter. Überlegungen zum "Ende" der Antike im Osten des Römischen Reiches, in: *Millennium* 9, 2012, 187-253, esp. 222-236; id., The "Justinianic Plague": The economic consequences of the pandemic in the eastern Roman empire and its cultural and religious effects, in: Early Medieval Europe 24, 2016, 267-292.

[4] *Peter Bell*, Social Conflict in the Age of Justinian: Its Nature, Management, and Mediation, Oxford 2013; cf. *Averil Cameron*, Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse, Berkeley 1991.

of Justinian emerges as a crucial moment in the transition from the (classical, pluralistic) culture of the ancient world to the (Christian, exclusive) culture of its medieval successor.[5]

In this paper I want not to contradict this narrative — which, of course, is far more detailed and nuanced than our brief précis allows — so much as to offer a brief addendum to it. Both for Meier and for Bell, a crucial prompt for the process of 'liturgification', that is, the process through which the emperor Justinian and his successors harnessed pre-existent religious phenomena, and in turn encouraged their dissemination, was the attempt to elevate the emperor above a chorus of dissent, in particular that aimed at him through disenfranchised or disillusioned aristocrats. The sometimes explicit suggestion, therefore, is that as the process of 'liturgification' advanced, so too were the possibilities for dissent constrained, and hence also was 'cultural integration' realised. Here, however, I want to add to this recent scholarship three further points: first, that intellectual dissent did of course continue long after Justinian; second, that it was not limited to the circles of dissident classicists; and third, that it was organised around those same Christian phenomena which emperors of this period had attempted to appropriate.

This addendum is important, I think, for three reasons, all of them important to the wider theme of 'threatened orders'. First of all, it reminds us that the imperial order in the eastern Roman empire was, despite its rhetoric, never static, but was caught in a continuous process of remaking, reordering, itself in response to new contexts and challenges. Second, it helps us to resist the temptation to regard the process of heightened Christianisation in this period as one of simplification, or to suppose that responses to contemporaneous crises were ever uniform or unidirectional. And, third, it also underlines that dissent in this period was not the preserve of pseudo- or non-Christians; that Christian discourse could embrace a range of (often inconsistent) intellectual positions; and that 'Christian' does not have to mean 'apolitical'. A range of excellent recent scholarship on the medieval east Roman empire has done much to denude it of its conservative, sterile ('byzantine') reputation; but those scholars who have attempted to uncover its pluralism, its dissenting traditions, have often

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[5] For an extreme expression of the same view: *Polymnia Athanassiadi*, Vers la pensée unique: la montée de l'intolérance dans l'Antiquité tardive, Paris, 2010, e.g. 114-132.

done so through reference to latent strands of pre-Christian thought[6], and sometimes cast this thought in explicit contrast to a static, monolithic, 'Orthodox Church' (capitalised) and its 'doctrine'.[7] It is crucial that we complicate this view of Christian culture.[8] Indeed I will argue here that if the crises of the age of Justinian and his successors indeed encouraged an intensified 'liturgification' of Roman culture, as recent scholars suggest, then so too did it witness an intensification of dissenting voices, and that the more overt and more threatening of such voices came not from classicising or pagan intellectuals, but from Christians.

Emperor and Saint

A central component of the narrative of 'liturgification' as set out above is a rising popular resort, in a context of crisis, to the divine intercession offered through the cult of saints, and a concomitant imperial attempt to harness that same phenomenon. At the popular level, this same phenomenon — which is well-attested in both written and material culture — has sometimes been placed in the context of a 'depersonalisation' of the sacred, as individual ascetics in the Brownian mode, in their conspicuous failure to assuage disaster, faced a rising tide of scepticism, and as Christians sought out new, less human, intercessors to petition for relief.[9] The burgeoning promotion of the shrines of dead saints might indeed have attempted to circumvent this scepticism, since it shifted (or tried to shift) the expectation of holiness from the performer of the miracle to his or her supplicant. But it is now clear

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[6] Most important are the various contributions of *Anthony Kaldellis* e.g. Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity, Philadelphia 2004; id., Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition, Cambridge, 2007.

[7] For some important reflections see *Paul Magdalino*, 'Orthodoxy and Byzantine Cultural Identity,' in Antonio Rigo/Pavel Ermilov (eds), Orthodoxy and Heresy in Byzantium, Rome 2010, 21-40; *Paul Magdalino*, Orthodoxy and History in Tenth-century Byzantine "Encyclopedism",' in: Peter Van Deun/Caroline Macé (eds), Encyclopedic Trends in Byzantium, Leuven 2011, 143-159; *Anthony Kaldellis*, Byzantine Philosophy Inside and Out: Orthodoxy and Dissidence in Counterpoint, in: Katerina Ierodiakonou/Börje Bydén (eds.), The Many Faces of Byzantine Philosophy, Athens 2012, 129-151; but cf. also *Anthony Kaldellis*, The Hagiography of Doubt and Scepticism, in: Stephanos Efthymiadis (ed.), The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography Volume II: Genres and Contexts, Farnham 2014, 453-477, for a differentiated view of popular Christian culture.

[8] See the reflections of *Averil Cameron*, Byzantium and the Limits of Orthodoxy, in: Proceedings of the British Academy 154, 2008, 129-152; ead., The Cost of Orthodoxy, in: Dutch Annual Lectures in Patristics 2, 2012, esp. 22-24. Also *Dimiter Angelov*, Power and Subversion in Byzantium: Approaches and Frameworks, in: Dimiter Angelov/Michael Saxby (eds), Power and Subversion in Byzantium, Abingdon 2013, 1-18, esp. 14-18.

[9] See e.g. *Meier*, 'Sind wir nicht alle heilig?' 140-148; now also *Lucy Parker*, Paradigmatic Piety: Liturgy in the *Life of Martha*, Mother of Symeon Stylites the Younger, in: Journal of Early Christian Studies 24, 2016, 99-125.

that such shrines were also mired in dissenting voices, and that such voices intensified in response to the imperial appropriation of cult.

As the cult of saints had expanded in the fifth and (in particular) the sixth centuries, so too had a new Christian genre emerged within the eastern Mediterranean: collections of miracles, focused on particular saints and their shrines. A notable feature of these collections is the appearance of sceptics, or the authors' anticipation of their audience's doubts about the narrative described. Thus these collections point to a cultic clientele which might be far less credulous and more discerning than we might often presume. This is not to claim that most late antique persons did not believe in saints or in miracles; it is rather to point out that, in a context of intense competition between different modes of supernatural intervention (e.g. magic), and indeed between different saints, supplicants must have developed complex mechanisms of discriminating true from false.[10] In this perspective, the saint as much the ascetic ever risked a reputation as a charlatan.

In the reign of the emperor Maurice (582-602), however, these doubts around the saints appear to have assumed a more formal basis. In one perspective, Maurice is the classic representative of imperial 'liturgification'. He spent much of his reign, which culminated in his violent usurpation, battling a succession of geopolitical and economic crises; and in this context, he continued the established trend towards the sacralisation of the imperial office. Like his predecessors Justinian and Justin II, Maurice is a noted promoter of the Constantinopolitan cult of the Virgin[11]; and it seems also that he cultivated various, prominent ascetics[12]. But during his reign we also witness a remarkable, concerted effort to concentrate in the capital saints' relics from across Christendom. Thus the *Letters* of pope Gregory the Great refuse a request of the emperor's wife Constantina for the head of St Paul[13]; the *Miracles of Demetrius* reports the emperor's attempt to appropriate the relics of Demetrius from Thessalonica[14]; and the later *History* of Ps.-Sebēos states that Maurice even obtained the relics

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[10] See *Phil Booth and Matthew J. Dal Santo*, Conclusion: An Age of Saints? Power, Conflict and Dissent in Early Medieval Christianity, in: Peter Sarris/Matthew J. Dal Santo/Phil Booth (eds), An Age of Saints? Power, Conflict and Dissent in Early Medieval Christianity, Leiden 2011, 205-214.
[11] *Nicephorus Callistus*, Ecclesiastical History 17.28.
[12] E.g. Theodore of Sykeon (Life of Theodore 82); Golinduch (*Eustratius Presbyter*, Life of Golinduch 23); Sabrisho (Chronicle of Seert 67).
[13] *Gregory the Great*, Letters 4.30.
[14] *John of Thessalonica*, Miracles of Demetrius 5.

of the prophet Daniel from Susa[15]. Here we have a clear attempt, then, to fashion Constantinople as a veritable *hagiopolis*, a city of the saints with the emperor as its centre.

It is now evident, however, that this same attempt encouraged significant dissent. In his recent *Debating the Saints' Cult in the Age of Gregory the Great* (2012), and in several articles, Matthew Dal Santo has drawn attention to a text composed at Constantinople under Maurice (*c*.590), *On the State of Souls after Death* of Eustratius Presbyter, an adherent of the Constantinopolitan patriarch Eutychius.[16] In this treatise Eustratius counters the position of some contemporaneous Christian theologians who contradicted the basic metaphysics of the cult of saints through positing the inactivity of their posthumous souls, and claiming that such miracles as received at saints' shrines represented God's or an angel's assumption of the saint's form. For Eustratius, this represented a clear challenge both to the saints' power to perform miracles for their supplicants post-mortem; and to the claims of the church to intercede for the souls of the dead through the eucharist. At stake, therefore, was nothing less than the claims of cultic and ecclesial impresarios to effective intercession.[17]

It cannot be a coincidence that these intellectual doubts concerning the theological basis of the cult of saints, which are also countered in a range of contemporaneous hagiographies, manifest at the same moment that imperial promotion lent the institution a new-found prominence and importance. Because of the increasing implication of the cult within imperial discourse, theological enquiries into the fundamental mechanics of the saints' intercession after death — enquiries which suggested that devotion to the saints might be idolatrous — also served to problematise a now fundamental component of imperial ideology. Indeed, Dal Santo associates this theological scepticism with political opposition to Maurice, and with the inevitable doubts around his rule raised in the successes of the Persians, Slavs, and Avars, and in the emperor's attempts to offset the depletion of the fisc.[18] If

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[15] *Ps.-Sebēos*, History 14.

[16] See *Nicholas Constas*, An Apology for the Cult of the Saints in Late Antiquity: Eustratius Presbyter of Constantinople, *On the State of Souls after Death* (CPG 7522), in Journal of Early Christian Studies 10, 2002, 267-85.

[17] *Matthew J. Dal Santo*, Gregory the Great and Eustratius of Constantinople: The *Dialogues on the Miracles of the Italian Fathers* as an Apology for the Cult of the Saints, in Journal of Early Christian Studies 17, 2009, 421-57; id., Debating the Saints' Cult in the Age of Gregory the Great, Oxford 2012, 21-83.

[18] Ibid. 321-335; also id., The God-protected Empire? Scepticism towards the Cult of Saints in Early Byzantium, in: Sarris/Dal Santo/Booth (eds), An Age of Saints? 129-149. Note that *Mischa Meier*, Liturgisierung und Hypersakralisierung. Zum Bedeutungsverlust kaiserlicher Frömmigkeit in Konstantinopel zwischen dem 6. und 7. Jahrhundert n.Chr., in: Nora Schmidt/Nora K. Schmid/A. Neuwirth (eds), Denkraum Spätantike. Reflexionen

the problems experienced in the east Roman empire encouraged 'liturgification', therefore, the same problems also encouraged, to quote Dal Santo, 'a dissenting current in the face of the broader stream of imperial ideology and public political culture.'[19]

The relation between Christian culture and contemporaneous crisis was, therefore, more multifaceted and more complex than has sometimes been allowed. The heightened sacralisation of the imperial office was not devoid of tension, nor did it constrain or marginalise dissent. If we accept that emperors were attempting to realise a so-called 'hegemonic' Christian culture in this period, and the appropriation of the cult of saints formed a crucial component within that process, then we must also accept that there existed significant currents of counter-hegemonic dissent generated in Christian circles, and that this dissent was oriented around the same institution through which emperors had attempted to realise their new societal consensus. This is indeed, as we shall see, a defining dynamic in the Christian debates of the subsequent period.

Emperor and Priest

Written and material evidence suggests that alongside the growing prominence of the cult of saints, the sixth-century empire witnessed a significant expansion of liturgical life, and a concomitant sanctification of both space and time: the numbers of churches and shrines expanded; new feasts were created; and new rituals devised.[20] In the 'liturgification' narrative described above, this expansion has two explanations: first, a rising tide of piousness; and, second, imperial patronage, as emperors began further to sacralise their role through Christianising existing rituals, and expanding their place within ecclesial liturgies. Both developments, according to the same narrative, occurred in a context of geopolitical and socioeconomic crisis, which encouraged the performance of liturgies as a means of

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von Antiken im Umfeld des Koran, Wiesbaden 2016, 75-106, also sees in Maurice's violent end (and that of Phocas) the failure, and indeed subversion, of imperial self-sacralisation.

[19] *Dal Santo*, The God-protected Empire? 133.

[20] See e.g. *Derek Krueger*, Christian Piety and Practice in the Sixth Century, in: Michael Maas (ed.), The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*., Cambridge 2005, 291-315.

propitiating God and, in the capital, accelerated the imperial appropriation of Christian rituals as a means of sacralising, and thus legitimising, the emperors' faltering temporal power.[21]

These developments are both clear in a range of contemporaneous sources. But it is difficult, nevertheless, to go further and to accept that this expansion of liturgical life realised some form of unambiguous social or cultural 'integration'. The phenomenon, as I hope to show, was more multi-faceted. In parts of the Near East, for example, this new commitment to liturgical life was now practised in a quite different context, for it coincided with the formation of new, anti-Chalcedonian congregations opposed to the doctrinal policies of Constantinople, and with the subsequent, radical, bifurcation of the Christian episcopate following the consecrations carried out through Severan bishops from 553.[22] In the diverse texts produced within these communities, we indeed encounter an ever-growing emphasis on the sacraments and on liturgies. But the immediate impetus for this emphasis, it seems, is not so much contemporaneous crisis as it is the desire to emphasise the ritual unity and integrity of the new church(es), in the face of Chalcedonian pollution.[23] In the discourse of these communities, moreover, the contemporaneous emperor is often considered as a heretic and persecutor, and new ideas are beginning to be explored, in which Roman and Christian identities are again held separate.[24] Here, then, the heightened investment in, and reflection upon, ecclesial rituals served not to 'integrate' such communities within a hegemonic Christian culture, but rather to provide a focus for the construction of new religious identities, to which emperor and empire might be irrelevant.

Even in Constantinople — the main stage for imperial ritual, and for the emperor's participation in ecclesial rituals — the sanctification of the imperial office was fraught with conflict. As Gilbert Dagron long ago demonstrated in a masterful monograph, the sanctification of the imperial office had long served to present the emperor as 'quasi-bishop', and this status was enacted in the

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[21] See esp. *Meier*, Das andere Zeitalter esp. 481-641; id., Sind wir nicht alle heilig? 156-160.

[22] For this process see e.g. *Albert Van Roey*, Les débuts de l'Église jacobite, in: Aloys Grillmeier/Heinrich Bacht (eds.), Das Konzil von Chalkedon: Geschichte und Gegenwart, 3 vols, Würzburg 1951, vol. 2 339-360; *Phil Booth*, Towards the Coptic Church: The Making of the Severan Episcopate, in Millennium 17, 2017 (forthcoming).

[23] See Volke Menze, Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church, Oxford 2008, esp. 145-193.

[24] Philip Wood, "We have no king but Christ": Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquest, Oxford 2010.

unique status afforded to him in ecclesiastical rituals, in particular the celebration of the eucharist. The quasi-sacerdotal status of the emperor was, however, at once exposed to challenge, since for all his proclaimed status as God's vicegerent on earth, the emperor was not and could not be a priest, and in his reception of the sacraments was subordinate to the hierarchs of the church. For the most part, this problem of the emperor's precise religious status remained implicit, its tensions enacted in continuous complex of rhetoric and ritual which pushed at the boundaries of imperial religious power, in particular in Constantinople. But for those Christians alienated from the emperor — whether through temporal or through spiritual failings — it was a simple step to refute his claim to special status in the church, and even, perhaps, to proclaim the independence of the latter from the empire.[25]

This tension manifests with particular force during the reign of the emperor Heraclius (610-641). Heraclius is, in one perspective, a classic representative of the 'liturgification' narrative described above. During his earliest reign, he confronted an unprecedented crisis, as the Persians extended their conquests across the Near East, sacked Jerusalem, and threatened Constantinople.[26] Indeed, it is remarkable that Heraclius — an usurper who had suffered a personal defeat on the field of battle in 613, presided over the loss of Jerusalem in 614, and failed to prevent the fall of Egypt (the empire's most important province) in 619-620 — was not himself usurped. But the imperial court responded to this unprecedented crisis with an intensified emphasis on the emperor's sacred role: Heraclian court culture shrouded him in the guise of an Old Testament warrior king[27]; his subsequent campaigns against the Persians were presented as a battle on a cosmological, even eschatological, scale[28]; and Heraclius himself emphasised a new, Christian, imperial title: *pistos in Christōi basileus*[29]. This conception of the emperor culminated in two particular events: first, the restoration to

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[25] See *Gilbert Dagron*, Empereur et prêtre: Étude sur le «césaropapisme» byzantine, Paris 1996, esp. 106-138.

[26] For the narrative see *Bernard Flusin*, Saint Anastase le Perse et l'histoire de la Palestine au début du VIIe siècle, 2 vols., Paris 1992, vol. 2 67-83.

[27] See e.g. *Suzanne Spain Alexander*, Heraclius, Byzantine Imperial Ideology and the David Plates, in: Speculum 52, 1977, 217-37; *Steven Wander*, The Joshua Roll , Wiesbaden 2012, 133-138; Mary Whtiby, A New Image for a New Age: George of Pisidia on the Emperor Heraclius, in: Edward Dąbrowa (ed.), The Roman and Byzantine Army in the East, Krakow 1994, 197–225.

[28] See *Yuri Stoyanov*, Defenders and Enemies of the True Cross. The Sasanian Conquest of Jerusalem in 614 and Byzantine Ideology of Anti-Persian Warfare, Vienna 2011, 45-75.

[29] See *Evangelos K. Chrysos*, The title βασιλεύς in early Byzantine international relations, in: Dumbarton Oaks Papers 32, 1978, 29-75.

Jerusalem, in 630, of the True Cross, removed to Ctesiphon after the Persian assault of 614[30]; and, second, his forced baptism of Jews in 632[31].

There can be little doubt that the emperor's success against the Persians was greeted with enthusiasm across the empire. But it is also evident that some provincial Christians hesitated to accept the grand rhetoric of imperial renewal. Elsewhere I have pointed to the muted response to Heraclius's success contained within the output of a prominent group of Palestinian, Chalcedonian, ascetics: John Moschus, Sophronius, and Maximus the Confessor.[32] In the face of the Persian advance into the Roman Near East, this group had, with other ascetics, retreated westwards, and in the end settled in North Africa. Across this same period, the output of the group manifests an ever-deepening emphasis on the sacraments and rituals of the orthodox church, and the shared ascetical and liturgical commitments of all Christians, as an evident demonstration of that church's continued mission, floating above the treacherous reefs of the secular.[33] In one perspective, then, this might well be seen an example of cultural and social 'integration': of the advanced attempt to systematise disparate aspects of Christian thought — in particular, competing narratives of the ascetic and liturgical lives — , to emphasise the shared religious devotion of all orthodox Christians, and to differentiate such Christians from those who did not share the same commitments.

When this same 'integrative' narrative intersected with the perception that the emperor had erred from the path of correct doctrine, however, it could also assume a quite different emphasis. From 629 to 633, following his dramatic triumph over the Persians, the emperor Heraclius had presided over a series of spectacular doctrinal unions with various anti-Chalcedonian churches, and even received communion from the hands of some of their prelates.[34] The basis for such unions was in part the doctrine of Christ's single operation (monenergism), which promoted as bridge between

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[30] See esp. *Jan W. Drijvers*, Heraclius and the *Restitutio Crucis*: Notes on Symbolism and Ideology, in: Gerrit J. Reinink/Bernard H. Stolte (eds), The Reign of Heraclius (610-641): Crisis and Confrontation, Leuven 2002, 175-90.
[31] See *Gilbert Dagron/Vincent Déroche*, Juifs et Chrétiens dans l'Orient de VIIe Siècle, in: Travaux et Mémoires 11, 1991, 17-274, at 28-32; *Stoyanov*, Defenders and Enemies 68-70.
[32] See *Phil Booth*, Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity, Berkeley 2013, 160-163, 170-171.
[33] Ibid. 76-185.
[34] Ibid. 200-208.

Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian theologies.[35] From the summer of 633, however, Sophronius and Maximus had launched a public opposition to the doctrine, and in turn to its successor, the doctrine of Christ's single will (monotheletism).[36] It is no accident that this opposition coincided with the first inroads of the Muslims into Roman territories, which invited the association between imperial doctrine and temporal disaster. Indeed, in certain of Sophronius's sermons — delivered during his tenure as patriarch of Jerusalem (634-*c*.639), when the Muslims surrounded the city — we find a clear association between the doctrinal, liturgical, and moral restoration of the Christian community and the renewal of temporal peace. But the implication is that the emperor is not so much the solution to the crisis of the *oikoumenē*, as its cause.[37]

The monenergist and monothelete controversies would continue to rage across the next decades, culminating at the Lateran Council of 649 — at which Palestinian ascetics and western bishops combined to condemn imperial doctrine — and the subsequent trials of Pope Martin (653) and Maximus (655) in the capital. After the latter, Maximus's circle produced a text which purports to be a record of the trial, and which offers us a remarkable insight into its conception of Maximus's dissent. Therein Maximus is asked whether he considers the emperor also to be a priest which, as we have seen above, was an implicit if fraught component of imperial self-conception. Maximus replies that the emperor cannot be a priest, for he fulfils none of the ritual functions of the priesthood, and is subordinate to its sacramental mediation like all others Christians. His interventions to enforce monenergism and monotheletism are therefore unwarranted transgressions upon the prerogatives of priests, to whom alone belongs the right to decide the faith.[38] Thus 'Maximus' sought to expose the paradox of the emperor as quasi-priest, and to unveil the burgeoning gulf between imperial sacralisation and the realities of Roman reversals.[39] Here, then, 'liturgification' — understood as a

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[35] See *Christian Lange*, Mia Energeia. Untersuchungen zur Einigungspolitik des Kaisers Heraclius und des Patriarchen Sergius von Constantinopel, Tübingen 2012.

[36] On the development of Maximus's opposition see *Marek Jankowiak and Phil Booth*, A New Date-list of the Works of Maximus the Confessor, in: Pauline Allen/Bronwen Neil (eds), The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor, Oxford 2015, 19-83.

[37] *Booth*, Crisis of Empire 241-250.

[38] See *Record of the Trial* ed. Pauline Allen/Bronwen Neil, Scripta saeculi VII vitam Maximi Confessoris illustrantia, CCSG 39, Turnhout 1999, 14-51.

[39] Cf. the comments of *Dagron*, Empereur et prêtre 182; *Wolfram Brandes*, "Juristische" Krisenbewältigung im 7. Jahrhundert? Die Prozesse gegen Martin I. und Maximos Homologetes, in: Fontes Minores 10, 1998, 141-212, at 194-196.

dual, interdependent, process through which communities and emperors, in a context of crisis, became more Christianised and more ritualised — resulted not so much in integration as in *dis*integration, in disruption, and in dissent.

Emperor and Icon

I would like to conclude with some brief reflections on the origins of iconoclasm, that is, the belief that the worship of icons (and relics) was idolatrous, adopted in some form in the later reign of Leo III (717-741) and his successor Constantine V (741-775). The emergence of anxieties over images has long been associated with perceptions of crisis—with continued Roman reversals at the hands of the caliphate, with natural disasters—and a subsequent perception that God was punishing the Christians for sin.[40] The recent work of John Haldon and Leslie Brubaker has offered a far more nuanced and differentiated exploration of that connection, placing iconoclasm within the context of a series of structural and cultural changes beginning from the reign of Justinian.[41]

In terms of the intellectual roots of iconoclasm, however, that work has focused on its more immediate context, seeking its inspiration in the period after 680, and pointing to a then more urgent perception of the need for purification, for the observance of Old Testament prescriptions, and for the propitiation of a God who had abandoned his chosen people.[42] In part this chronological focus rests upon the notion that the icon *devotion* of which iconoclasts disapproved, if not the spread of icons themselves, is also a product of this period, as embattled Christians sought out new forms of access to an ever-distant God; and that earlier witnesses to such devotion have been interpolated within iconophile manuscripts.[43] This issue, let us note, is far from decided.[44] But irrespective of this

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[40] E.g. *Peter Brown*, A Dark-age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy, in: English Historical Review 88, 1973, 1-34, esp. 23-27.

[41] *Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon*, Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c.650-850: A History (Cambridge, 2011) esp. 9-68, 772-799.

[42] *Brubaker and Haldon*, Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era 50-68.

[43] See (amongst various studies of the same author) *Paul Speck*, Wunderheilige und Bilder: zur Frage des Beginns der Bilderverehrung, in: Varia III, Poikila Byzantina 11, Bonn 1991, 163–247; taken up in *Leslie Brubaker*, Icons before Iconoclasm? in: Guglielmo Cavallo et al. (eds), Morfologie sociali e culturali in Europa fra tarda antichità e alto medioevo di studio, Spoleto 1998, 1215-54. The latter accepts Speck's arguments, but his position is far from comprehensive and in various cases has been challenged; see e.g. *Vincent Déroche*,

important debate, I would like here to connect iconoclasm to a series of pre-existent intellectual debates, and to place it within the narrative of 'liturgification' described above, that is, the integration of icons within both imperial and wider Christian practice, on the one hand, and of the dissenting Christian voices which were the inevitable handmaiden of that integration, on the other. This is not to discount that iconoclasm must be situated within a series of more immediate contexts; it is rather to point that out that we can connect it to far more protracted intellectual anxieties within Christian communities, evident long before the 680s. In this same perspective, the entire discussion might be seen both to draw from and to mirror those introspective Christian debates around praxis, politics, and crisis which we have examined above.

It seems quite clear that during the sixth and seventh centuries, the expansion of the cult of saints was also accompanied by a proliferation of the saints' images, if not on wooden panels then at least on *eulogiai* and other pilgrim tokens; and that such images were, moreover, crucial both to the aspiration of supplicants to experience visions of the saints at their shrines, and to the validation of theological claims as to the saints' posthumous existence.[45] At the same time, it is in the post-Justinianic period that one first reads of the so-called *acheiropoietai*, that is, contact relics bearing images of Christ, and attributed with miraculous, apotropaic powers.[46] Under Justin II one of these, the image of Camuliana, was transferred to Constantinople[47], and it was perhaps this *acheiropoieta* that the emperor Maurice then exhibited before his armies[48]. Soon after, Heraclius also displayed an *acheiropoieta* to his troops[49], while the same emperor, as well as his subordinates, also paraded

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L'authenticité de l'*Apologie contre les Juifs* de Léontios de Néapolis, in: Bulletin de correspondance hellénique 110, 1986, 655-669.

[44] For critique see e.g. *Averil Cameron*, The Anxiety of Images: Meanings and Material Objects, in Angeliki Lymberopoulou (ed.), Images of the Byzantine World: Visions, Messages and Meanings. Studies Presented to Leslie Brubaker, Farnham 2011, 47-56 ; *Richard Price*, The Acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, Liverpool, forthcoming.

[45] See *Dal Santo*, Text, Image.

[46] Image of Edessa: *Evagrius Scholasticus*, Ecclesiastical History 4.27. Image of Camuliana: *Ps.-Zachariah Rhetor*, Chronicle 12a. Image of Memphis: *Piacenza Pilgrim*, Itinerary 44 (cf. also *John of Nikiu*, Chronicle 91).

[47] *Cedrenus*, History (Bekker 684); with *Mischa Meier*, Die Translatio des Christusbildes von Kamulianai und der Kreuzreliquie von Apameia nach Konstantinopel unter Justin II. Ein übersehenes Datierungsproblem, in: Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum 7, 2004, 237-25.

[48] *Theophylact Simocatta*, History 2.3, 3.1.

[49] *George of Pisidia*, Persian Expedition 2.86 (and *Theophanes*, Chronographia AM 6113).

images of the Virgin and of Christ in battle[50]. In short, within decades of their emergence into public discourse, images of Christ and the Virgin were appropriated within imperial culture, and used further to sacralise both emperor and empire.

We have seen that the heightened prominence lent to saints and ascetics in the period after Justinian, in particular in imperial culture, also intersected with a more intense interrogation of those same figures, not least because of their inevitable failure to fulfil their posited role. Were sacred images also implicated thus? A lack of evidence means that it is difficult to assess the role of such images within imperial practice in the period before iconoclasm proper. Nevertheless it has been suggested that the anxieties around images of Christ, which manifest amongst certain of Leo III's churchmen in the 720s, might in part reflect their heightened appropriation within the propaganda of Justinian II (685-695, 705-711) — in particular, the famous, innovative solidus bearing Christ's image — and the patent disconnect between this façade of imperial holiness and the realities of temporal defeat.[51]

Since the reign of Justinian, contemporaneous crisis had accelerated a process of Christian introspection, an attempt to theologise, and thus to legitimise, those less formal elements of Christian praxis which existed on the edges of the church, and which might seem suspect, or even sacrilegious. In the face of criticism, at various levels, from within their own communities, some Christian intellectuals, such as Eustratius, had posited a defence of the saints' posthumous activities, and in so doing had also galvanised the church's claim to offer, through the eucharist, intercession for the dead; while others, such as Maximus, attempted a radical redefinition of the Christian ascetic, removed from the margins of the church and now set anew at its navel. In both authors, then, one encounters a common impulse, that is, to consider how these different, unconsecrated, forms of Christian devotion related to the rite of the eucharist, and to the sacramental mediation of the church.

Indeed across this period, as I and others have argued elsewhere, Christian authors demonstrated an ever-deepening concern with, and devotion to, the eucharist, the sacrament of

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[50] *George of Pisidia*, Heraclias 2.12-18 (cf. *Theophanes*, Chronographia AM 6102); Persian Expedition 1.139-153, 2.86-87 (and *Theophanes*, Chronographia AM 6113); *Theodore Syncellus*, On the Siege of Constantinople 15.

[51] *Michael Humphreys*, Images of Authority? Imperial Patronage of Icons from Justinian II to Leo III, in: Sarris/Dal Santo/Booth (eds), *An Age of Saints?* 150–68.

sacraments, which united all Christians in shared devotion, and in a ritual impervious to crisis.[52] At the same time, on the eve of iconoclasm, there is a clear, more intense, interest in other, material manifestations of the sacred — in the Cross, the church, and in the sacred image[53] — and from here it was but a short leap to the attempt to comprehend how (if at all) these other elements of Christian devotion related to the central Christian act.[54] Indeed, a crucial component of iconoclast polemic will be that icons (and relics), unlike the eucharist, the church, and the Cross, have not received the blessing of priests, and cannot therefore be worshipped.[55] Out of this threatened order, then, and the intense introspection which accompanied it, we can trace on ongoing attempt at the social and intellectual integration of Christian practices, and the orientation of such practices around the church's sacramental and hierarchical heart. Seen in this light, the emergence of iconoclasm and its intellectual rebuttal — in which all of the anxieties around asceticism and sainthood, familiar from the late sixth and seventh centuries, will reappear[56], and in which eucharistic doctrine will again assume a central position[57] — can be seen as a further manifestation of those debates which had, since the reign of Justinian, accrued around disparate aspects of Christian devotion.

The most obvious danger for the emperors was that such debates might cast a central component of imperial culture as idolatrous. Indeed, although Leo III and Constantine V acquiesced to some extent in contemporaries' criticism of saints' relics and sacred images, it is clear (despite the attempts of later polemicists) that both were nevertheless careful to curtail the more extreme

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[52] *Vincent Déroche*, Représentations de l'Eucharistie dans la haute époque Byzantine, in: Travaux et Memoires 14, 2002, 167-80; *Booth*, Crisis of Empire.

[53] See, for example, the preoccupation with eucharist, Cross, and image in the canons of Trullo: e.g. Canons 73, 82, 83, 100, 101. The same triad is a notable and frequent feature, often as apotropaia against demons and others, in the second collection of Tales of Anastasius of Sinai: see e.g. Tales 2.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 28. I cite the numbering of *André Binggeli* (ed.), Anastase le Sinaïte: Récits sur le Sinaï et Récits utiles à l'âme: édition, traduction, commentaire, unpublished PhD dissertation, Paris IV, 2001.

[54] On the status of material signs within contemporaneous debates see *Averil Cameron*, The Language of Images: The Rise of Icons and Christian Representation, in: Diana Wood (ed.), The Church and the Arts, Studies in Church History 28, Oxford 1992, 1-42. For the importance of the Cross in iconoclasm, see *John Moorhead*, Iconoclasm, the Cross, and the Imperial Image, in: Byzantion 55, 1985, 165-179.

[55] See *Brown*, Dark-age Crisis 5-6, 26-28; *Marie-France Auzépy*, Les Isauriens et l'espace sacré: l'église et les réliques, in: Michel Kaplan (ed.), Le sacré et son inscription dans l'espace à Byzance et en Occident: études comparées, Paris 2001, 13-24.

[56] See e.g. *Peter Hatlie*, Spiritual Authority and Monasticism in Constantinople during the Dark Ages (650-800), in: Jan W. Drijvers/John W. Watt (eds), Portraits of Spiritual Authority: Religious Power in Early Christianity, Byzantium and the Christian Orient, Leiden 1999, 195-222; *Vladimir Baranov*, "Angels in the Guise of Saints": A Syrian Tradition in Constantinople, in: Scrinium 12, 2016, 5-19.

[57] See e.g. *Stephen Gero*, The Eucharistic Doctrine of the Byzantine Iconoclasts and Its Sources, in: Byzantinische Zeitschrift 68, 1975, 4-22; *Vladimir Baranov*, The Doctrine of the Icon-Eucharist for the Byzantine Iconoclasts, in: Studia Patristica 44, 2010, 41-48.

expressions of such criticism: thus imperial leipsanoclasm focused on the presence of saints' bodies at the altar, and never extended to contact relics, like those of the Passion (of which the capital was an effective museum); while imperial iconoclasm never extended to a denial of the saints' traditional intercession (and thus to the shrines which all emperors patronised).[58]

At the same time, however, a more fundamental threat to the imperial office loitered in the burgeoning sacramental sensibilities — and the emergent, more ecclesiocentric, Christian culture — through which contemporaries attempted to frame the worship of images. Thus as the Christian empire faltered and Christians looked inwards for explanations as to God's apparent anger, some intellectuals legitimised otherwise contentious Christian practices through locating them within a sacramental framework, thus also anchoring them to an institution which transcended the vicissitudes of empire. But as the example of such persons as Maximus, John of Damascus, and Theodore the Studite demonstrate, this heightened integration, and sacramentalisation, of Christian thought could also be used to exclude the emperor from religious narratives, when that emperor was perceived, for one reason or another, as a failure.

The anxieties around images, then, although generated in particular contexts, also represented a conspicuous continuation of the dissenting voices which had swirled around various elements of Christian devotion since the eastern empire's Justinianic apex. The various crises which beset the emperors from that time encouraged, on the one hand, a process of 'liturgification', of the heightened sacralisation of public (and, in particular, imperial) culture, which much recent research has so well exposed. However the heightened prominence given to, for example, ascetics, saints, and sacred images, and the obvious failure of such things to assuage divine anger, also led to their heightened interrogation, and to the emergence of new narratives which threatened either to undermine, or to exclude, the emperors. Concepts of 'cultural integration' or of 'hegemonic discourse' — or, we might add, the reductive separation of 'political' and 'theological' motivations in appreciating the conflicts — do not encapsulate the complexities of this process, of this response to a 'threatened order'. But more than this, such concepts also risk perpetuating old clichés about the monolithic nature of

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[58] See *Auzépy*, Les Isauriens et l'espace sacré; also *John Wortley*, Iconoclasm and Leipsanoclasm: Leo III, Constantine V and the Relics, in: Byzantinische Forschungen 8, 1982, 253-279.

Christian ('Orthodox') culture, and thus encouraging the notion that dissidence in the medieval, eastern Roman empire must be sought in non-Christian traditions, even in non-Christian circles. I hope here to have shown, however, that the crises of empire in the sixth to eighth centuries encouraged something more than 'liturgification'; those crises also encouraged an intense, wide-ranging, and protracted debate as to what constituted the sacred, and as to how those elements of Christian devotion which emperors appropriated, and thus problematized, could be reconciled to the incomparable power of the central Christian rite.