

Aspects Preceding the Iconoclastic Crisis Reflected in the Life of the Byzantine State

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Abstract

A very important place in the Christian history and theology is occupied by the destiny and evolution of religious images, this being one of the most instructive and fascinating chapters. Behind the evolution of the artistic and ideological image of the ecclesial space there are a multitude of different factors and influences: cultural, religious, theological, artistic and last but not least, political.

Besides the word, the image has been an important and indispensable element of human communication and self-representation.

Because of its Jewish origin and of the polytheistic religious context in which it was developed in the first centuries, Christianity has expressed an undeniable reservation to religious images, although in the New Testament Jesus Christ is explicitly designated both as “the Word (Logos) of God” (Jn. 1: 1) and the “Icon (Eikon) of the invisible God” (Col. 1: 15).

Although Christian iconography used in many cases the ancient spiritualized forms, it was by no means a continuation of a pagan custom, favored by religious indifference, but a new creation, stemming absolutely of Christian piety meant to embody in the best possible way the spiritual ideals of Christianity. Generally, in the Early Church period, the Christian apologists and writers disapproved of the iconographic representations because of practical reasons, as they wanted to eliminate any tendency to maintain the idolatrous cult of the Gentile Christians.

Christian religious images also began to appear and develop as a result of the decline of Greek-Roman polytheism.